

Judith Kohlenberger

### **From Hard Core to Hard Facts: A Queer Approach to Science**

My project aims to make the insights gained by Queer Theory relevant beyond the traditional realms of gender and sexuality by applying it to the examination of current interactions between natural sciences and popular culture. I intend to examine the parallels and overlaps between what Jean-François Lyotard has defined as abstract or denotative knowledge on the one hand and narrative knowledge on the other, whose confusion and overlapping constitutes a vital feature of postmodern science. Specifically, my project is set to explore how the recent popularity of Big Science is contingent on its perception and construction as cool, which is one of the most pervading qualities in contemporary popular culture and at the same time perceived as incompatible with traditional scientific discourse. In accordance with contemporary cultural studies of science as pioneered by Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour, a central goal of my project will be to unravel a continuum between the supposedly polar notions of science and culture, logics and aesthetics, core and periphery, theoretical foundations and material effects. This continuum will be understood as distinctly queer, i.e. containing the potential for paradox, subversion and discontinuity. In that sense, I will resort to the methodological toolkit provided by Queer Theory to analyze, as one might loosely rephrase Annemarie Jagose's paradigmatic declaration, mismatches between epistemologies and discursive systems and unravel more fluid conceptualizations of purportedly clear-cut categories. My project thereby fully embraces queer as a position that is "at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant" (David Halperin) by contesting established discourses and advocating an alternative vision of one of the most regulated and normative segments of society, science.

**Judith Kohlenberger** is a PhD candidate at the University of Vienna. Her diploma thesis on the pertinence of coolness as a cultural strategy in contemporary US-American cinema was awarded the Annual Fulbright Prize in American Studies and the 2010 Excellence Award by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Science and Research. She is currently working on her PhD thesis, which explores the interactions between natural sciences and contemporary popular culture in the US-American context. Her research interests include European Romanticism and Gothic fiction, cultural and literary theory, gender studies as well as hemispheric approaches to the Americas.