

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



Marielle Plaisir M. Angelou (2020)
Mixed media, printing on Duratrans
archive film 56 x 32 x 10.5 inches

"Through the Backlit series entitled "The Malediction of Cham" a misinterpretation of a Biblical story, which was ultimately used as a justification for anti-black racism, Plaisir uses the myth as a metaphor. Through the light space, she populates the background with archive illustrations from the Caribbean, lush photographs from nature—constellations, natural forms, and flowers, colored spots made with inks, inspired by both her Caribbean roots and her imagined ideal of a utopia without oppression. By composing vivid images, made in the form of collages in which converse an activist black personality and a character representing power or supremacy, Plaisir claims the paradigm of intersectionality. Also, the lightbox or Backlit is a way to put on the light the beauty of the black body and its magnificence like a sparkling, vibrant universe, unique and alive, an imagining space where no one dominates and no one is dominated." —South Arts

WHAT IS AFFECT STUDIES?

“The Body.” What is it to the Subject? Not the qualities of its moving experience. But rather, in keeping with the extrinsic approach, its *positioning*. Ideological accounts of subject formation emphasize systemic structurings. The focus on the systemic had to be brought back down to earth in order to be able to integrate into the accounts the local cultural differences and the practices of resistance they may harbor. The concept of “positionality” was widely developed for this purpose. Signifying subject formation according to the dominant structure was often thought of in terms of “coding.” Coding in turn came to be thought of in terms of positioning on a grid. The grid was conceived as an oppositional framework of culturally constructed significations: male versus female, black versus white, gay versus straight, and so on. A body corresponded to a “site” on the grid defined by an overlapping of one term from each pair. The body came to be defined by its pinning to the grid.

(2)

Parables for the Virtual (2002), Brian Massumi

in critical theory, **Affect Studies is the focus (mostly by gender theorists, marxist-feminists, and new materialists) on emotion, perspective, and therefore the material and cognitive manifestations of interpersonal relations**; described as the sustained connection between values, objects, and ideas (Ahmed) "a growing acknowledgment of the role of emotion, affect and/or sensorial flows as generative forces in larger sociocultural and political processes" "to critique the long-held assumption that capital accumulation and economic projects inherently conflict with the intimate, affective realm of human experience, an assumption that has sustained distinctions between private and public, between "inner-world" and social contexts, and between subjectivity and political economy in anthropology and the social sciences."

Thinkers often associated with affect studies: **Eve Sedgwick, Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, Silvia Federici, Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, Jean Franco, José Esteban Muñoz, Raymond Williams**

AFFECT STUDIES + LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

1. The thickest engagement has been driven by efforts to diagnose sociocultural, political, and economic configurations in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries—as part of efforts to analyze the psychosocial afterlife of repressive dictatorships and armed conflicts (Franco; Manz; Richard); and/or as part of the examination of new economic structures and dynamics, broadly characterized as neoliberalism and globalization. **Scholars have turned their attention toward affect as a means to understand the continuities between periods marked by political change (from dictatorship to democracy). Calling into question distinctions based on the nature of state power, such studies also undercut facile distinctions between repression and liberation.**
2. The role of affect in the constitution and maintenance of particular collectives. Encompassing studies on queer cultural production as well as social movements and political activism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, these disparate efforts have **turned to affect as a response to the perceived shortcomings of other concepts (identity, ideology) to theorize the cohesion of particular groups of people.** Through the examination of particular case studies, some of these works propose that affective ties and/or a sense of belonging (rather than claimed attributes and articulated beliefs) is/are what holds together particular groups and mobilizes them to act as a collective
3. **emotion in earlier historical periods—most notably its role in politics and social order during the colonial period and in nation-building projects in the nineteenth century.** The pioneering work of Mexican-based historians Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru and her colleagues began to be published in the late 2000s. More recently, US-based social historians have tackled the issue of emotion to better understand processes of social control in colonial Mexico that cannot be explained by state actions or social codes (e.g., honor) alone (Villa-Flores and Lipsett-Rivera). For their part, literary scholars have begun to reassess sentimental fiction from the 1800s to understand how novels have called on their readers to feel part of a larger (national) community that is felt as well as imagined

LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES + AFFECT THEORY (ANTHROPOLOGY)

- One could say that the turn toward affect began as an attempt to address the complex legacies left by state-sponsored terrorism and/or years of civil war that took place in the late twentieth century in countries from Argentina and Chile to Guatemala, El Salvador and Perú. Political and economic concerns have been at the forefront of scholarly inquiry (e.g., the nature of so-called transitions to democracy, the shifting forms of capitalist expansion), along with important work revolving around the issue of cultural memory. Yet other approaches have been sought to address the pervasive embodied psychosocial effects of those years. Starting in the late 1990s and early 2000s as the years of intense violence waned, anthropologists were particularly keen to acknowledge how communities were responding to genocidal campaigns carried out against them. In some cases, this took the form of studying a particular community's grief and tracing the ways in which public actions gradually began to "link ... the individual to the collective process of coping with fear, stress, and recovery". In others, there was an effort to recognize how alternate (indigenous) beliefs about the interface between mind and body influenced the painful aftermath of rape as experienced by both the victim and her community.
- Although these studies certainly responded to recent traumatic events within Latin American countries, they were also part of a larger shift within anthropology as a field...the ethnographic attention to the pain of others in the contemporary moment has led to self-reflection on anthropology's disciplinary practices throughout the twentieth century wherein "one part of mankind treated the other as an object" of distanced inquiry: Scheper-Hughes recognizes that the "anthropology of suffering" involves vexing questions about the ethical stakes in "attempts to make meaningful the suffering of others" (154)—of acting not only as witness, but also of transcriber/translator of the pain of individuals and groups.

AFFECT THEORY IN LITERARY, FILM, & PERFORMANCE STUDIES

- Addressing the aftermath of state-sponsored terrorism was taken up somewhat differently by **literary, film, and performance studies** scholars who examined the ways in which varied forms of cultural production (from testimonios, novels, documentaries, and fiction films, to installations and performance pieces) in the 1980s-early 2000s attempted to represent and mediate authoritarian legacies of violence, pain, and suffering.
- In these fields, there was a deep interest in recognizing emergent textual devices for registering traumatic experience. Many of these critics have seen the deliberate formal gaps of these films, novels, and testimonios as an acknowledgment that any and all attempts to represent the violent past are necessarily insufficient.
- The worth of such texts lies, according to this line of thought, in their ability to make the past present for contemporary viewers and readers in visceral ways that impede facile attempts to cordon off further public debate about state-sponsored terrorism and its aftermath.
- Ex: In her most recent book *Cruel Modernity* (2013), Jean Franco widens the historical scope of such analyses to address not only the affective repercussions of such ferocious dictatorial repressions but also the underlying motivations that preceded their enactment.
 - Drawing on the work of scholars such as Giorgio Agamben and Darius Rejali, she argues that extreme violence is a feature of modernity that, while not unique to Latin America, finds in the region particular manifestations rooted in colonial systems...She argues convincingly that the monstrous nature of military actions (slamming children against trees, raping women and then mutilating their reproductive organs, eating the bodies of dead enemies) exceed any "tactical advantage" and thus can only be explained as the outgrowth of a long history of dehumanizing dispossessed peoples (frequently rural, indigenous populations).
 - Franco traces this lack of empathy and disregard for the humanity of (certain) others to the colonial period and in the racism "instilled with the Conquest, which left an inheritance of guilt and above all fear that the old gods would return" (7).

STRUCTURES OF FEELING (RAYMOND WILLIAMS)

- These efforts conceptualize the term in line with a feminist rethinking of the body and its epistemic possibilities—i.e. acknowledging the body as a site of knowing otherwise—and with an understanding of “affect as a form of embodied knowledge and practice” (Bosco 346, citing Thrift 60). In this light, while not characterized as necessarily counterhegemonic, affect becomes a means to rethink the contestatory dynamics of nondominant groups in ways that avoid stultifying debates about identity, class consciousness, or ideological formations. In developing this alternate approach, queer studies scholars have turned to the notions of “structures of feeling” or “archives of feeling.” Taken from the work of British scholar Raymond Williams, the former can be understood as an emergent sociocultural configuration that functions as a collective response to given sociohistorical conditions, in this case, white and heteronormative strategies of containment
- Ex: José Esteban Muñoz positions affect in terms of practices and performances wherein certain enactments by/of minoritarian groups are deemed excessive by dominant sectors (77–78). Pointing to the melancholic music of Cuban performer Bola de Nieve and Ricardo Bracho’s *The Sweetest Hangover (and Other STDs)*, Muñoz argues that performances of such work do not re-present (queer) Latino/american experiences of repression so much as provide the means by which circuits of belonging and recognition are constituted and reconfirmed (“Being North”).
- Ex: Filmmaker and scholar Frances Negrón-Muntaner locates structures of feeling not only as/through performance, but also in the formal maneuvers of alternative films and videos like *Mérida Proscrita* and *Carmelita Tropicana: Your Kunst Is Your Waffen*. Among other things, she points to their invocation and reworking of “culturally specific form[s] of sharing with the world” such as the bolero that serve as “vehicle[s] for making [queer] desire public” (70).

POST HEGEMONY

- These works each mark provocative and ever-relevant attempts at **coming to terms with the increasing discordance between contemporary theories of state power and the intensified historical contradictions brought about by the neoliberal restructuration of the nation-state**, a geopolitical form which we no longer seem to recognize in Latin America and whose critical realities we can no longer ignore.
- This shift in the contemporary grounds of modern political organization does not necessarily suggest that the nation-state no longer exists or has become obsolete, because it hasn't; it appears to still serve a vital function to global capital. Nor should arguments critical of this shift convince us into thinking that the nation-state represented some kind of ideal form of social organization that was ultimately betrayed and corrupted by an evil global capitalism, for there was never a time in the history of the nationstate where it was not already entwined in conflicts with communities over land, labor, and wages.
- What critics are remarking through this idea of a **posthegemonic historical era** are the cumulative economic and juridical effects deriving from a series of concerted US-backed interventions in various Latin American countries such as Guatemala in 1954, Cuba in 1961, and Chile 1973 [and Haiti in 1993, Honduras in 2009, and Haiti again in 2018] that resulted not only in successfully undermining the region's ability to curb US imperialism in the hemisphere, but now more recently, and on a much larger scale **through economic incentives with transnational corporations and multinational trade agreements, has provoked a profound and far-reaching transformation in the very nature and structure of state sovereignty in its relationship with global capital**.
- By posthegemony, therefore, one understands not only this decentering of the nation-state form under conditions of contemporary neoliberalism, but consequently **the need to fundamentally rethink current theories of state political power in order to offer a more adequate accounting of its social, political, and cultural effects**.

WHY "POST" HEGEMONY?

- **hegemony** - (from Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*) political power shared between elite and allied social classes and characterized principally as a system of ruling over the subordinate classes through a combination of leadership, coercion, and consent; the ruling classes may indeed be the ruling class, but hegemony itself only obtains when the rest of the population is interpellated by a normative explanation of reality and willingly allow themselves—that is, consent—to be governed under those terms. But hegemony is always only ever tentative—never final or complete—for alliances, like ideological interpellation, are always temporary and ever-shifting. And yet, what appears as a limitation of hegemony is in effect its strength, for this power structure is inherently flexible and able to adapt and maintain control in most predicaments of social and economic unrest.
- Beginning in the late twentieth and into the twenty-first century, from the military dictatorships in the Southern Cone, counterrevolutionary subversions in Central America, to the incessant and ever-spiraling currency crises, international bailouts, and trade agreements like NAFTA and CAFTA, state power in the region no longer wields itself in the same way, if at all. As if the very dynamic and processes attributed to hegemony had undergone irrevocable alteration and were now unrecognizable. Or as if, as some argue, Gramsci was wrong all along, hegemony was never secured through ideology in the first place, and we are only now coming to grips with this.
- posthegemony itself names the present critical conjuncture wherein the notion of hegemony is found to no longer hold as an adequate interpretive model to understand the current organization of political power and the nation-state structure of governmentality; we are seeing the critical debilitation of the nation-state as a culturally and politically binding model of social organization, the withering of once hegemonic categories which provided linguistic, ethnic, and cultural coherency, and a general paucity of critical language needed to account for this shift with any specificity...it is the nation-state's very lack of effective sovereign authority against globalized capital that now creates the need for new frameworks for literary and cultural analysis.

POST-HEGEMONY

- Beasley-Murray's account posits the idea of the multitude as some primordial and fundamental political predisposition to which he ascribes a rather universalizing, entirely immanent, and even instinctual quality: that behind the modern political fictions of the individual and the "people," it was only ever the multitude, and it has never been, nor ever could be, conducted ideologically, but always only affectively, always habitually. As he states, "the multitude is simultaneously historic presupposition, future goal, and present constitution" (247).
- the posthegemonic may amount to more than just the realization that there never was (or no longer is) any determinant social order to be had (hegemony, consent, reason), but rather, and more radically, the historical confrontation with the wager that the antithetical relation established through these debates (ideology-affect, ethics-politics) is only ever confirmation of a persisting and effective hegemonic installation grounded in yet other terms.
- Such a possibility is expressed most clearly in Giorgio Agamben's formulation of sovereign exception, "the nonlinguistic is only ever to be found in language itself" (50). The wager here is that, when it comes to these antinomies, there may ultimately be no outside of hegemony, no other side to ideology, and certainly no origin to affect; not because alternative accounts of power are wrong but rather because there is nothing to guarantee that established accounts do not overdetermine and condition the former's emergence as simply the latter's constitutive outside.
- It is not ideology (nor position) alone that is hegemonic, but rather ideology and affect (position and movement) together that constitute the hegemonic relation, and posthegemony both names this juridical short-circuiting as well as the process of thinking through its political and cultural implications