

Queer Marxisms – Syllabus

MA Seminar

*School of Culture and Society
Leuphana University of Lüneburg*

Winter semester, 2021

Dates: Tuesdays, 12:15-1:45 pm

Location: C 14.102b

Instructor: Ben Trott (ben.trott@leuphana.de)

Tutor: Thekla Molnar

Final paper: 12-15 pages

Deadline One: 15.03.2022

Deadline Two: 15.09.2022

Office Hours: Tuesdays 2-4pm

For many, the publication of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* in the year 1990 is seen as having marked the birth of Queer Theory, emerging out of various currents of feminist thought as well as the field of Gay and Lesbian Studies. Queer Theory is often seen as having formed part of a broader intellectual and institutional turn across much of the humanities and many social sciences: away from materialist and Marxian approaches and towards psychoanalysis, post-structuralism and deconstruction, adopting what Rosemary Hennessy described as 'a more textual approach to identity as signification'.

This seminar explores materialist feminist approaches to sexuality and gender as well as Marxist contributions to Gay and Lesbian Studies prior to Queer Theory, along with Hennessy's influential critique of early queer thought. In the years since this critique was first advanced, however, a sizeable and heterogeneous body of Marxist and materialist work has been published within Queer Studies. The primary focus of this seminar will be an engagement with some of these works, published since the turn of the century. This includes:

- Kevin Floyd's efforts to synthesize queer theoretical approaches and Georg Lukács' work on reification and totality
- Engagements with 'social reproduction' and with the legacies of the 'wages for housework' campaign in the emerging field of Transgender Marxism
- The uses made by Christopher Chitty of 'world-system theory' to show how the periodic politicization of homosexuality has often coincided with the crises of hegemonic powers – eras marked by growing social divisions and by the breakdown of both capital accumulation and 'the wider geopolitical balance of power'
- John D'Emilio's history of the emergence of modern gay subjectivity amidst processes of urbanization and industrialisation
- Roderick A. Ferguson's engagement with Herbert Marcuse and his development of a 'multi-dimensional' account of early queer and trans liberation movements in the context of the New Left, as well as the displacement of queer social life in the neoliberal city
- Petrus Liu's discussion of the development of a distinct Queer Marxist theory and literature between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China on Taiwan

Prior familiarity with Queer Studies, Transgender Studies and/or Marxian thought will be of benefit to students taking this seminar – but no prior knowledge is required!

Learning Objectives

- Gain a familiarity with materialist and Marxist critiques of the ‘queer turn’ in feminist thought as well as Gay and Lesbian Studies
- Explore examples of materialist feminist approaches to sexuality and gender as well as Marxist contributions to Gay and Lesbian Studies prior to the emergence of Queer Studies
- Critically engage with a broad range of materialist and Marxist contributions to Queer Studies, published since the turn of the millennium

Schedule

Seminar 1: Tuesday 19 October – Introduction

There is no required reading for this seminar. However, students new to the field of Queer Theory are invited to take a look at the extracts from *Queer: A Graphic History* available via myStudy.

Seminar 2: Tuesday 26 October – Materialist Feminist Critiques of Queer Theory

Required Reading

- Rosemary Hennessy (2000) ‘The Material of Sex’, in: *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (Routledge) pp.37-73

Seminar 3: Tuesday 2 November – Queer Critique vis-à-vis Marxism

Required Reading

- Judith Butler (1998) ‘Merely Cultural’, in: *New Left Review* Issue 227 (January/February 1998)

Optional Additional Reading

- Nancy Fraser (1998) ‘Heterosexism, Misrecognition and Capitalism: A Response to Judith Butler’, in: *New Left Review* Issue 228 (March/April 1998) (Available online here: <https://newleftreview.org/issues/i228/articles/nancy-fraser-heterosexism-misrecognition-and-capitalism-a-response-to-judith-butler>)

Seminar 4: Tuesday 9 November – What’s the Matter with Queer Theory?

Required Reading

- Petrus Liu (2020) ‘Queer Theory and the Specter of Materialism’, in: *Social Text* Vol. 38, No. 4 pp.25-47

Seminar 5: Tuesday 16 November – Reification, Totality and Queer Studies

Required Reading

- Kevin Floyd (2009) ‘On Capital, Sexuality, and the Situations of Knowledge’, in: *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism* (University of Minnesota Press) pp.1-38

Seminar 6: Tuesday 23 November – Transgender Marxism

In this session, the seminar tutor Thekla Molnar will provide an introduction to social reproduction theory and debates around housework in the 1970s and 80s, as well as the uses of these theories and debates in contemporary accounts of queer and trans reproduction within the capitalist system.

Required Reading

- Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke (2021) 'Introduction', in: *Transgender Marxism* (Pluto Press) pp.1-32

Seminar 7: Tuesday 30 November – Queer and Trans Liberation and the 'Multi-Dimensional' New Left of the 1970s

Required Reading

- Roderick A. Ferguson (2019) 'The Multidimensional Beginnings of Gay Liberation', in: *One-Dimensional Queer* (Pluto) pp.18-45
- Roderick A. Ferguson (2019) 'Queerness and the One-Dimensional City', in: *One-Dimensional Queer* (Pluto) pp.81-113

Seminar 8: Tuesday 7 December – Industrialisation, Urbanisation and Modern Gay Subjectivity

Required Reading

- John D'Emilio (1992) 'Capitalism and Gay Identity', in: *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (Routledge) pp.3-16

Seminar 9: Tuesday 14 December – Globalisation, Capitalism, and Homonormativity

Required Reading

- Rahul Rao (2015) 'Global Homocapitalism', in: *Radical Philosophy* No. 194 pp.38-49

ADDITIONAL EVENT: Wednesday 15 December – Guy Hocquenghem

This event will entail a discussion with Lukas Betzler and Hauke Branding, editors and publishers of the German translation of Guy Hocquenghem's 1972 *Le désir homosexuel*. The language of the event is to be confirmed. Discussion will be based on selected extracts of *Le désir homosexuel/Das homosexuelle Begehren/Homosexual Desire*, to be provided in French, German and English. I am pasting below the German-language description of the book:

„Als er 1972 *Das homosexuelle Begehren* schrieb, war Guy Hocquenghem gerade 25 Jahre alt – eine schillernde Persönlichkeit, Philosoph, Trotzkiist und Schwulenaktivist. Hocquenghem fordert ein neues Denken über Geschlecht, Begehren und Sexualität, jenseits binärer Schemata und des »ödüpalen Dreiecks« der psychoanalytischen Theorie. Für ihn gibt es keine stabile (sexuelle) Identität, sondern nur ein universelles Begehren. Skeptisch gegen jede Behauptung von »Normalität« kritisiert Hocquenghem daher auch jene liberale Ideologie, die Homosexualität zwar toleriert, aber nur als von der Normalität klar abgetrenntes »Minderheiten-Phänomen«. Sein Buch ist eine radikale Kritik der gesellschaftlich fest verankerten Homophobie, zugleich aber auch ein Appell an die

Bewegung, sich nicht vom liberalen Integrationsversprechen blenden zu lassen, das die Stillstellung des Begehrens in einer »homosexuellen Identität« einfordert. Stattdessen sieht er die Rolle der homosexuellen Emanzipationsbewegungen darin, mit ihrer eigenen Befreiung auch die der Sexualität aller zu erkämpfen.“

This additional event replaces the seminar that would otherwise be held on Wednesday 11 January and will also involve an encounter with students taking the Magnus Hirschfeld and Sexuality Studies seminar (BA Complementary Studies).

Seminar 10: Tuesday 21 December

A film will be screened in this seminar. Details to follow.

Seminar 11: Tuesday 11 January (cancelled!)

This seminar will not take place, instead students are asked to take part in an event on the work of Guy Hocquenghem which will take place earlier in the semester, on Wednesday 15 December.

Seminar 12: Tuesday 18 January – Capitalism, the World-System, and Homosexuality

Required Reading

- Christopher Chitty (2020) 'Homosexuality and Capitalism', in: *Sexual Hegemony: Statecraft, Sodomy, and Capital in the Rise of the World System* (Duke University Press) pp.21-41
- Christopher Chitty (2020) 'Sexual Hegemony and the Capitalism World System', in: *Sexual Hegemony: Statecraft, Sodomy, and Capital in the Rise of the World System* (Duke University Press) pp.73-105

Seminar 13: Tuesday 25 January – Queer Marxist Critique in the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China on Taiwan; or, Why Queer Theory Needs the Chinas

Required Reading

- Petrus Liu (2015) 'Marxism, Queer Liberalism, and the Quandary of Two Chinas', in: *Queer Marxism in Two Chinas* (Duke University Press) pp.1-31

Seminar 14: Tuesday 1 February – Final Presentations

During this session, students are asked to present their ideas for their final papers in order to receive feedback both from the instructor and their peers.

There is no required reading for this seminar meeting.