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University of Wisconsin, Madison
Esalen Self-guided Drop-in Series, June 23-27, 2025

Think Like a Multiverse: Pathways to Wonder, Kinship, and Radical Openness

One of life's great paradoxes is that we all inhabit the same world, yet no single person, living being or object within it is exactly *like* anything else. Thus, difference—the sheer diversity of the world's countless inhabitants—is arguably the most immediate fact of our shared reality.

This seminar asks: What does it take to properly apprehend the world's diversity and respond to it with curiosity, open-heartedness, humor, and joy, rather than anxiety, fear, and violence? In other words, how can each of us learn to “think like a multiverse”?

This 5-day seminar draws from some of the best traditions in the study of literature, philosophy, and popular culture to help you cultivate skills in grasping and negotiating difference in an increasingly xenophobic world. We will consider diversity and heterogeneity not as a problem to be solved, a threat to be feared, or a reality to be managed, but rather as a field of imaginative possibilities for the formation of new relationships *across* difference.

Each day, we will zoom in on a different framework for thinking about diversity and multiplicity. These include Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of “mestiza consciousness”; the popular culture concept of the multiverse; the indigenous kinship worldview; cosmopolitanism and radical democracy; and psychedelic experience. Throughout, we will combine the study of key texts in these various philosophies with recent popular media and experiential learning exercises to practice what we're learning in our everyday lives. We will do some writing about our encounters with non-human plant life on the Esalen campus; we will imagine and describe different versions of ourselves across a fictional multiverse; we will identify and respond to differences in temperament, personality, style, and tastes among the members of our seminar; and we will pursue various aesthetic genres like writing, drawing, and collage alongside sustained discussion to learn new ways of representing the diversity we encounter all around us.

Since this seminar will combine elements of academic or intellectual learning with practical exercises, students will be encouraged (though not required) to complete the seminar readings the week before they attend.

For Opening and Closing Circle Times / Locations as well as the Wednesday evening program, see the weekly schedule.

Tuesday-Thursday sessions will be held 10:15-11:45 in the Rooftop Room above the dining hall.

Note: Electronic and/or physical copies of all recommended short readings or excerpts will be provided to participants in advance of the week. Recommended film and television series are available on various streaming services as indicated below. Please bring a notebook to all our sessions.

Day 1 (Monday, Opening Circle): Welcoming the Stranger

Toni Morrison, “Strangers” (1998) and “Moral Inhabitants” (1976): 13 pages.

Day 2 (Tuesday): Mestiza Consciousness

Gloria Anzaldúa, “Preface” and “Chapter 7: Towards a New Consciousness,” in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987): 14 pages.

Recommended screening: *Undone* season 1, especially episode 7 [Available on Amazon Prime].

Day 3 (Wednesday): The Indigenous Kinship Worldview

Robin Wall Kimmerer, “Skywoman Falling,” “The Gift of Strawberries,” and “Learning the Grammar of Animacy,” from *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (2015): 34 pages.

Jenny Slate, “Treat,” from *Little Weirds* (2020): 4 pages.

Recommended Screening: *My Octopus Teacher* (2020) [Available on Netflix]

Day 4 (Thursday): Cosmopolitanism

David Hollinger, “Preface” to *Cosmopolitanism and the Problem of Solidarity: Studies in Ethnoracial, Religious, and Professional Affiliation in the United States* (2006): 8 pages.

Hannah Arendt, excerpts from “Introduction into Politics,” (1968): 12 pages.

Recommended film screening: *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse* (2022) [Available on Netflix]

Day 5 (Friday, Closing Circle): Thinking Like a Multiverse

Jeff Vandermeer, excerpt from *Annihilation* (2014): 12 pages.