The Center for Gender Studies

Director's Note

This fall the Center for Gender Studies has been a busy and exciting place to be. Our biggest event was in mid-October: a conference called If We Were the Pundits, featuring Kimberley Peirce (Chicago, AB ’90), the writer and director of the Academy Award winning film, Boys Don’t Cry.

Featuring Peirce and Laura Flanders (of In These Times and Working Assets Radio), the day-long conference hosted nationally and locally-known participants in alternative media and politics. Other panelists were: U of C’s own Jacqueline Stewart, Phoebe Schellenberg of Wages for Housework, Salome Chasnoof of Beyond Media, and Kevin Pranis of the No More Prisons Project. They spoke brilliantly about the embattled but not defeated economic and ideological state of non-mainstream journalism, independent cinema, and grassroots projects (concerning prison, welfare reform, and inner-city youth culture). In particular, they focused on recent victories and the long-term prospects for changing the taken-for-granted terms of political common sense. Flanders also ventured prophetically that the out of touch mainstream media would be shocked by the outcome of the election!

Showing clips from Boys Don’t Cry, Peirce spoke eloquently about translating the story of Brandon Teena to film, focusing on her conflicting desires to tell the truth, to move, and to entertain her audience. She also spoke poignantly of the ways that, at the University of Chicago, she began to develop the tools for thinking about gender and sexuality, tools that enabled her to cultivate the brave and extraordinary work she is now doing. It was one more testimony to the ways learning the undervalued histories of women and men in their everyday lives and in social movements is to shift remarkably the way one encounters the world.

This newsletter tells of more events this quarter, where brave and creative intellectual activists will come through the Center every Friday at 12:15, and throughout January and February. Please join us.

-Lauren Berlant

Fall Highlights

The Future of the Queer Past, the largest queer history conference ever held, took place at the U of C on September 14-17. With historians from around the world speaking on 50 panels, as well films, exhibits, and performances, the conference organized by the Lesbian and Gay Studies Project drew over 400 participants.

On October 6, Mary Ann Case (pictured), professor of law and trailblazing scholar, presented "Toilet Paper: Toilets as Gendered Spaces," Case, the Center’s Fall Distinguished Faculty Lecturer, drew an audience of 100 faculty, students and community members.

Gayatri Spivak, renowned post-colonial scholar, visited the Center on December 1, presenting an informal lecture at a CGS Brown Bag luncheon. Due to the overwhelming response, the approximately 90 participants moved to the Judd Hall auditorium.

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- Fellowship and Ruth Murray Prize deadlines announced – page 2.

- Gina Olson on her trip to the First Continental Workshop on Women’s Studies in Havana, Cuba.

From the left, CGS Director Lauren Berlant, Gayatri Spivak, Board members Candace Vogler and Neville Hoad, and Assistant Director Gina Olson.
Gender Studies in Cuba

From November 11-18th, I attended the First Continental Workshop on Women's Research and Studies Centers hosted by the Cuban Federation of Women (FMC) in Havana, Cuba. I was one of four participants from the U.S. who traveled through the Center for Development Studies at Presbyterian College. The Workshop included participants from across Cuba, Spain and Latin America.

The Workshop opened with an address by Vilma Espin Guillois, President of FMC and a former combatant leader of the Revolution. The Revolution created FMC in 1960 as the official women's movement, with the objectives of incorporating women into the economic, political and social life of the country and to raise consciousness of the rights and duties in the new society being built. Cuba is ranked 12th in the world for women's participation in leadership. The FMC serves as an umbrella group to the base of Cuban women's municipal organizations. Delegates representing each popular settlement gather regularly and in a national Congress to prepare the platforms for women's advancement.

I am glad to have had this glimpse of Cuba but know that I have much to learn about Cuba and all that has created the current reality of this very complicated place. I am left with contemplations on the movement's origins and continued sponsorship by the state and question what kind of dialogue and change can occur under those circumstances. For all the discussion about sexuality in the Workshop, only one panelist mentioned lesbians specifically and made no mention of bi-sexual/queer women. When a question arose about lesbians and the history of persecution in Cuba, one scholar replied, "We no longer persecute them. We study them." Our translator (a young Cuban) could not stop from laughing, though the comment was serious.

I am excited about the contacts that I made while there, and foresee a continuing relationship between the CGS and the FMC, as well as the individual scholars I was privileged to meet.

-Perla Popowski Casañ, sociologist and leader

Espin addresses Workshop

Center News and Announcements

Beginning January 17th, the Center will be hosting two high school interns from the newly established Young Women's Leadership Charter School of Chicago. The interns will assist with projects and events at the Center and get a glimpse into the world of Gender Studies.

The Center is now accepting applications for the Stuart Tave Teaching Fellowship sponsored by the Humanities Collegiate Division. CGS will sponsor up to two advanced graduate students (ABD) who will compete for these fellowships across the Division. The fellows will teach one undergraduate course "of their own design" and will receive $3,500. Applications must be submitted to CGS by Feb 2.

The Ruth Murray Essay Prize deadline is April 23 at 5 p.m. This annual competition is open to both undergraduate and graduate students for the best essay written on a feminist/gender issue. The winner will be awarded $300.

For details on the Fellowship or Essay Prize, email org@uchicago.edu.

A new program has been announced to support gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and queer students: the U of C GLBTQ Mentoring Program will pair each interested GLBTQ undergraduate with a GLBTQ faculty or staff mentor. The idea is that the mentor will be a sympathetic queer adult who will do what they can to be supportive. Mentors will be able to act as a sounding board as students navigate their way through a (mostly) straight world. They can help as students address issues such as whether or not to come out on a resume or during a job search or graduate or professional school applications. The hope is that being able to interact with a GLBTQ faculty or staff member will give students more of a sense of community.

Queer faculty and staff who are interested in becoming mentors or undergraduates who are interested in having a mentor can contact Kathy Forde (kaf1@midway.uchicago.edu) or Jim Howley (howley@midway.uchicago.edu).

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Millennial Scholars Lecture Series

Judith Butler will present a series of lectures on "Ethical Violence: Suspending Judgment." Her schedule is as follows—Tuesday, January 16: "Critique as Virtue: Foucault and the Limits of Intelligibility"; Thursday, January 18: "Is Kinship Already Always Heterosexual?" Thursday, January 25: "Allegories of Sex Assignment" All lectures will be held in Swift 3rd Floor Lecture Hall, at 4:30 p.m.

On Jan 31, 5 p.m. Wendy Brown will present, "A Consideration of Tolerance as a Contemporary Discourse of Multicultural Justice." Brown is Professor of Political Science and Women's Studies at the University of California, Berkeley whose current research interests are in postfeminist thought and American political culture. Her books include Manhood and Politics: A Feminist Reading in Political Theory, States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity, Politics Out of History, and Left Liberalism/Left Critique.

From 9-11 a.m. on February 1 Brown will present a seminar with the Theory and Insurgency Workshop, "Moralism as Anti-politics."


On Saturday, February 17, Gilmore will present a seminar, "You Have Dislodged a Boulder" at the Theory and Insurgency Workshop, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. in Cobb 402. She will also present "Workfare Warfare States" as a Brown Bag on Friday, February 16.

Cherrie Moraga, (Loving in the War Years and co-editor of This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color) will speak the evening of Friday, March 2.

Brown Bags: Fridays at 12:15 p.m.

January 12:
"Civil Rights, Done and Undone: Television and the Constructions of Black Male Subjectivity" Sasha Torres, Director of Film and Media Studies, John Hopkins University

January 19:
"Unconscious States: State Fantasy and the Cultural Formation of State Personhood in Late Victorian England" Zarena Aslam, CGS Fellow, English Department

January 26:
"Obscure' Representation in the Poetry of Mei-mei Berssenbrugge" Dorothy Wang, Professor, Northwestern University

February 9:
"Theorize This: Academic Training and the Brutalization of Self" Lisa Ruddick, Assoc. Professor of English

February 16:
Ruthie Gilmore "Workfare Warfare States"
(See Millennial Scholars column above)

February 23:
"A Matter of Deference: Gender, Power, and Privilege in the 'Marital quid pro quo'" Froma Walsh, Professor, School of Social Science Service Administration and Dept of Psychiatry, Co-Director, Center for Family Health

March 9:
"Post Mortem" Mary Patten, Video Artist and Professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Brown Bags are held at the Center, Judd 422, 5835 South Kimbark from 12:15-1:30 p.m., unless otherwise noted.
Workshops

This year, the CGS has begun one new workshop, along with two continued form previous years. The Center’s Late Liberalism Project now coordinates a graduate student workshop, Theory and Insurgency. This is an interdisciplinary group of students and faculty interested in exploring new constructions of belonging (politically and socially) that depart from liberal conventions of personhood that focus on individuality, nationality and sub-national identities. In doing so, our goal is to envision the insurgent possibilities of rethinking subjectivity, agency, and political form. If you would like to join the mailing list, please email Noah Salomon at ndsalomo@uchicago.edu.

The Gender and Society Workshop usually meets every other Wednesday at the Center. Contact Elizabeth Campbell at ecampbel@midway.uchicago.edu for more details.

The Lesbian and Gay Studies Project Workshop meets biweekly to discuss drafts of articles and dissertation chapters written by graduate students, faculty, and visiting scholars. Its participants include graduate students and faculty from a wide range of departments, including history, anthropology, human development, English, art history, East Asian languages, political science, and sociology. The Workshop provides students with a supportive intellectual community at a crucial stage in their graduate careers, a critical interdisciplinary forum in which to present their work, and the opportunity to meet leading scholars in the field. Contact Jennifer Spruill at spru@midway.uchicago.edu for more information.

The Gender and Society Workshop and the Lesbian and Gay Studies Project Workshop will begin the quarter by hosting joint workshops. Judith Butler—January 17. Kelly Hayes—February 1. Check the website for future speakers and workshops.