In our seminar, we consider the problems of legibility, recovery, and reckoning with respect to the histories of loss that are the conditions for U.S. modernity, yet often occluded by modernist notions of nation, history, text, author, and period. To read “against the grain” of the closure and triumphalism of national forms, some critics have elaborated “haunting” as a conceptual tool for understanding the unwritten aftermaths of war, conquest, coercion and slavery, while others develop “mourning,” “memory,” and “redress” as generative hermeneutic activities after the failures of emancipation, reform, and enfranchisement. Some mobilize figures of the “witness” and the “survivor” for ethical or political representations of historical destruction and dispossession. We review the psychoanalytic notion of trauma in literary and historical studies (S. Freud, C. Caruth), yet place alongside it, the work of W. Benjamin, G. Agamben, A. Gordon, J. Butler, and A. Mbumbe as alternative theoretical models for conceiving the conditions and the aftermath of collective historical loss. Critical work on the aftermaths of war, investigations of the feminicidio at the U.S.-Mexico border, and meditation on the Atlantic slave trade, offer situated engagements with the capacity and limits of “national” history and subjectivity. Chang-rae Lee’s A Gesture Life, Lê Thi Diem Thúy’s The Gangster We Are All Looking For, Toni Morrison’s Beloved, films by Lourdes Portillo, Vicki Funari and Sergio de la Torre, visual art and media of Kara Walker, Lorna Simpson, Carrie Mae Weems, and Long Nguyen – provide cultural works for examining haunting, mourning and memory in the modern imagination.
Students are required to complete weekly reading and viewing assignments, to generate questions for discussion and to be prepared to participate in seminar meetings; you’ll write four 1-2 page responses to the assigned materials. Students will also work in pairs for one class presentation, in which you engage the class by identifying the intervention made by the critical or expressive work(s) (rather than summarize the assigned readings or offer your opinion); i.e., into which historical moment and intellectual or political genealogy is the piece intervening; how, out of what materials, is the argument is made or the vision of the work presented; why, and for what ends? You may discuss the relationships between, and divergences among, the critical concepts and approaches represented by different readings, or what they may provide for your own work or projects. Finally, all students will write a final paper, due in hard copy by June 12th, which may or may not be part of a larger ongoing project (for example, a thesis, dissertation, or project).

Discussion/Participation 25%
Presentations 25%
Final Paper 50%

REQUIRED BOOKS available for purchase at UCSD Bookstore (*on reserve at SSHL):
*Chang-rae Lee, A Gesture Life. (Riverhead Books)
*Lê Thi Diem Thúy, The Gangster We Are All Looking For. (Alfred Knopf)
*Saidiya Hartman, Lose Your Mother: Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route (Farrar Strauss)
*Toni Morrison, Beloved. (Vintage)
*Cathy Caruth, Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History (Johns Hopkins)
*Avery Gordon, Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination (U Minnesota)
*Rosa-Linda Fregoso, Mexicana Encounters: Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands (U California)

REQUIRED ARTICLES available through SSHL Course Reserves website:
Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” “The Sense of Symptoms,” “Fixation to Trauma” from Standard Ed of Complete Psychological Works, Vol. XIV and XVI
Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” from Illuminations
Judith Butler, “Violence, Mourning, Politics” from Precarious Life
J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, “Disavowal,” “Trauma” from Language of Psycho-Analysis
Raymond Williams, “Dominant, Residual, Emergent,” "Structures of Feeling" from Marxism and Literature
David Eng & David Kazanjian, “Mourning Remains” from Loss.
Dori Laub, “Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening” from Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History
Lisa Yoneyama, “Traveling Memories, Contagious Justice,” JAAS (Feb 2003): 57-93
T. Fujitani, et al., “Introduction” Perilous Memories: The Asia Pacific War(s)
Lisa Yoneyama, “Transformative Knowledge,” Perilous Memories: The Asia Pacific War(s)
Yen Le Espiritu, “The We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose Syndrome” AQ 58:2 (2006)
Anne Cheng, Ch. 1 from The Melancholy of Race
Fred Moten, “Black Mo’nin’” from Loss
Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, “The Rememory of Slavery” from Seeing the Unspeakable
Selections from Long Nguyen, Tales of Yellow Skin: The Art of Long Nguyen.
Selections from Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love
Selections from Beryl Wright & Saidiya Hartman, Lorna Simpson: For the Sake of Viewer
Selections from Andrea Kirsch & Susan Sterling, Carrie Mae Weems

FILMS on reserve in Arts Library SSHL:
Rea Tajiri, “History and Memory”
Lourdes Portillo, “Señorita Extraviada”
Sergio de la Torre and Vicki Funari, “Maquilapolis”

Long Nguyen, “Tales of Yellow Skin #2” (1991)
Schedule

Week 1
April 3: Introduction

Week 2

Week 3
Lee, A Gesture Life

Week 4
Rescheduled (to April 27?): Fujitani, et al., “Introduction” from Perilous Memories
Rea Tajiri, History and Memory

Week 5
May 1: Agamben, “Sacred Life,” “Politicization of Life,” “Biopolitics” from Homo Sacer; Min, “Remains to be Seen” in Loss; Nguyen-Vo, “Forking Paths”; Espiritu, “We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose”
Lê, The Gangster We Are All Looking For
Selections from Nguyen, “Tales of Yellow Skin”

Week 6
May 8: Fregoso, Mexicana Encounters: Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands
Schmidt Camacho, "Ciudadana X”
Portillo, “Señorita Extraviada”
de la Torre & Funari, “Maquilapolis”
Week 7
May 15: Canceled

Week 8
Hartman, Lose Your Mother

Week 9
Morrison, Beloved

Week 10
June 5: Wright, “Back Talk: Recoding the Body” from For the Sake of the Viewer
Hartman, “Excisions of the Flesh” from For the Sake of the Viewer
Shaw, “The Rememory of Slavery” from Seeing the Unspeakable
Selections from Kara Walker, Lorna Simpson, Carrie Mae Weems

Final papers and projects due June 12th