

Curtis Marez
ETHN 200B
W 11:30-2:20
SSB 103
cmarez@ucsd.edu
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 9:30 to 11

Formulations: Interdisciplinarity and Knowledge Production in Ethnic Studies

This course uses model studies to explore how comparative and relational problems are posed as research projects, how research questions are constructed, and how they employ theory to frame the project and establish what is at stake in the research. Interdisciplinarity can be understood as the critical practice of working across, between, and against otherwise isolated intellectual traditions. For ethnic studies scholars, interdisciplinarity research often entails the rearticulation of existing systems and tools of knowledge production and dissemination so as to better understand—and ultimately, transform—how social conditions and worlds are (re)produced, represented, and lived. Course readings will focus in particular on recent books by Ethnic Studies scholars that model interdisciplinary research design. With each model study, we will pay particular attention to how research questions are constructed, arguments are framed, and methods are deployed in ways that both draw upon and destabilize traditional disciplinary approaches. In so doing, we will explore why interdisciplinarity has been crucial to the study of power and difference. One of our aims will be to articulate different interdisciplinary approaches, distinguishing, for example, between research that combines methods from traditional disciplines (i.e. History, Literature, Sociology, etc.) and research in fields that are interdisciplinary in their origins (i.e. Ethnic Studies and allied fields).

BOOKS

Campt, Tina M. *Listening to Images*
Dorr, Kirstie. *On Site, In Sound: Performance Geographies in América Latina*
Karuka, Manu. *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad.*
Luk, Sharon. *The Life of Paper: Letters and a Poetics of Living Beyond Captivity*
Puar, Jasbir. *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*
Tuck, Eve, Yang, Wayne, and Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. *Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education*
Valencia, Sayak. *Gore Capitalism*
Ellis, Nadia. *Territories of the Soul: Queer Belonging in the Black Diaspora*
Schreiber, Rebecca. *Undocumented Everyday: Migrant Lives and the Politics of Visibility*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Participation.** To do well in this course you must complete assigned readings before we are scheduled to discuss them. Keeping up with the reading will be necessary to engage in conversation and to participate in specialized discussion exercises. The theory and practice of course discussion exercises are described by Cathy Davidson, “An ‘Active Learning’ Kit: Rationale, Methods, Models, Research, Bibliography,” <https://www.hastac.org/blogs/cathy->

davidson/2017/11/15/active-learning-kit-rationale-methods-models-research-bibliography.

Participation of course presumes attendance, so please show up on time and please attend every class short of an emergency. Should you have to miss class please inform me in advance if possible.

2. Five reading responses, two pages in length. Please email your responses to me by midnight the day before the relevant class meeting. Please address the following questions:

What are the book's central questions? What are its theoretical frameworks and what is their critical intervention? What forms of evidence does the author use and is their use effective? What disciplinary/interdisciplinary methods do they mobilize and how? What do their methods make visible or occlude?

3. **An in-class presentation.** Each student will make an in-class presentation about an assigned reading that is no longer than 15 minutes. In your presentation, please address the questions in italics above. As part of your presentation please also compose 1-2 page handout that highlights key points and 3 questions for discussion. After the presentation, you will be responsible for leading discussion so be prepared pose questions or present discussion exercises. While presentations should summarize a reading's central claims, the aim is not to exhaustively describe the work. Instead, you should focus on issues related to interdisciplinarity. So be sure in your presentation to address the questions in italics above. You can also connect the reading to your own research project(s).

4. **A final 10 page paper due on 3/20.** In your final paper, choose three assigned readings and assess their interdisciplinary contributions. Ideally you will draw upon your response papers and presentations. Papers should be double spaced, 12 point font, and emailed to me.

In all of class discussions and assignments, I urge us all to begin from a perspective of intellectual generosity. Start by trying to mentally inhabit a work and understand why an author makes the choices they do and what they are trying to accomplish. It is easier to critique and point out short-comings than it is to understand what an author is trying to do and how to positively formulate an interdisciplinary project. The goal of this course, then, isn't to train you in detecting the limits of existing work but to help you ultimately produce your own interdisciplinary research.

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

1/9 INTRODUCTION

1/16 Dorr

Sound Studies/Critical Geography

In *On Site, In Sound* Kirstie A. Dorr examines the spatiality of sound and the ways in which the sonic is bound up in perceptions and constructions of geographic space. Focusing on the hemispheric circulation of South American musical cultures, Dorr shows how sonic production

and spatial formation are mutually constitutive, thereby pointing to how people can use music and sound to challenge and transform dominant conceptions and configurations of place. Whether tracing how the evolution of the Peruvian folk song "El Condor Pasa" redefined the boundaries between national/international and rural/urban, or how a pan-Latin American performance center in San Francisco provided a venue through which to challenge gentrification, Dorr highlights how South American musicians and activists created new and alternative networks of cultural exchange and geopolitical belonging throughout the hemisphere. In linking geography with musical sound, Dorr demonstrates that place is more than the location where sound is produced and circulated; it is a constructed and contested domain through which social actors exert political influence.

1/23 Ellis

Queer of Color Critique/Literary and Cultural Studies/Affect Studies

Nadia Ellis attends to African diasporic belonging as it comes into being through black expressive culture. Living in the diaspora, Ellis asserts, means existing between claims to land and imaginative flights unmoored from the earth—that is, to live within the territories of the soul. Drawing on the work of Jose Muñoz, Ellis connects queerness' utopian potential with diasporic aesthetics. Occupying the territory of the soul, being neither here nor there, creates in diasporic subjects feelings of loss, desire, and a sensation of a pull from elsewhere. Ellis locates these phenomena in the works of C.L.R. James, the testy encounter between George Lamming and James Baldwin at the 1956 Congress of Negro Artists and Writers in Paris, the elusiveness of the queer diasporic subject in Andrew Salkey's novel *Escape to an Autumn Pavement*, and the trope of spirit possession in Nathaniel Mackey's writing and Burning Spear's reggae. Ellis' use of queer and affect theory shows how geographies claim diasporic subjects in ways that nationalist or masculinist tropes can never fully capture. Diaspora, Ellis concludes, is best understood as a mode of feeling and belonging, one fundamentally shaped by the experience of loss.

1/30 Schreiber (will speak @UCSD Feb 21)

Visual Culture Studies

In *The Undocumented Everyday*, Rebecca M. Schreiber examines the significance of self-representation by undocumented Mexican and Central American migrants, arguing that by centering their own subjectivity and presence through their use of documentary media, these migrants are effectively challenging intensified regimes of state surveillance and liberal strategies that emphasize visibility as a form of empowerment and inclusion. Schreiber explores documentation as both an aesthetic practice based on the visual conventions of social realism and a state-administered means of identification and control. As Schreiber shows, by visualizing new ways of belonging not necessarily defined by citizenship, these migrants are remaking documentary media, combining formal visual strategies with those of amateur photography and performative elements to create a mixed-genre aesthetic. In doing so, they make political claims and create new forms of protection for migrant communities experiencing increased surveillance, detention, and deportation.

2/6 Campt

Visual Culture Studies

In *Listening to Images* Tina M. Campt explores a way of listening closely to photography, engaging with lost archives of historically dismissed photographs of black subjects taken throughout the black diaspora. Engaging with photographs through sound, Campt looks beyond what one usually sees and attunes her senses to the other affective frequencies through which these photographs register. She hears in these photos—which range from late nineteenth-century ethnographic photographs of rural African women and photographs taken in an early twentieth-century Cape Town prison to postwar passport photographs in Birmingham, England and 1960s mug shots of the Freedom Riders—a quiet intensity and quotidian practices of refusal. Originally intended to dehumanize, police, and restrict their subjects, these photographs convey the softly buzzing tension of colonialism, the low hum of resistance and subversion, and the anticipation and performance of a future that has yet to happen. Engaging with discourses of fugitivity, black futurity, and black feminist theory, Campt takes these tools of colonialism and repurposes them, hearing and sharing their moments of refusal, rupture, and imagination.

2/14 Tuck, Yang, and Tuhiwai Smith

Education Studies/Indigenous Studies

Indigenous and decolonizing perspectives on education have long persisted alongside colonial models of education, yet too often have been subsumed within the fields of multiculturalism, critical race theory, and progressive education. Timely and compelling, *Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education* features research, theory, and dynamic foundational readings for educators and educational researchers who are looking for possibilities beyond the limits of liberal democratic schooling. Featuring original chapters by authors at the forefront of theorizing, practice, research, and activism, this volume helps define and imagine the exciting interstices between Indigenous and decolonizing studies and education. Each chapter forwards Indigenous principles - such as Land as literacy and water as life - that are grounded in place-specific efforts of creating Indigenous universities and schools, community organizing and social movements, trans and Two Spirit practices, refusals of state policies, and land-based and water-based pedagogies.

2/20 Puar

Political Theory/Disability Studies

In *The Right to Maim* Jasbir K. Puar brings her pathbreaking work on the liberal state, sexuality, and biopolitics to bear on our understanding of disability. Drawing on a stunning array of theoretical and methodological frameworks, Puar uses the concept of “debility”—bodily injury and social exclusion brought on by economic and political factors—to disrupt the category of disability. She shows how debility, disability, and capacity together constitute an assemblage that states use to control populations. Puar's analysis culminates in an interrogation of Israel's policies toward Palestine, in which she outlines how Israel brings Palestinians into biopolitical being by

designating them available for injury. Supplementing its right to kill with what Puar calls the right to maim, the Israeli state relies on liberal frameworks of disability to obscure and enable the mass debilitation of Palestinian bodies. Tracing disability's interaction with debility and capacity, Puar offers a brilliant rethinking of Foucauldian biopolitics while showing how disability functions at the intersection of imperialism and racialized capital.

2/27 Valencia

Decolonial Feminism/Philosophy/Marxism

Written by the Tijuana activist intellectual Sayak Valencia, *Gore Capitalism* is a crucial essay that posits a decolonial, feminist philosophical approach to the outbreak of violence in Mexico and, more broadly, across the global regions of the Third World. Valencia argues that violence itself has become a product within hyper-consumerist neoliberal capitalism, and that tortured and mutilated bodies have become commodities to be traded and utilized for profit in an age of impunity and governmental austerity.

3/6 Luk

Literary and Cultural Studies/Prison Studies

The Life of Paper offers a wholly original and inspiring analysis of how people facing systematic social dismantling have engaged letter correspondence to remake themselves—from bodily integrity to subjectivity and collective and spiritual being. Exploring the evolution of racism and confinement in California history, this ambitious investigation disrupts common understandings of the early detention of Chinese migrants (1880s–1920s), the internment of Japanese Americans (1930s–1940s), and the mass incarceration of African Americans (1960s–present) in its meditation on modern development and imprisonment as a way of life. Situating letters within global capitalist movements, racial logics, and overlapping modes of social control, Sharon Luk demonstrates how correspondence becomes a poetic act of reinvention and a way to live for those who are incarcerated.

3/13 Karuka

Indigenous Studies/Asian/Asian American Studies/History

Empire's Tracks boldly reframes the history of the transcontinental railroad from the perspectives of the Cheyenne, Lakota, and Pawnee Native American tribes, and the Chinese migrants who toiled on its path. In this meticulously researched book, Manu Karuka situates the railroad within the violent global histories of colonialism and capitalism. Through an examination of legislative, military, and business records, Karuka deftly explains the imperial foundations of U.S. political economy. Tracing the shared paths of Indigenous and Asian American histories, this multisited interdisciplinary study connects military occupation to exclusionary border policies, a linked chain spanning the heart of U.S. imperialism. This highly original and beautifully wrought book unveils how the transcontinental railroad laid the tracks of the U.S. Empire.

3/20 Final paper due—please email it to me.