

LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES II

Topics in Latin American Studies

COURSE AGENDA

Overview of the radical transformation of epistemological and methodological assumptions in Latin American Studies from the end of the 1980s to the present.

Week 1 - Race & Indigeneity in LAS

Week 2 - Afro-Diasporic Religions in the Caribbean

Week 3 - U.S. Imperialism and Hegemony in Latin America

Week 4 - The Subaltern: Hegemony, Cultural Studies, and Decoloniality

Week 5 - LAS Approaches: Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

Week 6 - LAS Approaches: Affect and Post-Hegemony



Edouard Duval-Carrié

La Triste Histoire des Ambaglos (The Sad History of the Underwater Spirits), 2003

Mixed media on white plexiglass

WESTERN PHILOSOPHY: REVISITED

- **Subjectivity** in the western philosophical tradition dates back as far as Aristotle; however, **Modern western philosophy** (which is sometimes called Continental Philosophy) dates subjectivity to the writings of René Descartes and Immanuel Kant.
- "The Western philosophical tradition presents the concept of a unitary soul within the hermetic enclosure of a body. In *Sources of the Self*, historian of philosophy Charles Taylor presents a genealogy of the Western self in which Descartes marks the most important milestone:
 - The internalization wrought by the modern age, of which Descartes's formulation was one of the most important and influential, is very different from Augustine's. It does, in a very real sense, place the moral sources within us. Relative to Plato, and relative to Augustine, it brings about in each case a transposition by which we no longer see ourselves as related to moral sources outside us, or at least not at all in the same way. An important power has been internalized. (1989, 143)
- It becomes important for us to place Taylor's claims concerning Descartes in the historical context of the Enlightenment. The theocentric philosophical tradition delineated by Plato and Augustine is characterized by the human search for an identity beyond the individual, in the divine without. The intense secularization of the Enlightenment disrupts this theocentrism by foregrounding the individual, a move that brings about the internalization of identity. **This sense of inwardness, however, is dependent upon a clear demarcation between the new boundaries of the self and the body.**"
- "there is a great difference between mind and body, inasmuch as the body is by nature always divisible, and the mind is entirely indivisible" -Descartes
- "through his reasoning, Descartes crystallizes the notion of **a self within a body, establishing this self as internal, unitary, and inseparable from the body.**"

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- "Because traditional African philosophy emerged implicitly in the ontological, ethical, existential, and other positions taken in religious, mythic, genealogical, and folkloric discourses, its presence and visibility depended upon the continued vitality and growth of these systems of thought. Their contraction or decay would mean decline and eclipse for traditional African philosophy. . . . In the Caribbean . . . traditional African philosophy experienced an even greater eclipse as a result of the rise of colonial discourses and a literate, hybridized local intelligentsia." - Paget Henry
- "Henry's statement implies the need to investigate Afro diasporic religion as a repository of philosophical information that can overcome the imposition of Western philosophical discourses on colonized peoples. In fact, **a thorough study of Afro-diasporic religions reveals how—unlike the Western idea of the fixed internal unitary soul—the Afro diasporic self is removable, external, and multiple.**"
 - Kuame Gyekye presents a tripartite plan of the self, consisting of the *honam*, the material body; the *okra*, the immaterial soul; and the *sun-sum*, the quasimaterial spirit—"Neither the *okra* nor the *sunsum* can be identified with the immaterial soul familiar in some influential Western philosophical and religious thinking (with all its attendant paradoxes). This concept of the soul is routinely used interchangeably with the concept of mind while the concept of *okra* and *sunsum* are categorically different from the Akan concept of mind (*adwene*), as our previous explanation should have rendered apparent. Thus Descartes (in English translation) can speak indifferently of the soul or the mind and appear to make sense. In Akan to identify either the *okra* or the *sunsum* with *adwene* would be the sheerest gibberish"

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- The multiplicity of the self displayed in the Akan scheme is prevalent in Western African societies and has been noted by Haitian Vodou scholar Guérin Montilus in his study of Adja philosophy
 - The Vodu religion of the Adja taught these same Africans that their psychic reality and source of human life was metaphorically symbol ized by the shadow of the body. This principle, represented by the shadow, is called the *ye*. There are two of these. The first is the inner, the internal part of the shadow, which is called the *ye gli*; that is, a short *ye*. The second, the external and light part of the same shadow, is called the *ye gaga*; that is, the long *ye*. The first *ye gli*, is the principle of physical life, which vanishes at death. The second, *ye gaga*, is the principle of consciousness and psychic life. The *ye gaga* survives death and illustrates the principle of immortality. It has metaphysical mo bility that allows human beings to travel far away at night (through dreams) or remain eternally alive after the banishment of the *ye gli*. After death, the *ye gaga* goes to meet the community of Ancestors, which constitutes the extended family and the clan in their spiritual dimensions
- The African duality of the immaterial self—the okra and sunsum of the Akan and the *ye gli* and *ye gaga* of the Adja—become the *tibonanj* and the *gwobonanj* in Haitian Vodou
 - The head, which contains the two elements that comprise the soul—the *ti bònanj* or *ti bon ange* (the conscience that allows for selfreflection and selfcriticism) and the *gwo bònanj* or *gros bon ange* (the psyche, source of memory, intelligence, and personhood)—must be prepared so that the *gros bon ange* can be separated from the initiate to allow the spirit to enter in its place.
 - It is the general opinion that dreams are produced by the wander ings of the *Grosbonange* when it abandons the body during sleep. The sleeper becomes aware of the adventures of the *Grosbonange* through the *Tiz'ange* who remains by him as a protector and yet never loses sight of the *Grosbonange*. He wakes the sleeper in case of dan ger and even flies to the rescue of the *Grosbonange* if this faces real danger

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- For the self to achieve altered states of consciousness—in trance possessions, dreams, or death—the *tibonanj* allows the *gwobonanj* to become detached from the body. In the case of trance possession, the *gwobonanj* surrenders its place and its authority to the *mètet*, “the main spirit served by that person and the one s/he most often goes into trance for”
- *mètet*, roughly translated as “the master of the head”: “The personality of the *mèt tet* and that of the devotee tend to coincide, an intimate tie hinted at in the occasional identification of the ‘big guardian angel’ (*gwo bònaj*), one dimension of what might be called a per son’s soul, with the Vodou spirit who is his or her *mèt tet*” (1991, 112–13). Here we see how **the *gwobonanj* is the central element of the self in Vodou. Not only is it the seat of individuality but it also maintains links between *mètet* and the *tibonanj*, two aspects of the self that are not directly connected to each other.** These links are broken after the death of the individual, in the Vodou ceremony of *dessounin*
 - The ceremony of *dessounin* thus accomplishes two separate but related actions: it severs the loa cord of the *grosbonange*; and it separates the *grosbonange* from its physical parent—the now defunct matter of the body—launching it as an independent spiritual entity into the spiritual universe, where it, in turn, becomes either part of the general spiritual heritage of the descendants of that person, or even, perhaps, the divine parent, the loa *maîtête* of some subsequent *grosbonange*
- **The complex relationship between the *gwobonanj* and the *tibonanj* has at times not been correctly understood by Western scholars, who have disseminated erroneous information, further mudding our collective understanding of the self in Vodou**

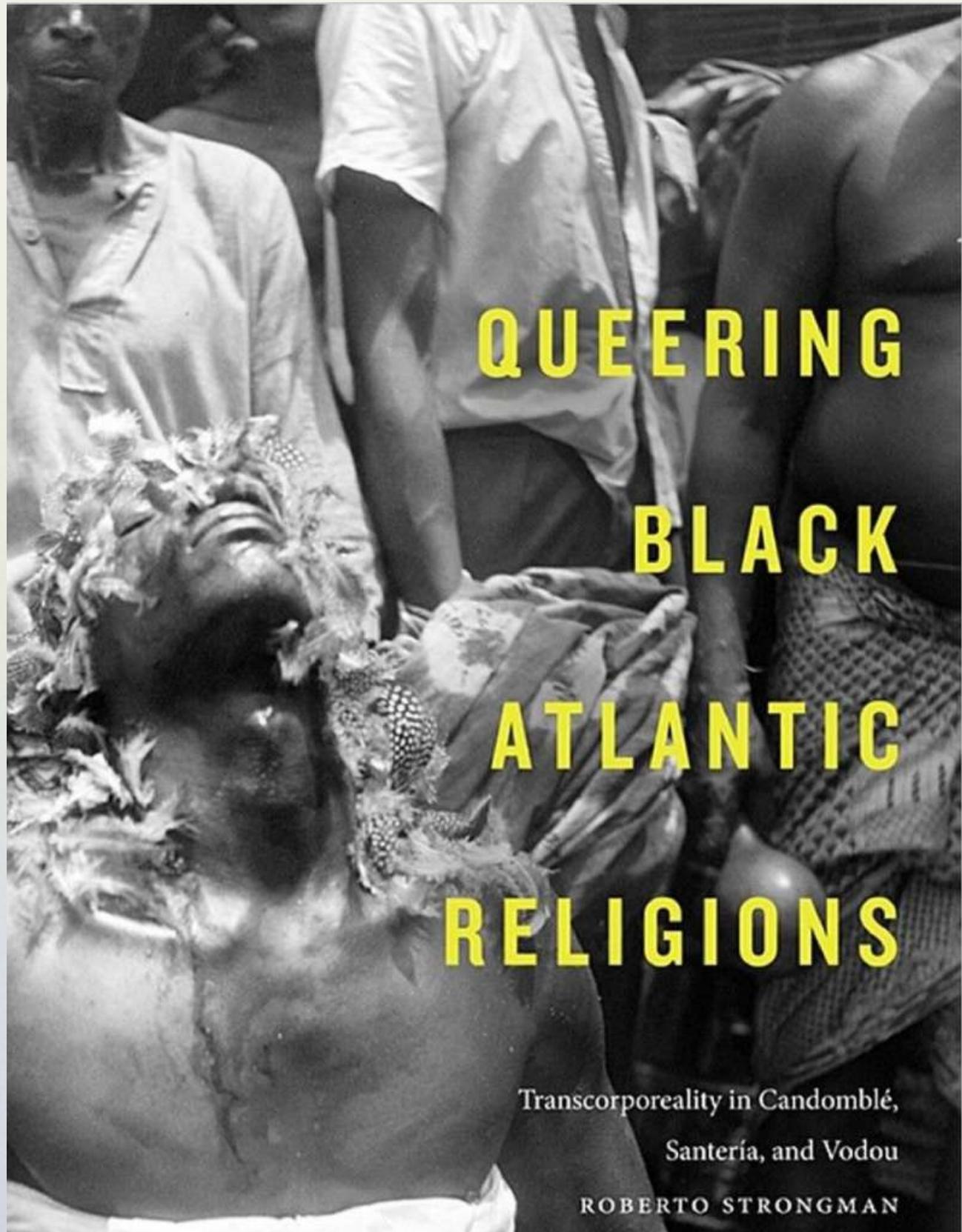
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- For Strongman, "the commingling of the human and the divine produces subjectivities whose gender is not dictated by biological sex." Put another way, there are *other* types of subjectivities that derive from genealogies not related to the Western Philosophical tradition. These subjectivities involve the interaction of, and sometimes replacement by, the divine with the human subjectivity.
- This *tèt*-as-location of subjectivity that Decartes uses, therefore, is undermined in the Haitian vodou practice, where the *tèt* is not the location of one subject but the empty cup waiting for a consciousness to act upon/within it. (his discussion of the cashew nut fruit)
- "The phenomenon of possession that enables this performative regendering of the body in the ritual context, far from being contained within the sacred space, spills over into the realm of the profane"
- "Dreaming the body with the technologies of Vodou corporeality implies the possibility of constructing a gendered subjectivity with greater freedom and flexibility than that allowed by the interiorizing model of the European philosophical tradition. The cashewnutlike external and removable anima allows for a modular bodily schema, accounts for trance possession, and enables the regendering of the female body in the sacred and profane realms of Haitian cultural life. In all of these accounts there is a diffused and buried selfawareness of an enabling malleability of the self that is alluring to the female and queer ethnographer. Yet it is the role of the critic to give voice to the impetus behind such research on Vodou embodiment, since for many of these female ethnographers, likely due to sociotemporal conventions, the desires animating their inquiry remain something of a taboo."

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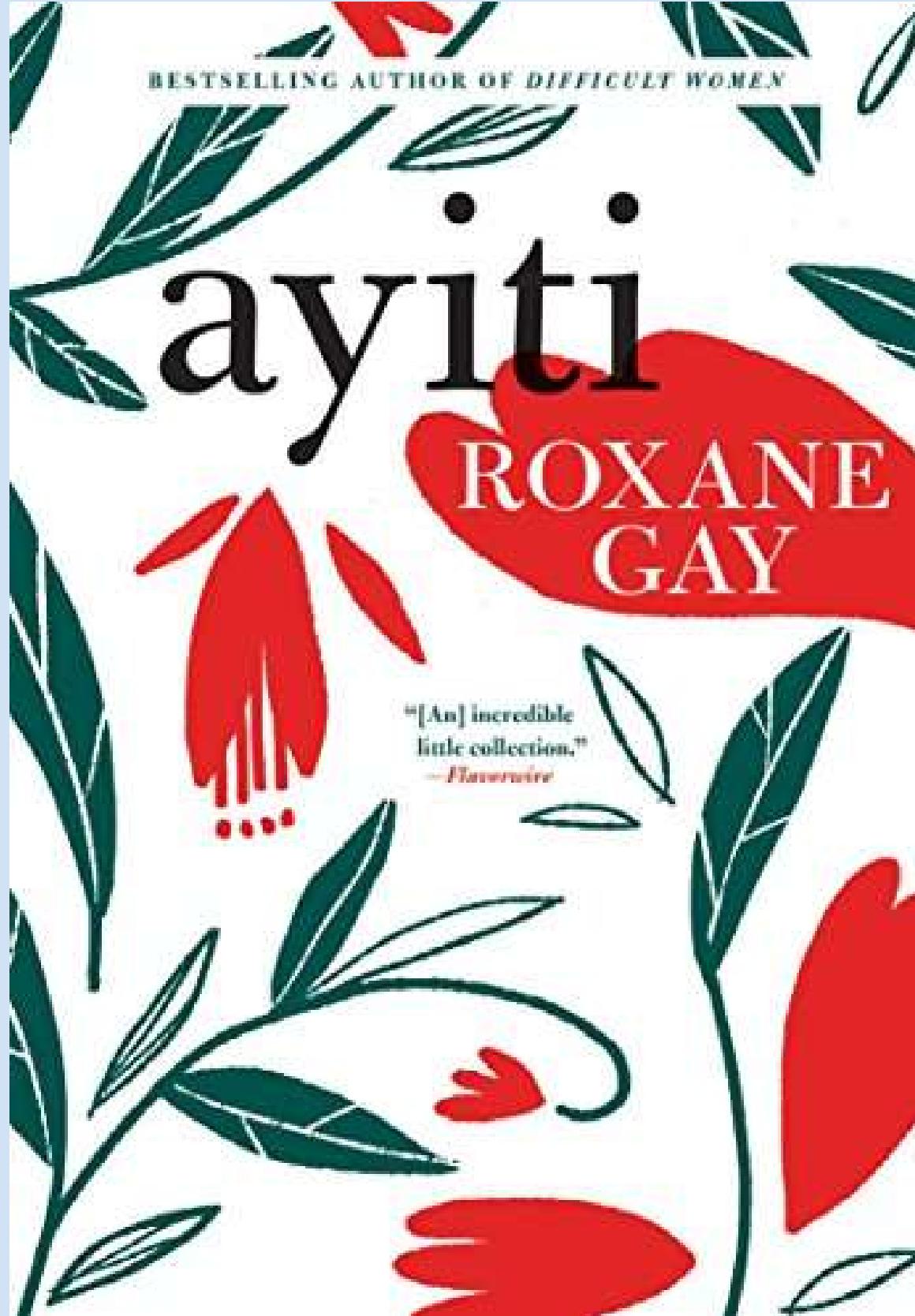
- Afro diasporic religions operate under a transcorporeal conceptualization of the self that is radically different from the Western philosophical tradition. Unlike the unitary soul of Descartes, the immaterial aspect of the Afro diasporic self is multiple, external, and removable. These various subjectivities rest upon a concave corporeal surface reminiscent of a saddle or an open calabash.
- Unlike the Western idea of the body as the enclosure of the soul, the *kòka* dav is an open vessel that finds metaphoric and aesthetic expression in the *kwi*, *govi*, and *kanari* containers of Haitian Vodou.
- The spirit *zombi*, or the *zombi* of the *ti bon ange* alone, is carefully stored in a jar and may later be magically transmuted into insects, animals, or humans in order to accomplish the particular work of the *bokòr*. The remaining spiritual components of man, the *n'âme*, the *gros bon ange*, and the *z'étoile*, together form the *zombi* cadaver, the *zombi* of the flesh.
 - apart from zombification, there are various forms of spiritual embottlement, all of which involve the capturing of the *gwobonanj*, not the *tibonanj*. For instance, when the individual willingly decides to bottle up part of himself, it is the *gwobonanj*
 - While this procedure protects the *gwobonanj*, it does not prevent bodily damage to the material body from which it proceeds. This creates a potentially dangerous scenario in which people who have sustained severe bodily injury—through either spells or accidents—will beg to have their *gwobonanj* liberated from the bottle, in order to end their corporeal suffering through death.

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- what is important for us here is to consider how regardless of what aspect of the self is bottled, according to all of these authors, any type of hermetic enclosing of the self is seen as potentially dangerous or associated with death. The fact that one of the most dreaded Afro diasporic states of being should be so similar to the Cartesian view of the hermetically sealed soul points to the contestatory and critical relationship between these two philosophical traditions
- Unlike the Western idea of a unitary self that is fixed within the body, the African diasporic philosophical religious tradition conceives of the body as a concavity upholding a self that is removable, external, and multiple. Allowing for a wider range of subjectivities than the more rigid Western model, the modular African diasporic discourse of personhood becomes a vehicle for the articulation of noncompliant identities that are usually constrained by normative heteropatriarchy

AYITI



ROXANE GAY

- There Is No “E” in Zombi, Which Means There Can Be No You or We
- Of Ghosts and Shadows

NEXT CLASS

***U.S. Imperialism
and Hegemony
in Latin America***

