

Seminar in Literature, Culture, and Thought

Trauma and Its Survivors in Contemporary Culture & Literature

COLT 620, 22074D, Tuesdays, 2:00-4:50 pm, THH 203

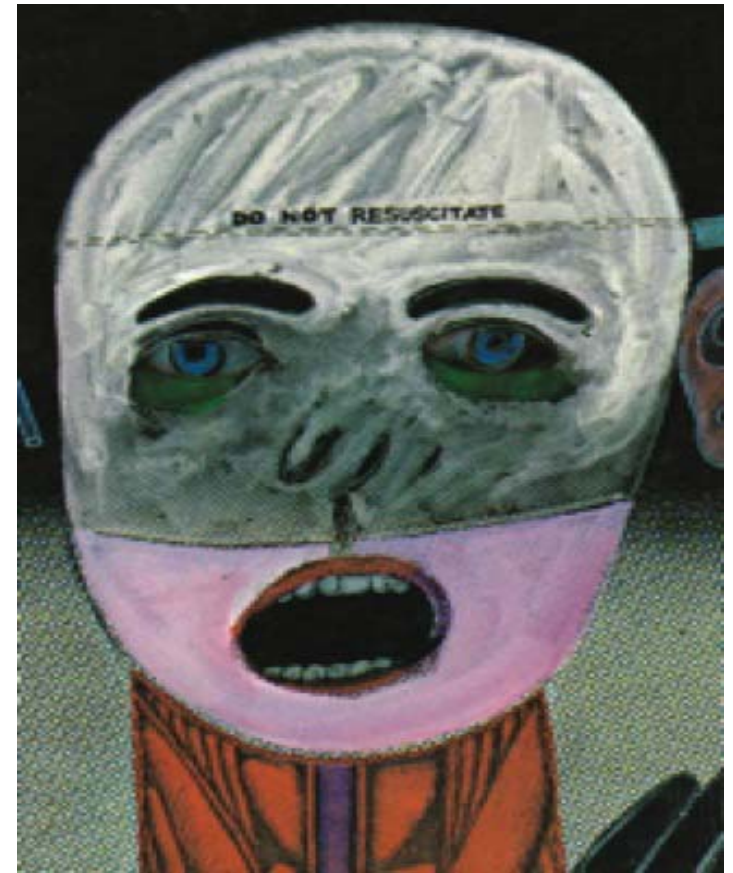
How did trauma originate as a diagnosis in medicine, psychiatry and law from the late 19th century to the present? What neurological and psychiatric theories of trauma developed from Charcot and Freud (Beyond the Pleasure Principle) to contemporary PTSD and contemporary neurobiology? (Kirmayer, Lemelson and Barad, *Understanding Trauma: Integrating Biological, Clinical, and Cultural Perspectives*, 2007).

How did trauma emerge as a theoretical paradigm in cultural and literary studies that drew on the Shoah's concepts of survivor/victim, witness, and testimony? (Felman and Laub, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, 1992; Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 1995 and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, 1996; LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 2001.) Writers Charlotte Delbo, Jean Améry, Primo Levi, and B. Wilkomirski serve as reliable and unreliable guides; seminar participants will suggest other readings.

More broadly autobiography and "trauma fiction" by Marguerite Duras, Toni Morrison, W.G. Sebald, and J.M. Coetzee introduce topics like trauma and sexual abuse; trauma and narrative; trauma, agency and subjectivity; and the ethical status of the trauma survivor. Here we consider: Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*, 1996; Nance, *Can Literature Promote Social Justice? Trauma Narrative and Social Action in Latin American Testimonio*, 2006); Vickeroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, 2002; Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, 2004; Miller and Tougaw, *Extremities: Trauma Testimony and Community*, 2002; and Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*, 2000.

We also consider critical studies that question the validity of the "trauma paradigm" and the witness' role as a reliable guide to the experiences of survivors. Wierviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, 1998; Fassin and Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Conditions of Victimhood*, 2009; and Trezise, *Witnessing Witnessing: On the Reception of Holocaust Survivor Testimony* 2013) are central to this critique.

How appropriate is the cultural paradigm of trauma for theorizing about post-traumatic/postmodern forms of representation and communication? Seltzer, *Wound Culture*, 1998; Ferrell, *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the 90s*; and Luckhurst (*The Trauma Question*, 2008) suggest answers.



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