Queertopia! — Notes on an Academic Festival
by Theo Greene

northwestern’s Queer Pride Graduate Student Association (QPGSA) held its inaugural graduate student festival, entitled Queertopia!, on April 25 and 26, 2008.

The festival kicked off Friday evening at Northwestern University, with “Other Pleasures: A Queer Burlesque Review.” This performance and talkback brought together some of the Chicago’s top burlesque performers to engage in conversation on the often overlooked topic of queer sexual pleasure and live performance (see photo at right.)

An all-day interdisciplinary graduate student conference followed on Saturday, April 26, at Center on Halsted in the Lakeview/Boystown neighborhood of Chicago.

QPGSA designed this two-day event with two things in mind. While we wanted to provide a forum for graduate students to present their scholarly work on queer topics in a supportive environment, we also wanted to create a space to bridge our research interests with those of the communities we research. Splitting our festival between Northwestern’s campus and Center on Halsted has become a defining characteristic of this festival; one of the reasons we held the conference outside of an academic space was to get more of the community involved. Sixty people participated in this event, representing 20 institutions, some from as far away as California and New York.

The conference included panels examining Chicago queer history, queer identities in social movements, queer representations in literature, television and film, genderqueer access to healthcare and marriage, and queer theory as an analytical tool to critique social and political structures.

Many of the panelists featured research by Northwestern graduate students. Tristan Capello (History) presented “The White Queens Got Scared!” which focused on Bronzeville’s gay nightlife during 1935 – 1965. Jeff Kosbie (Sociology) addressed the ways in which black feminist and black queer theories could provide potential models for gay rights scholars. Stefanie Bator (History) presented “But He Didn’t Live Happy Ever After: Sexuality and the Ideal Man in Tarzan and the Apes,” a paper queering Edgar Rice Burrough’s 1914 novel by examining how the character of Tarzan, in spite of his idealized manhood, does not fit the model of twentieth-century heterosexuality.

Among the panelists who presented during the conference, we were also fortunate to offer an opportunity for undergraduate students to present their original research. April Ledbetter, a third-year English major and McNair Scholar at UCLA, presented a paper comparing the depictions of heterosexual characters Remus Lupin and Sirius Black in the Harry Potter novels with depictions of their counterparts in the Harry Potter fanfiction.

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From the director’s desk

“..."You will transition," in its prediction of a future conversations as she remains a part of the local gender studies community. As the cookie says, I will transition too – to the fall, Alison Boyd (Art History), who joins current students with home departments in English and Performance Studies. It’s a time of transition for Gender Studies in several other ways. Sadly, we bid farewell to Professor Linda Zenith, who leaves Northwestern for a position in Political Science at the University of Chicago. We will miss Linda’s intellectual commitment and generosity to Gender Studies at Northwestern, but we look forward to future conversations as she remains a part of our graduate students community. As the cookie says, I will transition too – this is the last of these columns I will write, as I now conclude my term as director of the program. I’m happy to look back on the things we have together been able to build in Gender Studies at Northwestern over the past three years – additional tenure-line and lecturer positions in the program; faculty recruitments at the junior and senior levels; record numbers of courses, offered by regular faculty and a dynamic roster of local and international visitors; new graduate fellowships in Gender Studies through the Graduate School’s interdisciplinary “clusters” initiative; and renewed visibility of Gender Studies’ unique status as a vibrant, multi-disciplinary, interdisciplinary program at Northwestern.

Together we transition to a new director, Ann Olof, Professor of Sociology and long-time core faculty member in Gender Studies. Ann’s current research is profiled on page 6 of this newsletter.

We welcome Ann as director, and look forward to the continued growth and dynamism of Gender Studies at Northwestern. Meanwhile, best wishes for a smooth transition to summer...”

—Jeffrey Maier

Feminist Interventions in Western Political Thought by Marissa Faustini ’09

In each newsletter, Gender Studies asks a student to introduce a course to our readers. Marissa Faustini ’09 contributed this description of a Winter 2008 course, a new faculty member Mary G. Dietz (Gender Studies and Political Science).

Since the 1970s, feminist political theorists have offered critical interpretations of the “canon” of Western political theory. In addition to interrogating canonical texts and writers, these theorists have decontextualized the concept of the canon itself, revealing a gender bias which tends to privilege male voices as authorities on justice, freedom, and citizenship. The canonization of these “epic theorists,” whose work often diminishes or entirely rewrites the question of women, also tends to render invisible the work of contemporary female theorists.

This winter, Professor Mary Dietz further complicated this project in her class “Feminist Interventions in Western Political Thought.” Throughout the quarter, we looked closely at the work of classic theorists from Plato to Nietzsche, and engaged in a radial re-reading of the canon. Moving beyond simply “the woman question,” we asked how gender, sex, and sexuality provide frames of analysis through which canonical texts can be both critiqued and revaluated by feminist political theorists.

Queretopia! – Notes on an Academic Festival

Our semester conclusion, Shannon T.L. Furness Keans of the University of Chicago, drew upon Ezekiel 37: 1 – 14 to examine the transgender experience as being able to lead into a discussion of gendered embodiment and authentic resurrection.

Queretopia! concluded with a “Queretor-storming Session” designed to promote new ideas and new approaches in queer research, and an evening reception in the local Harris Reinhart Lecture Hall in the basement of Northwestern’s Science Library, open to students of all disciplines, offering a day of events exploring how sexualities are read through performative, artistic, and film texts. We also will seek to expand the field of intellectual inquiry, including panels that explore the diversity between sexuality and activism and academia. Additionally, through Queretopia!, we hope to build our queer community, reaching out to universities and colleges across the nation, to build a dialogue about the construction of queerness. In short, we hope to make Chicago in springtime the place to be for young queer scholars to get together, share scholarship, build networks, and create the dialogue that will take the study of sexualities to the next level.

Photos will be available this summer on our Northwestern LGBTQ+ website, http://groups.northwestern.edu/queerpride.

Then Grace, a second-year graduate student in Sociology, was Co-President of Northwestern Queer Pride Graduate Student Association. Along with Kelly Harrison (Ph.D candidate in Philosophy and 2007-08 Gender Studies Teaching Assistant), Grace co-organized Queretopia!
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Faculty News, Honors, and Achievements

Michelle L. Leonard (Anthropology) recently defended her dissertation at Rutgers University on her current research, and will be a keynote speaker for the 14th Annual Conference on National Performance, Nondiscrimination, Human Rights at Trusteeship: The Aftermath.

In February, (Psychology) had been awarded the Gold Medal for Lifetime Achievement in the Science of Psychology from the American Psychological Foundation.

In March, Kaye gave a keynote address at the Eastern Psychological Association in Boston and spoke on “self-effec".

If Brokenhearted Was Black

by Kelby Harrison

On February 25, 2008, University of Maryland Assistant Professor of American Studies and Women’s Studies Jeffrey Q.McCune, Jr. gave a talk entitled “If Brokenhearted Was Black.” A recent Ph.D. graduate of Northwestern’s Performance Studies Department and a recipient of the Gender Studies Graduate Certificate, Prof. McCune spent his graduate years thinking about “the down-low”—African-American men who live public and family lives as heterosexuals and engage in private sexual lives with other men. Prof. McCune’s talk directly engaged questions of race, the down-low, passing, and alongside images of same-sex desire in the recent film Brokenback Mountain.

How do we understand ourselves as sexual subjects? This is a guiding question for McCune’s research. In a post-Stonewall world, being “out” is understood as an absolute criterion of liberation. As the recent disclosures of public figures that have passed as heterosexual may suggest (McCune cited Rep. Mark Foley, Rev. Ted Haggard, and Gov. James McGreevey), our modern sexual identity is both keenly intelligent and accessible to diverse audiences. It can envision the down-low as white. The down-low and framed by their love story can be understood as a positionality, one way to understand ourselves as sexual subjects temporally between past lies hidden in the closet and accessible to diverse audiences.

In addition, she organized the “Virtual Internet Researchers’ Conference” at the Computing Passions conference.

Lamont Ferron (History) delivered a lecture entitled “The Third Reich and the Holocaust” at the Chicago Holocaust Center.

A recent Ph.D. graduate in English, Ferron was named Charles Deering McCormick Professor of Teaching Excellence, Northwestern’s highest teaching honor.

Christina Freeda (English) delivered a paper entitled “American Feminists, Freedom of Speech, and the Culture, Queer Politics, and Commercial Space.”

Julia Serano (Gender Studies and English) was awarded a fellowship at the Folger Library in Washington D.C. for work on her book Speaking Shakespeare and Other Essays in Queer Performance. This spring she presented the paper “Dancing and Tuning, Gendering and 11th-Space, Sexuality and Race in ‘Othello’,” at the annual meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America.

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January 28, 2008 “Troubadour Poems from the South of France,” a reading and discussion with translator William D. Padern and Frances Freeman Padern, cosponsored with the Writing Program, the Center for Writing Arts, and the Medieval and Renaissance Studies
February 25, 2008 Jeffrey R. McCrene, Jr., “If Brokenback was Black,” cosponsored with the Department of Performance Studies, African American Studies, and Radio/Television/Film (see page 5)
February 28, 2008 Michelle Citron, lecture and lunch discussion, “Naming Identity,” organized by the Gender Studies Undergraduate Board (see page 7)
April 11-12, 2008 “Race, Sex, Power: New Directions in Black and Latino/a Sexualities” Conference at the University of Illinois at Chicago, cosponsored with the Performance Studies Department and universities throughout the Chicago area
April 18-20, 2008 Black and Latino Queer Performance Festival, cosponsored with the Performance Studies Department
April 21, 2008 “Actor Slash Mode,” film talk, trip, and performance organized by the Gender Studies Undergraduate Board (photo, right)
April 25-26, 2008 “Quonttanal: An Academic Festival and Graduate Student Conference,” organized by the PRIDE Graduate Student Association (see page 1)
May 8, 2008 John Bacewicz, lecture and lunch discussion, “Black Student Revolt at Northwestern: Reflections After 40 Years,” cosponsored with the Departments of African American Studies, Art Theory and Practice, and the Peare Project
May 15, 2008 Julia Serano, lecture discussion, “Transsexuality and Transfeminine Perspectives on Sexism,” organized by the Gender Studies Undergraduate Board (see page 5)
May 22, 2008 Anthony Rapp, Rainbow Week keynote speaker, cosponsored with the Rainbow Alliance
June 13-14, 2008 “The Space Between Societies: Literature and Culture 1914-1946” Conference at Northwestern, organized by Phyllis Lasner

Faculty Sabbatical Research

Farewell to Maternalism?

by Prof. Ann Shola Orfield

In the United States, as across the rich, developed democracies more generally, we are in the midst of what might be called a “farewell to maternalism,” a change in the gendered logic of our system of social provision from supporting women-time caregivers (in households headed by breadwinning men or as single mothers) to requiring and supporting employment for all. Today, motherhood is no longer a basis for making entitlement claims in the U.S. welfare state, whatever its considerable remaining cultural and political-discursive powers. Systems of social provision and regulation are being restructured to encourage “activation” and economic self-sufficiency, often with reference to increasing levels of women’s – and mothers’ – employment. Both men and women are expected to be employed, but with cross-nation-ally varying levels of accommodation for the “difference” of women.

This is an epochal shift in social policy, politics and gender relations. I spent the 2006-07 academic year as a fellow at the Russell Sage Foundation researching my book, Farewell to Maternalism, which aims to describe and to explain this shift; to understand its implications for policy and in the employment-based policies that have replaced it.

The book focuses on the United States, but will include the experiences of several other countries—Britain, France, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Italy—to highlight the “roads not taken” by Americans and to deepen our understanding of the prospective and problems of the distinctive U.S. policy approach.

Where much of my past work documented and explained the gendering of systems of social provision, I am turning in this project to understanding the sources of a moment in which the possibilities for degendering entitlement are greater than ever before. Of course, the potential for re-thinking gender difference also remains, and gender inequalities may mix in new ways with racial and class inequalities. But I argue that – by understanding the dangers and opportunities of both employment- and care-based strategies, as revealed in our policy history – feminists and other advocates of social justice can turn away from nostalgic and unproductive calls to reform the maternalist policies of the past and instead work to expand the opportunities in the shift to employment.

In a political context in which citizenship has always been linked to employment, perhaps we can “gain from leaving behind the legacy of maternalism behind us. For the costs of maternalism were high, the inadequacies of welfare were not only its lack of generosity, restricted coverage, or onerous eligibility requirements, but also its reinforcing of gender difference and its restriction of women to a narrow range of life possibilities. Could freeing women from the policy-mediated link to mothering open up a range of possibilities for women while opening caregiving more fully to men?

The book will provide answers to these questions. First, how can we structure current policy shifts in the US and other rich democracies? Are we bidding “farewell to maternalism”? Second, if we are seeing the demise of maternalism – as I contend we are – why have these changes occurred?

The book will answer these questions, how can we structure current policy shifts in the US and other rich democracies? Are we bidding “farewell to maternalism”? Second, if we are seeing the demise of maternalism – as I contend we are – why have these changes occurred? Finally, what are the political openings for advocates of women’s emancipation, social equality, and racial justice in the turn toward “employment for all”?

Seniors Conduct Honors Thesis Research

Annually we present abstracts of senior honors thesis writers by Gender Studies majors. This year Katherine Goring received honors in Gender Studies; additionally, Rikko Stern received honors for her thesis in Sociology and Science in Human Culture and participated in the Gender Studies thesis seminar. Their theses are assisted by their individual faculty advisor and by thesis-committee instructor and Honor Coordinator Amy Petyarre. Congratulations to these honor-achieving their writers!

KATHERINE GORING (Sociology and Science in Human Culture) ’08 “WHEN SHE SINGS, I HEAR THE REVOLUTION: RADICAL FEMINIST DEMANDS ON WOMEN IN POPULAR MUSIC, 1969-1973”

In the late 1960s, as radical feminism and feminist music began to organize, newly emerging female singer-songwriters represented a significant shift in women’s cultural production. Unlike the previous generation of female musicians—Doris Day, Patti Page, Peggy Lee, Judy Collins—women singer-songwriters such as Joan Baez, Joni Mitchell, Buffy Sainte-Marie, and Carole King wrote and sang their own music. In many ways, we would expect feminists of the period to see these women artists—independent women exercising control over their lives and artistic careers—as exemplifying the values of the broader feminist movement. Interestingly, self-identified radical feminists celebrated female artistic expression but did not embrace these musicians as representatives of movement goals and aspirations. This dismissal of Baez and others, similar, artists calls into question the feminist movement’s mainstreaming of women who do not conform to its reinforcing of gender difference and its onerous eligibility requirements, but also its reinforcing of gender difference and its restriction of women to a narrow range of life possibilities. Could freeing women from the policy-mediated link to mothering open up a range of possibilities for women while opening caregiving more fully to men? As evidences who are unique in their quest to form biogenetic families, tend to inscribe those alternative family forms with assumptions about biologically determined gender and racial differences.

RIKKO STERN (Sociology and Science in Human Culture) ’08 “GEMENTIALS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CREDIBILITY AND EXPERIENCE-BASED EXPERT CONSTRUCTION OF MALE FACTOR INFERTILITY”

Drawing on data from the experiences of physicians and infertile men, my research compares how infertile men and doctors make sense of male-factor infertility and demonstrates the extent to which medical models, dominant cultural frames, and economic realities shape this mode of knowledge production about male-factor infertility. I interrogate the functions of this discourse produced by physicians and infertile men and argue that it reduces infertile men to merely the sum of their biological processes and privileges biogenetic connections over other forms of parenting. I then turn to an examination of how infertile men attend to repeated medical failure in treating their infertility and attempt to resolve their reproductive difficulties through social parenthood. Importantly, my data suggests that infertile men, who are unsuccessful in their quest to form biogenetic families, tend to inscribe these alternative family forms with assumptions about biologically determined gender and racial differences.

Alumnae/i Updates

Shoshal Prapatj (2002) was recently appointed to the Board of Directors of Dog and Pony Theatre Company in Chicago, which was founded by Northwestern alum Kris Krueger (2000) and her associate Devan de Mayo.

Sara Roberts (2006) is living in Las Vegas and teaching fifth grade as a Teach For America corps member. She will continue to teach at the same school next year and plans to attend a graduate program in educational policy in the near future.

Dana E. Weiser (Graduate Certificate, 2007) has accepted an appointment as Assistant Professor of English at Wesleyan University in Watertown, Ontario, Canada. She presented a paper entitled “Forged in Conflict: abolitionists and Old Northwest Hospitality, 1830-1861.”

On February 28, the Gender Studies Undergraduate Board welcomed Professor Michelle Citron to Northwestern for a two-part presentation, Prof. Citron talked to Northwestern for 28 years, from 1978 to 2006. Since her departure, she has served as chair of the Department of Multidisciplinary Arts at Columbia College, Chicago.

During her visit, Citron discussed her work at a brown-bag lunch and delivered an evening lecture. At the lunch event, Citron discussed Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions (University of Minnesota Press, 1998) and her current project on lesbian identity and community in Chicago with about 20 students, faculty, and staff. Together, the participants debated issues of nomination, identity formation, truth, and fiction and their interaction with issues of surveillance, ephemeral and mortality.

In the evening lecture, Citron talked about her work as a visual artist. She described the intentions that informed and the techniques she used in her latest multimedia pieces, showing clips from Irish Links (2005) and Brides of Eden (2004) to an audience of over 30. This event was cosponsored by the Departments of Performance Studies, Radio, Television and Film, and Art Theory and Practice.

“Narrating Identity”: A Talk by Michelle Citron by Shoshal Prapatj ’02

On April 18, 2008, Black and Latino Queer Performance Festival, cosponsored with the Performance Studies Department (photo, right)
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Gender Studies at Northwestern is an interdisciplinary program, with faculty affiliates drawn from more than twenty-five departments across four of the University’s schools.

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Clockwise from upper left: Queertopia! organizers Theo Greene (left) and Kelby Harrison (right) with sermon-competition winner Shannon T.L. Furness Kearns; Gender Studies seniors Cora Leech, Mindy Yahr, and Sharlyn Grace at spring awards banquet; Gender Studies majors Marissa Faustini and C. Nern Ostendorf; senior Katherine Gorringe and thesis advisor Prof. Tessie Liu. (photos: Kathleen Fitzgerald and Kristina Ogilvie)