

Queer Futurities, Today: Utopias and Beyond in Queer Theory

Time: Monday 18-Tuesday 19, May 2009

Location: The Finnish Institute in Germany

Organizers: SQS—Society for Queer Studies in Finland, Institute for Queer Theory in Berlin

In cooperation with Finnland-Institut in Deutschland, Berlin and Institute for Cultural Inquiry (ICI-Berlin)

Untimely utopias are inhabited by those who interrupt the here and now, who occupy positions which are yet to be articulated, who have learned to hope for times that will open up new spaces and who never cease to re-invent themselves. – María do Mar Castro Varela

Recent years have witnessed a normalizing domestication of the queer. Once held back by the closet, gays and lesbians are now basking in the public spotlight and enjoy high visibility in media, television and popular culture. They are featured in mainstream films and are targeted by advertisers as a major consumer group. What's more, they are getting married and having children like there is no tomorrow. For some, this kind of visibility in the public sphere is a utopia come true – it is seen as political and social progress, the realization of true equality.

During the past decade, however, many activists and scholars have questioned this development and argued that it is a reactionary response, linked with neoliberal politics and privatization. One of the most ardent critics of this development, Lisa Duggan, argues that lesbian and gay politics have reached an era best described in terms of “homonormativity,” which she defines as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them.” Another influential queer theorist, Lee Edelman, sees the very term *queer* as entailing a resistance to normalized social forms – including the norm of what he calls “reproductive futurism.” For Edelman, reproductive futurism involves a faith in the consistency of the social, invoking a normative humanism that installs the image of the child as a symbolic token of a progression into the future. The pastoral faith in a shared futurity is therefore something that the queer movement might logically reject rather than embrace.

Futurities Countering Normalization

Yet, if a main thrust of queer politics is to oppose normalization, does that necessarily entail jettisoning all visions of the future? Can there be a form of utopian thinking that is not idealistic or normative? Might we entertain the idea of heterotopia as a space that suggests the co-existence of different social relations? Perhaps, rather than seeing society's turn into a “homonormative” dystopia as a failure of queer politics, one could make use of dystopia as a space of queer potentiality.

Futurities Challenging Progressive Time

With the title of our conference, we not only want to proliferate the idea of “future” into “futures” but also, by introducing the term “futurities,” we want to question the idea of progressive time. This questioning includes building a different relationship between the past and the future: How can we understand political agency if the relationship between the past and the future is *not* mediated by the present?

Imagination Designing Futurities

Finally, what is the role of imagination when we take up the question of queer futurities? Do imaginations project “a beyond” or, rather, can they be a way for futurities to inhabit contemporary social relations and political practices? How do these differing ideas of imagination materialize in cultural products or quotidian practices?

“Queer Futurities, Today” is an international symposium that welcomes a wide range of presentations, from academic papers to performances and visual presentations, as well as any other intellectual exchange concerning queer presence(s) in contemporary culture, history and theory. We invite queer scholars, activists and artists to submit abstracts that relate mainly, but not exclusively, to one of the three organizing themes: “Futurities Countering Normalization,” “Futurities Challenging Progressive Time” and “Imagination Designing Futurities.” We are very excited to welcome Lee Edelman as the keynote speaker of the conference. Note: Edelman will give his address on May 18 **at ICI-Berlin**.

Abstracts (200-300 words) for twenty-minute papers should be submitted as an email attachment to mail@queer-institut.de by March 11, 2009. Please use your surname as the document title. Abstracts should be sent in the following format: (1) Title (2) Presenter(s) (3) Institutional affiliation (4) Email (5) Abstract. For more information, contact us at mail@queer-institut.de. After the seminar, the papers can be offered as articles for publication in *SQS: Journal of Queer Studies in Finland* (<http://sqslehti.wordpress.com/>).

Looking forward to your abstracts,

Jessica Dorrance, Antke Engel, Livia Hekanaho, Tuula Juvonen, Harri Kalha, Leena-Maija Rossi, Antu Sorainen, Laura Tulehmo, Annamari Vänskä