CALL FOR PAPERS
Graduate Conference
Department of German, New York University

Sisterliness

Keynote:
Prof. Laurence A. Rickels

April 26–27, 2018
Deutsches Haus at NYU, New York City

As a paradigmatic sister-figure in literary history, Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, defies the law of the state in order to bury her brother. Her behavior can be read as an act of political resistance and transgression. Slavoj Žižek, for example, interprets her defiance as the radical act par excellence. According to Judith Butler she represents a “deformation and displacement” of kinship that destabilizes a normative symbolic order from within. At the same time, the figure of Antigone can be used to challenge a number of assumptions put forward by Freudian psychoanalysis. The latter, still the dominant framework for thinking family relationships and structures, is based on a triadic model which centers on the male subject – Oedipus and his relationship to his mother and father. This vertical model, however, harbors a twofold blind spot: female subjectivity and horizontal structures. By reading Antigone’s provocation as acts of a sister, and thus analyzing family models and power dynamics from a sister’s perspective, it becomes possible to rethink kinship as an institution marked by a crisis of representation.

We seek to explore a concept of “sisterliness” that is closely linked to notions of transgression and alternative forms of kinship. Through the lens of “sisterliness,” our conference will engage new and productive ways of understanding and/or critiquing concepts of identity and alterity. We welcome papers that explore “sisterliness” with regard to symbolic formations, ethical implications, and structures of desire, as well as papers that ask how the destabilization of genealogical origin calls traditional concepts of subjectivity into question. Investigations of alternative modes of (re-)production in and of literary texts are encouraged: Which epistemological, aesthetic, and rhetorical operations are at stake when we approach literary texts with this framework? What implications would this have for questions of authorship, genre, and mediality? Our conference seeks to take the first steps in developing an archive and poetics of “sisterliness.”
Possible topics include (but are not limited to):

- Epistemological Instabilities: Twins and Doppelgänger
- Envy, Rivalry, and Competition
- Exclusive Bonds: Fraternities and Sororities
- Alternative Genealogies and Horizontal (Re-)Production
- Taboo: Incestuous Desires and Sororicide
- Uncanny Sisters: Phantoms and Ghosts
- Problems of Subjectivity: Identity, Individuality, and Difference
- Sisterly Correspondences
- Poetics and Politics of “Sisterliness”
- Feminist, Queer, and Political Voicings
- Problems of Caretaking
- The Law: Obedience and Transgression
- Performing “Sisterliness”
- Narratives of Family and Childhood

We primarily invite doctoral students of German and related disciplines to submit proposals; post-doc level researchers are also welcome to participate. Submissions should contain a 300-word abstract of the prospective 20-minute talk and a short bio. Send your submissions to nyusisterliness@gmail.com.

The deadline for submissions is Monday, January 29, 2018.

Organizers: Marie-Luise Goldmann, Rahel von Minden, Endre M. Holéczy