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Special issue editors

Queer Studies: Methodological approaches

During the three days in the beginning of May 2007, the Nordic Research School in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies arranged the PhD-course *What's up in Queer Theory? Recent Developments in Queer Studies* at the Centre for Gender Studies, Lund university, Sweden. There, Judith Halberstam, Tiina Rosenberg and Tuula Juvonen gave lectures about queer archives and genealogies of queer. A significant number of discussions focused around the need for displacements of power and the importance of context in the queer academic and activist practises. Several questions also emerged during this three-day course that solicited further problematisation. The idea for the current special issue of the *Graduate Journal of Social Science*, devoted to discussions around/about meanings and functions of the word “queer” was born.

Recent publications in queer studies point towards several directions, such as the dimension of “anti-social”-ity of “queer”, temporalities of non-normative desires, and geographies of non-Western sexualities. Clearly “there is something in the air” around these issues, which quickly became noticeable from the abstracts we received for consideration for publication. Problems of contextualizations of queer; the reception in non-English speaking contexts where “queer” is an empty word without history and negative connections; the impact of spatial and temporal contexts on queer formation and academic practises of story telling and a problematisation of privileges, positionality and canon setting in queer studies of today – are the hot topics. The following selection of eight contributions is the first of two planned. **Thus, we are happy to announce now that GJSS will be publishing a follow up issue on queer methodologies in March**, to accommodate another set of interesting papers we received in the call out for this issue.

The December 2008 issue follows a certain logic that emerged from submitted papers. The opening article of acclaimed academic Tiina Rosenberg on queer genealogies is followed by a series of papers dealing with issues of self-reflexivity, intersections, dispersion, and accommodations of “queer” to non-Western (English) contexts. The closing articles scrutinise

identity and materiality of objects and bodies, to be metaphorically summarised in Judith Halberstam's article on “non-identification” and “negativity” of “queerness”.

In the opening article to this issue of *GJSS*, Swedish queer and feminist scholar and activist Tiina Rosenberg reminds us about often forgotten feminist legacy of queer studies, both in their academic and activist approaches. Additionally, by reflecting on the local, Swedish case, her paper establishes an excellent way and route of thinking and scrutinisation, taken up in the following articles in this issue.

The uses and historical development of the word “queer” is investigated in the subsequent article, where Liv Mertz traces not only valuable insight in to the Danish culture and the way the foreign word “queer” was nested in academic circles, but also offers some critique on the process of such translation. Another significant contribution of Mertz is the use of auto-narrative form for a scholarly paper, producing still “unusual” (at least in more traditionally oriented academic circles) academic story-telling.

The intersections of “queer” and “diaspora” is the topic of exploration of the next ensuing article, which, as Michaela Baldo writes herself: “aims at analysing the ways in which the term has been recontextualised in this transnational context with reference to issues of ethnicity. Within cultural theory the concepts of ‘queer’ and ‘diaspora’ have been informed by post-modern and post-colonial theory and have intervened on theories of time, space and identity infusing them with notions of transgression, contingency, power and conflict”.

In “‘Latino’ and ‘queer’ as sites of translation: Intersections of ‘race’, ethnicity and sexuality” María Amelia Viteri discovers how the voices of LGBT Latinos brings up the need of a translation of categories such as ‘queer,’ ‘Latino/ Latinidad’ and ‘American’. Viteri thus intervenes in typically ‘Western’ systems of classification, and illustrates in her piece how translating across “fields of power” can generate methodological and theoretical tools to “better account for the privileged position of ‘Western’ thought”. Viteri shows how ‘Latino’, ‘queer’ and ‘American’ are located within particular cartographies of place, desire and belonging and introduces a border-crossing ‘queer’ methodology where sexual and gender

‘crossing’ have a potential to challenge perceptions and readings around race, ethnicity and class.

Elisabeth Engebretsen in her ethnography-informed paper presents Chinese lesbian “lala” culture. However, what she is interested in, is not only the “lala” community, but also a role and position of a Western academic researching non-Western sexualities. Engebretsen clearly places herself in the camp of sexuality scholars who see the urgent need of self-reflexivity in the western queer studies field, and prompts us to “ponder the possibilities and limits of current analytical frameworks”.

Intervening in to the discourses of old age as either ““successful”” or ““a decline””, Linn Sandberg makes use of the anti-social turn in queer theory in order to challenge normal and good ageing in her piece “The Old, the Ugly and the Queer: thinking old age in relation to queer theory”. Through an analysis of queer theoretical notions such as failure and the abject, Sandberg discusses some implications of bringing old age into queer theory, where, as she writes “a turn to queer theory may not only confront ageism but imply a resurrection of knowledges springing from the old, ugly and the queer”.

In 1992, Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman published their piece “Queer Nationality”, noting that the tactics of Queer Nation was to show how inappropriate xenophobia is, through reversing the hate speech against gays to a hate speech of straights (Berlant and Freeman 1992: 170). Nevertheless, Berlant and Freeman had difficulties finding any space in Queer Nation for those who did not identify with “the national fantasy of the white male citizen”. Thus, and in an intervention into the imperialism, nationalism and hegemony of US queer activism, they turn to descriptions of a negative identity as a “space of nonidentification” which they can inhabit (Berlant and Freeman 1992: 176). This turn to negativity is also pointed out by Judith Halberstam in her essay in this issue of the GJSS, where she engages with the anti-social project, arguing for the need of a more explicitly political framing of the project, and search for an “archive of alternatives”, mixing high and low and provides examples from a feminist or post colonial context through the works by Valerie Solanas and Jamaica Kincaid, and through the works by performance artists, such as Marina Abramovic and Yoko Ono.



In the review section, excellently edited by Melissa Fernandez, this issue of *GJSS* introduces five books covering a wide range of topics, such as a methodology and pluralism, queer bisexuality and youth culture, spirituality, sexualities and public culture in China of today.

Thanks to the possibility of an engagement with many interesting intellectual conversations around queer methodologies, connected to politics, culture, history and society located in European, Asian and American contexts, the work on this issue of the *GJSS* has been a true enjoyment. We want to acknowledge the team of anonymous referees for contributing with their competence to the production of this issue. We also want to thank to the members of the special issue advisory board, who have shared their knowledge and contacts on the field. Here, we want to send special thanks to Tuula Juvonen, whose careful input and expertise has been of great importance for the editorial team. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the Nordic research school of interdisciplinary gender studies, for making this issue financially possible.

References:

Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman (1992) "Queer Nationality", *boundary 2*, no. 1, pp. 149-180.