Comparative Literature 279, Winter 2016

Contemporary Literary and Critical Theory: Thinking Violence, Thinking War
Professor Elisabeth Weber

W 12:30-3:20, Phelps Hall 6206 C

Office hours: M, 9-10:30 and by appointment, Phelps 6212

We will study texts by philosophers and theorists from the 20\textsuperscript{th} and 21\textsuperscript{st} century that reflect on trauma, violence, war, terror. Authors include Judith Butler, Cathy Caruth, Jacques Derrida, Arundhati Roy, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Cornell West, Slavoj Žižek. We will also discuss some seminal texts that have informed the work of those thinkers, such as essays by Walter Benjamin, Sigmund Freud, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Lacan, Emmanuel Levinas. Three scholars will visit the seminar:

In second half of our meeting on January 13, Jacques Lezra will present a talk on “Necrophilology”.

On January 20 Susan Buck-Morss will lead a seminar session on Walter Benjamin.

On March 2, Cathy Caruth will lead a session on trauma theory.

Readings and discussions in English. Texts will be made available in their original language and in the English translations, most of them on GauchoSpace. We will work closely with the translations and to do so, will need the ability to consult the original (this will be useful even for those who do not speak/understand the language in question).

For more information please contact Elisabeth Weber: weber@gss.ucsb.edu

Seminar etiquette:

1) Social media: The seminar will be a space entirely free of social media. For two times 1h15 minutes, we will be unchained! This means concretely that I expect everybody to turn all social media off (including cell-phones, texting, e-mail, etc.) for the duration of each of the halves of each seminar session. Respecting this requirement will be indispensable for those who will work with electronic copies of the readings. All online activity non-related to class distracts everybody else (I mean everybody) in the room. If due to an emergency you need to be reachable during class time, you should not attend the seminar that day.

2) Attendance: A seminar is most productive if everybody attends on a regular basis, as materials and discussions from different seminar sessions enter into a conversation with each other and thus get a chance to unfold their full (and sometimes unexpected) potential. Unexplained departures or arrivals during seminar are disruptive and harm this collaborative environment. If you need to miss a session or portions of a session, please let me know in advance.
Syllabus

Waïl S. Hassan, “Arabic and the Paradigms of Comparison”,
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Righting Wrongs” (Oxford Amnesty International lecture 2001) (GauchoSpace)

January 13  In preparation of Jacques Lezra’s talk:
Karl Marx: The value-form (original and English translation on GauchoSpace)
Herman Melville, Bartleby, the scrivener (link on Gauchospace)
Herman Melville, translation by Borges: Bartleby el escribiente (to be posted on January 4)
Arundhati Roy, “Capitalism, a ghost story” (2014) (to be posted on January 4)

Second half of the session: Visit by Jacques Lezra, talk: “Necrophilology”

January 20:  Visit by Susan Buck-Morss
Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History” (1939-1940)
Walter Benjamin, “On some Motifs in Baudelaire” (1939)

Martin Heidegger, “The Thing” (1950)

February 3  Emmanuel Levinas, “Vulnerability” (From: Otherwise than being or beyond essence, 1974)
Emmanuel Levinas, “Humanism and Anarchy” (1968)

February 10  Sigmund Freud, “Untimely Thoughts on War and Death” (1915)


March 2  Visit by Cathy Caruth
Texts TBD

March 9  Grégoire Chamayou, A theory of the drone (2013/2014), excerpts
Talal Assad, On Suicide Bombing (2006/2007)