

affect, terror, biopolitics
wed 2:15-5:15, fall 2006, rdc 011
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For having lost its power to interpellate subjects as raced subjects, the raced image can no longer broker processes of identity formation and struggles for social recognition, and in effect, remains in force solely as an instrument of social techniques for identification and exclusion. The result is a profound paradox of our contemporary moment: the very subjects targeted by these racist techniques can only misrecognize themselves in the images that –precisely for this reason–manage all the more effectively to exert their violence upon them.”
–Mark Hansen, “Digitizing the Body, or The Politics of Universal Address”

...the more resistive (that is, on the outside) X is imagined to be, the more unavoidably it is to lose its specificity (that is, become appropriated) in the larger framework of the systematic production of differences, while the circumstances that make this framework possible (that is, that enable it to unfold and progress as a permanently self-regulating interiority) remain unchallenged. This is, I believe, one reason why so many new projects of articulating alternative identities, cultures, and group formations often seem so similar in the end. Whether what is in question is a particular ethnic work or the identity of an ethnic person, what has become predictable—literally, already spoken—is precisely the compulsive invocation of difference with interchangeable terms such as ‘ambivalence,’ ‘multiplicity,’ ‘hybridity,’ ‘heterogeneity,’ ‘disruptiveness,’ ‘resistance,’ and the like; and no matter how new an object of study may appear to be, it is bound to lose its novelty once the process of temporal differencing is set into motion...” **Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target***

Poststructuralist theories are said to be transforming through what has been recently called the “affective turn.” This turn for many suggests that poststructuralist critiques are encountering the limits of representational practices and analyses while also fatigued by approaches to corporeality that read the materiality of bodies primarily through culture, discourse, and social constructivism, thus disavowing the roles of matter, biology, and energetic forces. Foregrounding affect also raises questions about subjectivity, identity, agency, subjectivity, and performativity, putting under duress the centrality of subject formation to contemporary biopolitical and necropolitical forms of power, subjugation, and resistance.

We will evaluate the “politics of affect” through various interdisciplinary texts that illuminate the connections between terror, incarceration, war, detention and deportation; intimacy, violence, bodily subjectification; tactility, temporality, turbulence; death and pleasure; technologies of population and sub-individual control. Through these readings we will examine the tensions between discipline and control, epistemology and ontology, representation and affect; explore the corporeal practices of morbidity, mourning, monstrosity, debility, health, capacity and the biotechnologies

that modulate them; centralize affect economies of fear, pain, hate, love, terror, security and vulnerability, thus interrogating the emerging tendencies of capitalist productivity to manipulate and distribute these affective modalities; and evaluate feminist methods of writing and theorizing to apprehend, convey and intervene upon social suffering and devastation. Readings span the terrains of postcolonial studies, queer and feminist theory, ethnic and diaspora studies, biology and technoscience criticism, and ethnographic inquiry.

An immediate conundrum that is raised by these issues, reflected upon by the Hansen and Chow epigraphs above, should guide us: What are the political efficacy of identity categories and subject formations that are always already captured, or at the very least brokered, by the state, by capital, by law? Is our only alternative to keep pushing at representing the bereaving subject, the subject of injury that appears to be maligned by these systems of thought and practice?

course objectives:

1. to situate transnational, postcolonial and queer feminist critiques and interrogations of key debates regarding subjectivity, identity, intersectionality; the movements of goods, people, ideas; the security and insecurity of nations, peoples, communities, systems; questions of oppression, resistance, and suffering; lines of flight, becomings and futurity.
2. to contextualize the production of these engagements in terms of location, history, dialogic modalities;
3. to develop familiarity with and literacy of theoretical terminology through a focus on keywords (such as subaltern, performativity, subjectivity, agency, ontology, affect) and their contextualized deployments.

assignments:

50 pts: two class presentations and class participation

50 pts: 20-25 page research paper (topic cleared by me)

articles and chapters are available on-line through electronic reserve.

sept 6: overview

sept 13: Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work*

Mark Hansen, "Digitizing the Body, or the Politics of Universal Address" (*SubStance*, 2004)

sept 20: Jackie Orr, *Panic Diaries: A Genealogy of Panic Disorder*

sept 27: Dylan Rodriguez, *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime*

optional: Jasbir K. Puar, "Intimate Control" (book manuscript, chapter three, *Terrorist Assemblages*)

october 4: Julie Livingston, *Debility and the Moral Imagination in Botswana*

Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics" (*Public Culture*, 2002)

october 11: class cancelled

october 18: Elizabeth Povinelli, *Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality*

october 25: Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety*

nov 1: Eve Sedgwick, "Introduction" and "Interlude, Pedagogic" in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*

Gilles Deleuze, "Control and Becoming" and "Postscript on Control Societies"

Michael Hardt, "The Withering of Civil Society"

nov 8: Manuel DeLanda, *War in the Age of Intellectual Machines*

Eyal Weizman, "The Politics of Verticality" (www.opendemocracy.net) and "The Art of War"

nov 15: Eugene Thacker, *The Global Genome: Biotechnology, Politics, and Culture*

nov 22: no class – thanksgiving

nov 29: Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*

optional: Jasbir K. Puar, "The Turban Is Not a Hat" (book manuscript, chapter four, *Terrorist Assemblages*)

dec 6: Luciana Parisi, *Abstract Sex: Philosophy, Bio-Technology, and the Mutations of Desire*

dec 13: Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*

optional: Jasbir K. Puar, "Queer Times, Queer Assemblages" (book manuscript, conclusion, *Terrorist Assemblages*)

papers due

