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READINGS IN CONTEMPORARY THEORY
Soc 880/Spring 2011



S. Pfohl (GunGirl, 2003)

Over the last several decades, an explosion of social theories has transformed—or tried to—understandings of power, language/representation, the dynamics of oppression & privilege, capitalism, the body, colonialism, sexuality, trans/nationalism, science & technology, and the politics of producing knowledge itself. The seminar offers a focused

and selective engagement with only a small sample of this enormous theoretical creativity. Drawing on recent interdisciplinary work in feminist theory, critical race and anti-racist theory, postmodernism, postcolonial studies, queer theory, and theories of globalization and transnational politics, we will explore the productive disruptions of contemporary theory with an eye towards how they might challenge and enliven our own sociological imaginations and methods.

Course Expectations

This is an advanced graduate reading and writing seminar. Students are expected to participate consistently and intensely in weekly seminar discussions. Each week, students will hand in, at the beginning of the seminar, 2-3 pages of writing, composed in relation to that week's readings. These 2-3 page essays will be read by me each week and returned to you the next week. You cannot pass the course without doing these weekly writings, which compose a kind of intellectual diary of your passage through the multiple text(ure)s of the course. Each student will also write an 8-page essay, due Tuesday, March 8, and a 15-20 page final essay addressing a theoretical problem of your choice. No incompletes will be given in the course.

Required Texts:

1. Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.
2. Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
3. Eduardo Galeano, *Century of the Wind*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1988.

Readings in the syllabus that will be posted on Blackboard are marked with a **BB**.

January 18 Openings and Introductions

Video (in class): *Reassemblage* (Trinh Minh-ha, 1982)

January 25 I. LANGUAGE, POWER, HISTORY: TRANSFORMING THEORY

Let me tell you a story. For all I have is a story....When history separated itself from story, it started indulging in accumulation and facts. Or it thought it could. It thought it could build up to History because the Past, unrelated to the Present and the Future, is lying there in its entirety, waiting to be revealed. The act of revealing bears in itself a magical (not factual) quality—inherited undoubtedly from "primitive" storytelling....No wonder that in old tales storytellers are very often women, witches, and prophets. The African griot and griotte are well known for being poet, storyteller, historian, musician, and magician—all at once.

--Trinh T. Minh-ha

Michele Barrett (1999), "Words and Things" in *Imagination in Theory: Culture, Writing, Words, and Things*, pp. 18-34. **BB**

Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989), "The Story Began Long Ago..." and "Commitment from the Mirror-Writing Box" (Ch. I) in *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality, and Feminism*, pp. 1-44.

Helene Cixous (1976), "The Laugh of the Medusa" in *Signs*, pp. 875-893. **BB**

Della Pollock (1998), "Performing Writing" in Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane, eds., *The Ends of Performance*, pp. 73-98. **BB**

Audre Lorde (1980), "Poetry is Not a Luxury" in Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine, eds., *The Future of Difference*, pp. 125-127. **BB**

Avery Gordon (2008 [1997]), "Intro to New Edition" and "her shape and his hand" (Ch. 1) in *Ghostly Matters: Hauntings and the Sociological Imagination*, pp. xv-xx, 3-28.

recommended:

Helene Cixous and Catherine Clement (1986 [1975]), "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays" in *The Newly-Born Woman*, pp. 63-130.

Luce Irigaray (1985 [1977]) "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine" in *This Sex Which Is Not One*.

Domna Stanton (1980), "Language and Revolution" in Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine, eds., *The Future of Difference*, pp. 73-82.

Walter Benjamin (1968 [1936]), "The Storyteller" in *Illuminations*, pp. 83-109.

Roland Barthes (1978), *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*.

February 1

Gordon (1997), "distractions" (Ch. 2) in *Ghostly Matters*, pp. 31-60.

Grace M. Cho (2008), "Fleshing Out the Ghost," (Ch. 1) in *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 27-49. **BB**

Trinh (1989), "Grandma's Story" (Ch. IV) in *Woman, Native, Other*, pp. 119-151.

Hosu Kim (2007), "The Parched Tongue" in Patricia Clough, ed., *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, pp. 34-45. **BB**

recommended:

Michele Barrett (1999), "Psychoanalyses and Feminisms" in *Imagination in Theory: Culture, Writing, Words, and Things*, pp. 124-134.

Sigmund Freud (1919), "The 'Uncanny'" in *The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17. Trans. by James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press.

Francoise Davoine and Jean-Max Guidilliere (2004). *History Beyond Trauma*. New York: Other Press.

February 8

Trinh (1989), "Difference: 'A Special Third World Women Issue'" (Ch. III) in *Woman, Native, Other*, pp. 79-116.

Cornel West (1993), "The New Cultural Politics of Difference" in Simon During, ed., *The Cultural Studies Reader*, pp. 203-217. **BB**

M. Jacqui Alexander (2006), "Anatomy of a Mobilization," (Ch. 4) in *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, and the Sacred*, pp. 117-180. **BB**

recommended:

Gloria Anzaldua (1987), *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.

Chela Sandoval (2000), *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press.

Patricia Clough (1994), "A Feminist Post-Colonial Criticism" in *Feminist Thought: Desire, Power, and Academic Discourse*, pp. 114-138.

Michael Ryan (1982), "Deconstruction: A Primer, A Critique, The Politics Of" in *Marxism and Deconstruction: A Critical Articulation*, pp. 9-42.

Steven Seidman (1997), "Difference troubles: the flight of sociology from 'otherness'" in Seidman, ed., *Difference Troubles: Queering Social Theory and Sexual Politics*, pp. 97-106.

February 15

Trinh, "The Language of Nativism: Anthropology as a Scientific Conversation of Man with Man" (Ch. II) in *Woman, Native, Other*, pp. 47-76.

James Clifford (1986), "Introduction: Partial Truths," in James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography*, 1-26. **BB**

bell hooks (1990), "Culture to Culture: ethnography and cultural studies as critical interventions," (Ch. 13) in *Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics*, 123-133. **BB**

Kathleen Stewart, (2007), *Ordinary Affects*. Duke Univ. Press, pp. 1-7, 55-74. **BB**

recommended:

James Clifford (1988), "On Ethnographic Surrealism" in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Harvard University Press), pp. 117-151.

Michele Richman (1990), "Anthropology and Modernism in France: From Durkheim to the 'College de Sociologie'" in Marc Manganaro, ed., *Modernist Anthropology: From Fieldwork to Text*, pp. 183-214.

Kathleen Stewart (1996), *The Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an "Other" America*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Michael Taussig (1997), *The Magic of the State*, New York: Routledge.

Allen Shelton (2007), *Dreamworlds of Alabama*, Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press.

February 22

Gordon (1997), "the other door, its floods of tears with consolation enclosed" (Ch. 3) in *Ghostly Matters*, pp. 63-135.

Michael Taussig (1992), *The Nervous System*, pp. 1-35. **BB**

Walter Benjamin (1969), "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken), pp. 253-264. **BB**

recommended:

Michael Taussig (1984), "Culture of Terror—Space of Death..." *Comparative Studies in Society & History* 26, no. 3 (July 1984): 467-497.

Luisa Valenzuela (1985). *Other Weapons*. Trans. Deborah Bonner (Hanover, NH: Ediciones del Norte).

Diana Taylor (2003), *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Duke University Press.

March 1

Gordon (1997), "not only the footprints but the water too and what is down there" and "there are crossroads" (Chs. 4-5) in *Ghostly Matters*, pp. 137-208.

Raymond Williams (1977), "Structures of Feeling" in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 128-135. **BB**

recommended:

Toni Morrison (1990), "The Site of Memory" in Ferguson, Gever, Trinh, West, eds., *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, pp. 299-305.

Monica J. Casper and Lisa Jean Moore (2009). *Missing Bodies: The Politics of Visibility*. NYU Press.

Hortense Spillers (1987), "Mama's Baby Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics* 17 (Summer 1987): 65-81.

**March 8 II. QUESTIONING THE SUBJECT OF/AND 'EXPERIENCE':
QUEERING CATEGORIES**

We need to free ourselves of the sacralization of the social as the only instance of the real and stop regarding that essential element in human life and human relations—I mean thought—as so much wind. Thought does exist...It is something that is often hidden but always drives everyday behaviors...Criticism consists in uncovering that thought and trying to change it: showing that things are not as obvious as people believe...To do criticism is to make harder those acts which are now too easy.

--Michel Foucault,
"So Is It Important to Think?"

Mid-Term ESSAY DUE IN CLASS

Michel Foucault (1978), *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, pp. 3-73. **BB**

Joan Scott (1992), "Experience" in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds., *Feminists Theorize the Political*, pp. 22-38. **BB**

David Valentine (2007), Ch. 1 in *Imagining Transgender: an ethnography of a category*, Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 29-65. **BB**

recommended:

Michel Foucault (1984), "Truth and Power" in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader*, pp. 51-75.

Foucault (1990 [1978]), "Interview with Michel Foucault" in James D. Faubion, ed., *Michel Foucault: Power*, vol. 3. New York: The New Press, pp. 239-297.

Scott Braverman (1996), "Postmodernism and Queer Identities" in Steven Seidman, ed., *Queer Theory/Sociology* (Blackwell Publishers), pp. 333-361.

March 15 No class – Spring Break

March 22

Sara Ahmed (2006), “The Orient and Other Others” (Ch. 3) in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke University Press, pp. 109-156. **BB**

Karen Barad (2007), “Agential Realism: How Material-Discursive Practices Matter” (Ch. 4) in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, pp. 132-185. **BB**

recommended:

Judith Butler (1990), "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in Sue-Ellen Case, ed., *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, pp. 270-282.

Sara Ahmed (2004), *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (Edinburgh Univ. Press).

March 29 III. WHOSE BODIES MATTER? TRANSNATIONAL ECONOMIES & IMAGINARIES OF EMPIRE

It can feel like a grievous loss to find that identities are contingent, that the *pueblo* is not united or the enemy solid and easily identifiable, that radical social change is not around the corner, and that our understandings are deeply partial—limited and incomplete....But discarding the idea of unified and homogeneous agents and of power uni-directionally deployed from the first world, or from the Guatemalan state, does not preclude struggles for peace and justice. I hope instead that it allows us to analyze frequently contradictory positions and the overdetermined nature of different struggles.

--Diane Nelson, *A Finger in the Wound*

No class March 29 but please turn in 2-page essays via e-mail!

Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff (2001), “Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming,” in Comaroff and Comaroff, eds., *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism*, pp. 1-46. **BB**

Inderpal Grewal (2005), “Neoliberal Citizenship: The Governmentality of Rights and Consumer Culture” and “Women’s Rights as Human Rights’: The Transnational Production of Global Feminist Subjects” (Intro and Ch. 3) in *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms*, pp. 1-34, 121-157. **BB**

recommended:

M. Jacqui Alexander (2007), “Transnationalism, Sexuality, and the State: Modernity’s Traditions at the Height of Empire,” (Ch. 5) in *Pedagogies of Crossing*, pp. 181-253.

J.X. Inda, ed., (2005), *Anthropologies of Modernity: Foucault, Governmentality, and Life Politics*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

David Harvey (2005), *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford Univ. Press.

Mike Davis (2004), "Planet of Slums." *New Left Review* 26: 5-34.
<http://www.ic.arizona.edu/~indv102/Planet%20of%20Slums.pdf>

Jackie Orr (2010), "The 'Soul of the Citizen,' the Invention of the Social: Governing Mentalities" in Hall, Grindstaff, and Lo, eds., *Handbooks of Cultural Sociology*, Routledge, pp. 547-554.

April 5

Michel Foucault (2003 [1976]), Ch. 11 in "*Society Must Be Defended*": *Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976*. Trans. by David Macey. New York: Picador, pp. 239-263.

BB

Diane Nelson (2010), *Reckoning: The Ends of War in Guatemala*, pp. xiii-xxxi, 252-325. **BB**

recommended:

Ann Stoler (1995), "Toward a Genealogy of Racisms: The 1976 Lectures at the Collège de France" (Ch. 3) in *Race and the Education of Desire*. Durham: Duke Univ. Press.

Diane Nelson (1999), *A Finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

April 12

Anne Stoler with David Bond (2006), "Refractions Off Empire: Untimely Comparisons in Harsh Times." *Radical History Review* 95: 93-107. **BB**

Paola Bacchetta, Tina Campt, Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, Mino Moallem, and Jennifer Terry (Spring 2002) "Transnational Feminist Practices Against War." *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 2(2): 302-308. **BB**

Achille Mbembe (2003) "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* vol. 15, no. 1: 11-40.
 SU library: http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/public_culture/v015/15.1mbembe.html

Performance: *Body Animations (or, Lullaby for Fallujah)*

recommended:

Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos (2002). *Our Word Is Our Weapon: Selected Writings*. New York: Seven Stories Press.

Alexis Bhagat and Lize Mogul, eds. (2008), *An Atlas of Radical Cartography*. Journal of Aesthetics and Protest Press.

Ann Stoler (2006), ed., *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* Durham: Duke University Press.

RETORT (2005), *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*. London: Verso.

April 19

Grace M. Cho (2008), "Diasporic Vision: Methods of Seeing Trauma," (Ch. 5) in *Haunting the Korean Diaspora*, pp. 162-197. **BB**

Jasbir Puar (2007), "The Turban is Not a Hat," and "Queer Times, Terrorist Assemblages" (Ch. 4 & Concl.) in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, pp. 166-222. **BB**

recommended:

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. By Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press.

April 26

IV. BIOCAPITALISM: SOCIETIES OF CONTROL

The deployment of biopower through control is much more dispersed than its deployment through disciplining. The target of control is not subjects whose behaviour expresses internalized social norms; rather, control aims at a never-ending modulation of moods, capacities, affects, potentialities, assembled in genetic codes, identification numbers, ratings profiles, and preference listings: that is to say, bodies of data and information...

--Patricia Clough

There is no need to fear or to hope, but only to look for new weapons.

--Gilles Deleuze

Gilles Deleuze (1992), "Postscript on the Societies of Control." *October* 59 (Winter 1992): 3-7. **BB**

Patricia Clough (2003), "Affect and Control: Rethinking the Body 'Beyond Sex and Gender.'" *Feminist Theory* vol. 4, no. 3 (2003): 359-364. SU library:
<http://fty.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/4/3/359>

Eugene Thacker (2005), "The Incorporate Bodies of Recombinant Capital" (Ch. 5) in *The Global Genome: Biotechnology, Politics, and Culture*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, pp. 171-207. **BB**

Stephen Pfohl (2005), "New Global Technologies of Power: Cybernetic Capitalism and Social Inequality" in M. Romero and E. Margolis, eds., *The Blackwell Companion for Social Inequalities*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 546-588. **BB**

recommended:

Antonio Negri (1999), "Value and Affect." *Boundary 2* vol. 26, no. 2: 77-88.

Brian Massumi (2002), *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham: Duke Univ. Press.

Melinda Cooper (2008), *Life as Surplus: Biotechnology and Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Stephen Pfohl (1992), *Death at the Parasite Café: (Social) Science Fictions and the Postmodern*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

May 3 **V. (RE)IMAGINING THE AMERICAS: FICTIONS OF OUR PRESENT**

On a corner, by a red light, someone swallows fire, someone washes windshields, someone sells Kleenex, chewing gum, little flags, and dolls that make pee-pee. Someone listens to the horoscope on the radio, pleased that the stars are concerned about him. Walking between the tall buildings, someone would like to buy silence or air, but doesn't have the cash. . . Someone talks to no one on the phone, after hanging up the receiver. Someone talks to no one in front of the TV set. . . Someone climbs on an empty bus, at dawn, and the bus stays empty.

--Eduardo Galeano

Eduardo Galeano (1988), *Memory of Fire: Century of the Wind*. New York: Pantheon Books.

_____ (1983). *Days and Nights of Love and War*. New York: Monthly Review Press, pp. 169-178. **BB**

Avery Gordon (2004), "Something More Powerful Than Skepticism" in *Keeping Good Time: Reflections on Knowledge, Power, and People*. Boulder: Paradigm, pp. 187-205. **BB**