



Possible Modernities between Medieval and Enlightenment

GENEALOGIES OF MODERNITY II

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*June 11th ~ June 15th, 2018*

*Collegium Institute*

*hosted at the University of Pennsylvania*

When or how did we become *modern*? Or is modernity a fiction, both of the past and present? **Genealogies of Modernity** is an interdisciplinary seminar [launched last year](#) to interrogate the role of the "age of reform" (roughly 1350-1600) in influential genealogical accounts of the modern world, and also to explore competing movements within that same age that might expand our imagination for life in our own. In its next iteration this summer, GenMod II, we will extend our investigation into accounts of the Enlightenment, connecting them back to the age of reform and ahead to the present era. (Collegium will also host GenMod III: Global Genealogies of Early Modernity in summer 2019--some details below.)

*(Image: Tree of Jesse, London, British Library, MS Harley 1892, f. 31v.)*

Modernity is a concept that is frequently used in a variety of fields, from academic research to public policy. However, what constitutes modernity is poorly understood, in part because it is a relational category, as the Latin roots of the word suggest: the Latin adjective *modernus* came into use in the late fifth century as a way of demarcating the present versus a cultural moment that had already receded into the past. “Modernity” as a concept came along much later. Yet “modernity” has taken root and ramified in ways that have consequences. This seminar proposes to investigate various accounts of when, where, and how “modernity” took shape as a way to reveal how the past has helped to shape the present and to understand better how these various approaches can provide resources to shape the future.

Each academic discipline has developed its own definition of what constitutes “modernity” and narrated the stories of how and why it emerged in a given place at a particular moment. Often, a single academic discipline will enfold multiple contrasting narrations of the emergence of modernity. Frequently such accounts appeal to large, structural changes: the emergence of a global economic system, the rise of the nation-state and colonialism, and the emergence of institutional science are but three examples of this sort of master narrative. Such structural accounts undoubtedly have merit. However, this project draws out some of the intellectual and cultural threads that often unconsciously subtend these master narratives. Our project aims to tease out elements of late medieval and early modern culture that will bring greater legibility to the manifold passages to modernity--and their alternatives.

Genealogy is a flexible term that enfolds a variety of approaches to the question of heritability. A biological approach to genealogy tracks the evolution of a genotype; a juridical construction of genealogy decides how citizenship is passed down through generations, with each country constructing its own set of laws that govern access to its passport; Nietzschean genealogy demonstrates the radical contingency of social formations and intellectual traditions.

Each kind of genealogy is appropriate for a particular set of circumstances, but each can also be abused by application to the wrong circumstances. Likewise, exclusive reliance on a single kind of genealogical inquiry can obscure other dimensions of historical phenomena. Our goal is to understand the affordances and limitations of these methods more clearly. Despite longstanding, pervasive aversion to grand narratives, the historical disciplines continue to grapple with questions of heritability. To wit: even as scholars express skepticism about the very notion of modernity, they nevertheless leverage the concept daily and feel quite comfortable identifying the period 1200-1700 as Early Modern. This double move of use and disavowal creates cognitive dissonance that is ripe for examination. This seminar’s focus on existing genealogies and on genealogical methods will allow a diverse group of scholars to consider how the analogy of genealogy and heritability functions in their own disciplines and how it might open new areas for collaboration among them.

The first four days of the five-day seminar will be led by faculty specialists focusing on a specific genealogy in their own disciplines – history, philosophy, theology, literary studies, art history, and music. The final day offers grad participants an opportunity to reflect on the week’s themes through the lens of their own work. Graduate students across the humanities, whether they are new to the project or returning from last summer’s seminar, are welcome to apply.

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## Seminar Faculty



***Karen Detlefsen:*** Philosophy

University of Pennsylvania



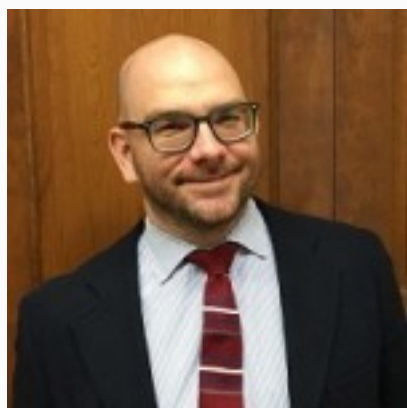
***Ulrich Lehner:*** History and Theology

Marquette University



***Ryan McDermott:*** Literature

University of Pittsburgh



***Christopher Nygren:*** Art History

University of Pittsburgh



***Eileen Reeves:*** Literature & History of Science

Princeton University



***Naomi Waltham-Smith:*** Music

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# APPLICATION MATERIALS

- A completed online [Application Form](#).
- An updated CV
- A statement of research interest no longer than *750 words*, which includes an explanation of how this seminar might bear on the your current or future research plans.

# SUBMISSION DEADLINES

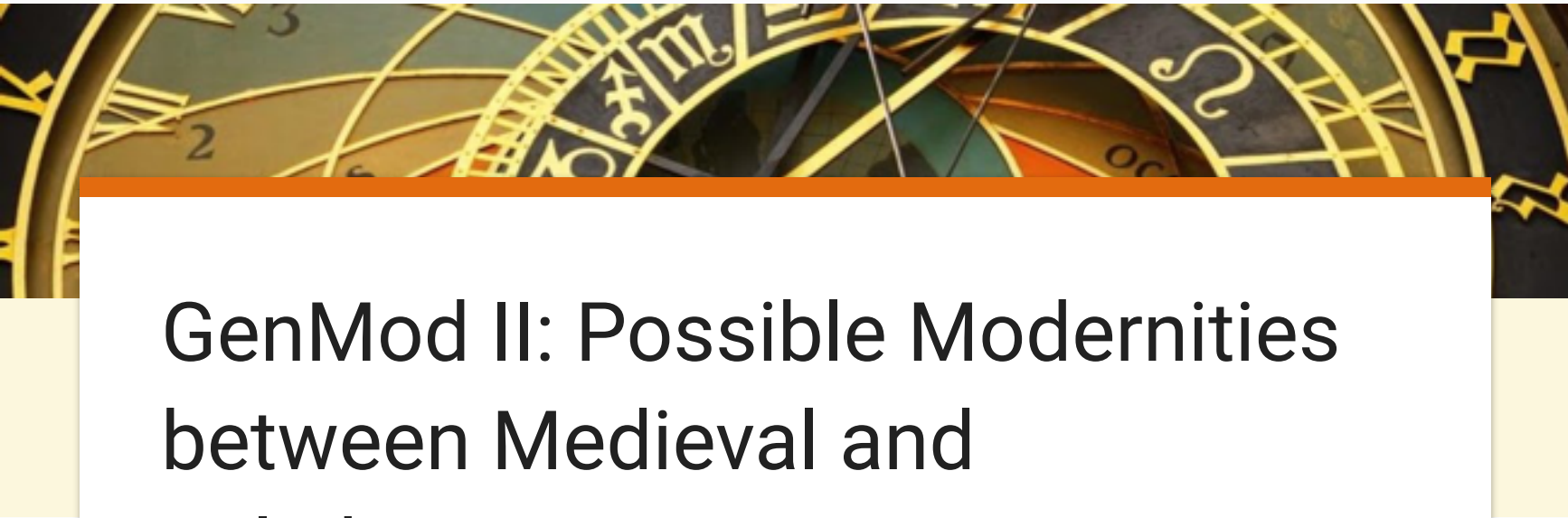
**Priority Deadline:**  
*Friday, April 6, 2018*

**Final Deadline:**  
*Friday, April 13, 2018*

All documents should be submitted after the online application form. Please e-mail documents to [summer.seminar@collegiuminstitute.org](mailto:summer.seminar@collegiuminstitute.org). Each document should be titled with the student's last name and first initial.

\*Acceptance to this seminar includes coverage of all expenses for the duration of the workshop. This includes room, board, and texts. Participants are responsible for their travel to and from the workshop.\*

*Shareable Description for GenMod II*



## SUMMER 2019: GENMOD III: GLOBAL GENEALOGIES OF EARLY MODERNITY

The seminar has three overarching goals:

- \* First, it will examine how individual disciplines narrate the “passage to modernity.” Rather than divide the discussion into discrete units of *disciplinary* investigation (a unit, say, on “modernity” in English literature), we will create cross-disciplinary groupings that allow us to see how disciplinary definitions constellate around certain key tropes, events, monuments, and metanarratives.
- \* Second, we will examine the notion of genealogy in a comparative manner. While humanists such as Nietzsche and Foucault have used a particular notion of genealogy to destabilize origin stories and reveal the radical contingency of historical phenomena, the dominant paradigm of genealogy remains a genetic one based on the heritability of culture. One major contribution of this seminar will be to encourage scholars studying outside of the Anglo-European system to bring forward alternative, local formulations of genealogy and heritability.
- \* Third, we will foreground historical inquiry’s place in public discourse. By incorporating indigenous models of genealogy from across the globe, we hope to provide a more supple account of the notion of cultural heritability, which will have a salutary effect not only on historically-minded scholarship, but also on public discourse.

