The past academic year of 2011–12 witnessed a diverse and intellectually inspiring menu of ICM events, including public lectures and informal conversations, film screenings, and our graduate reading groups’ presentations. The year culminated in an unprecedented workshop at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda (May 10–12, 2012), a collaboration between the ICM and the Makerere Institute for Social Research (MISR). The brilliant line-up of scholars we hosted included our colleague Brett de Bary (Professor, Asian Studies and Comparative Literature, Cornell University), Olufemi Taiwo (Professor, Philosophy and Global African Studies; Director, Global African Studies Program, Seattle University), Daphne Brooks (Professor, English and African American Studies, Princeton University), and Adrienne Davis (Vice Provost and William M. Van Cleve Professor of Law, Washington University in St. Louis). As has been the norm, several of the guest speakers from institutions other than Cornell stayed for a second day and conducted a follow-up seminar based on papers distributed in advance to interested students and faculty. In addition, the New Conversations Series offered occasions for scholars to present their work-in-progress or recent publications for reflection and discussion. This series included inspiring presentations by our Cornell colleagues Bruno Bosteels (Professor, Romance Studies), Ziad Fahmi (Assistant Professor, Near Eastern Studies), Petrus Liu (Assistant Professor, Comparative Literature), Dagmawi Woubshet (Assistant Professor, English), and Gerard Aching (Professor, Romance Studies), in addition to a joint presentation by Shelley Feldman (Professor, Development Sociology; Director, Feminist, Gender, & Sexuality Studies) and Chuck Geisler (Professor, Development Sociology). As usual, we made an effort to include summaries of the content of the events mentioned above, including the public lectures and the New Conversations Series as well as the Bandung workshop in Kampala, in this issue of the newsletter.

The fourth in our series of annual conferences materialized this year as a workshop entitled After Bandung: Non-Western Modernities and the International Order and was accomplished in collaboration with MISR. The meeting dwelt on the implications of the historic 1955 Bandung Conference for non-Western modernities and for reimagining scholarship on the humanities and social sciences at large.
The workshop was structured around a set of pre-circulated papers, and brought together a group of distinguished scholars from Cornell, Makerere University, and other institutions, such as Columbia University. More details on the workshop, papers, and participants are provided in this newsletter.

In addition, the ICM was fortunate to host the Beninois filmmaker Idrissou Mora Kpai as Artist in Residence for the 2011–12 academic year. Mora Kpai’s films have been screened throughout the world and have garnered international accolades and prizes. In conjunction with their willingness to take on such a task and the responsibilities and efforts it entails.

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The rich visual culture of the Ethiopian Orthodox church with its centuries-old tradition of illustrated manuscripts and church murals still has not been critically deciphered. The academy of Ethiopian traditional art has long been studied by Western scholars outside the discipline of art history and by others who have been fascinated by Ethiopia’s myth as a Christian empire, headed by monarchs perceived to be instruments of God. This discourse has structured itself within two pervasive and contradictory narratives: exceptionalism and primitivism. These narratives have transcended Orthodox Christianity and the institution of the monarchy as emblems of Ethiopia’s uniqueness and greatness, contributing to a perception of Ethiopia as non-African and Christian nation, while all the while denigrating its rich and diverse artistic traditions in relation to the “norms” of European ecclesiastical paintings.

As Ethiopia’s first and only art historian, Elizabeth Giorgis aims to situate these conflicting narratives within contemporary critical discourses and in relation to modern and contemporary art history. Her project is the first sustained attempt to navigate the multiple points of Ethiopian intellectual and aesthetic realm from a combination of contrary and conflicting narratives within contemporary Ethiopian art history. This program has produced many young scholars involved in cross-disciplinary works in modernist epistemology, ontology, and representation.

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Elizabeth Giorgis received her doctorate from the Department of History of Art and Visual Studies at Cornell University in 2010, and her master’s degree in museum studies from New York University. She served as Director of the Skeneade Besho Genna College of Performing and Visual Arts and was Director of the Institute of Ethiopan Studies at Addis Ababa University. She teaches Art History and Criticism in the graduate schools of the College of Performing and Visual Arts and the Institute of Ethiopian Studies. She is the author of several publications, including, “Charting Ethiopian Modernity and Modernism,” a special issue of Callaloo, Journal of the African Diaspora, on Ethiopian art and literature and “Salem Mekuria, Ruptures: A Three-Sided Story,” published in conjunction with an exhibition of Ethiopian art outside the hegemonic matrices of Western art and its market. This fellowship will permit Giorgis to share her experiences with young American scholars in the interdisciplinary examination of African art and its representations as she also works toward publishing her dissertation manuscript.

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Anarchism: no gods, no masters. Enough with religion and the state. This workshop makes an additional demand: no peripheries.

The diffusionist line—anarchism was, in areas outside of Europe, an import and a script to be mimicked—has faced the challenge in recent years of research that reveals anarchism in its plural origins and sheer multiplicity of local variants. In this sense one might go so far as to argue that early twentieth-century anarchists were—in their emphasis on the world as their home, in their peripatetic radicalism, in the fact that anarchist perspectives could be born from (rather than prior to) migration, in their critique of the constant efforts to divide and hierarchize people—the first postcolonial theorists. To reflect on the histories and cultures of the anti-statist mutual aid movements of the last century, then, will be one aim of this conference. It has a second aim, that dovetails with the first: the re-examination of the historical relationships between anarchism and communism, without starting from the position of sectarian difference (Marxism versus anarchism). Rather, we will look at how anarchism and communism intersected; how the insurgent Left could appear—and in fact was—much more ecumenical, capacious, and eclectic than frequently portrayed; and that such capaciousness is a hallmark of anarchist practice, which is pre-figurative in its politics and anti-hierarchical and anti-dogmatic in its ethics.

Conference Organizers
Ray Craib (Associate Professor, History, Cornell University) & Barry Maxwell (Senior Lecturer, Comparative Literature and Program in American Studies, Cornell University)

Conference Participants
Gavin Arnall (Doctoral candidate, Comparative Literature, Princeton University)
Mohammed Bamyah (Professor, Sociology, University of Pittsburgh)
Banu Barge (Assistant Professor, Politics, The New School for Social Research)
Iain Boal (MayDay Rooms, London and San Francisco)
Bruno Bosteels (Professor, Romance Studies, Cornell University)
Glen Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene First Nation)
Ray Craib (Associate Professor, History, Cornell University)
Geoffroy de la Forcade (Associate Professor, History, Norfolk State University)
Silvia Federici (Professor Emerita, Social Sciences, Hofstra University)
Andrei Grubačić (Associate Professor and Chair, Social and Cultural Anthropology, California Institute of Integral Studies)
Steven Hirsch (Professor, International and Area Studies, Washington University in St. Louis)
Adrienne Hurley (Assistant Professor, East Asian Studies, McGill University)
G. Peter Jemison (Heron Clan, Seneca Nation) (Historic Site, Ganondagan State Historic Site)
Hilary Klein (Independent Scholar and Community Organizer)
Peter Linebaugh (Professor, History, University of Toledo)
Barry Maxwell (Senior Lecturer, Comparative Literature and Program in American Studies, Cornell University)
Glen Coulthard (Professor Emeritus of Political Science, SUNY/Empire State College)
Maia Ramnath (Visiting Scholar, Humanities and Social Thought, New York University)
Jolene Rickard (Director of the American Indian Program and Associate Professor, History of Art and Visual Studies, Cornell University)
Penelope Rosemont (Independent scholar; Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company)
Bahia Shehab (Artist, designer and Islamic art historian; Associate Professor of Professional Practice, American University in Cairo; Creative Director at Mi7-Cairo; PhD candidate at Leiden University)

BRETT DE BARY

Mining the ‘Remains of the Remains’: Materiality and Spectrality in Morisaki’s Writings from Chikuhô

Wednesday October 5, 2011

Olufemi Táiwò

Freedom and Democracy: Rethinking Political Philosophy in Modern Africa

Wednesday October 19, 2011

Olufemi Táiwò’s lecture continued his efforts to revive in the consciousness of today’s scholars West Africa’s forgotten legacy of political philosophy and aimed to clarify the historical role of African political philosophy in general. Looking back to the nineteenth century, Táiwò retrieved the names and ideas of thinkers such as Samuel Crowther, Samuel Johnson, Edward Wilmot Blyden, J. E. Casely Hayford, and Africanus Horton. Rather than leaving them to the dustbins of history, Táiwò made the case that at the dawn of the colonial era these pioneers conceived an alternate path toward African development and modernity. Contra to accepted convictions that modernity is a Western phenomenon, Táiwò argued that formerly colonized Africans are also heir to the intellectual legacy of the Enlightenment. This contentious proposition left Táiwò the Herculean task of disentangling the ideologies of liberalization from the harsh realities of the colonial experience. Táiwò appropriated the vocabulary of Western political discourse, claiming African thinkers such as Blyden were actually liberal democrats at their core.

Wednesday April 11, 2012

DAPHNE BROOKS

“One of these mornings you’re gonna rise up singing”
The Secret Black Feminist History of Porgy and Bess

Wednesday April 11, 2012

Professor Brooks’s talk focused on the sonic and racial history of *Porgy and Bess*, the famed opera by George and Ira Gershwin and Dubose Heyward, which debuted in New York in 1935. Dubbing it a “folk opera,” the creators of *Porgy and Bess* wanted to capture the American soundscape by filtering black performative forms through George Gershwin’s Tin Pan Alley sensibilities. Brooks thus characterized the opera as a classic example of a show about black people created by white people; at the same time, she drew attention to a diverse genealogy of African American female performers who, from the show’s inception, have influenced and inhabited the role of Bess to carve out a space for the expression of black feminist subjectivity.

Opening with a series of recordings of “Summertime,” the opera’s most famous song, by performers from Whitney Houston to Angelique Kidjo, Brooks asked the following questions: What does this musical text offer black female performers? How have performances interpreted Bess, thereby opening up the Afro-modernist possibilities latent in her story, character, and music? Turning to the musical life of New York City in the 1930s, Brooks highlighted Florence Mills, Shirley Graham Du Bois, and Zora Neale Hurston as high profile avant-garde “sonic experimentalists” whose compositions, texts, and performances likely influenced Gershwin as he created the role of Bess. Brooks then traced a diverse lineage of seminal black female singers—from lesser-known names such as Alice Brown, who originated the role of Bess, to stars such as Leontyne Price and Nina Simone—who use *Porgy and Bess* as a space of interpretive agency, even as they critique the opera as oversimplified and socially problematic. In this way, Brooks read the role of Bess as a productive space for black feminist practice in “worrying the line” of seemingly overdetermined forms, as gendered, racial, and musical archetypes are reworked from the inside. And she suggested that this potent practice of transformation and protest might be encouraged and enhanced by the musical form itself.

This highlights the second theme of Professor Brooks’ talk, namely to approach sound as a space for the archiving of racial relations and to consider what other stories and histories might thus be heard and told. Through this analytical lens, *Porgy and Bess* becomes a potential archive of cross-racial, cross-cultural encounter, where cultural memory is contained not just in the music and text, but also in the sonic praxis through which so many black female artists have inhabited and transformed it. In closing, Brooks urged more attention to the latent histories that might be located when sonic recordings are engaged as an archive of social encounter. An emphasis on sonic praxis, in turn, shapes “the archive” and the genealogies of social and musical history that can be located through it.

Wednesday April 25, 2012

ADRIENNE DAVIS

Irregular Intimacies: Polygamy, Race, and the Sexual Politics of Democracy

Wednesday April 25, 2012

However, Táiwò did not leave this discussion on the eve of colonialism in the nineteenth century. He ventured beyond the intellectual legacy engaged in his most recent book *Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa*, to pursue the task of incorporating the intellectual legacy of Africa’s nationalist and post-colonial leadership of the twentieth century into a grander arc extending back from the mid-nineteenth century. Táiwò framed this discussion within the context of Kwame Nkrumah’s triumphant leadership in the decolonization movement. Moreover, Táiwò emphasized the unfailing contribution of the African diaspora to discourses with particular inspiration from Frederick Douglass’ assertion that liberalism manifested on the African continent.

In all, Professor Táiwò’s lecture compelled contemporary scholars to reinvestigate this parallel legacy of African modernity. His work also encourages us to further study the efficacy of this movement as implemented by post-colonial leaders. The results, perhaps, could give momentum to current efforts to modernize and develop Africa.

Adrian M. Deese

Africana Studies and Research Center, Graduate Student

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Adrienne Davis is vice provost and William M. Van Cleve Professor of Law at Washington University, where she is also the founding coordinator of the Law, Identity, and Culture Initiative and directs the Black Sexual Economies Project for the Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Work and Social Capital. In the latter, the primary couple only jointly wows and Washes and the nuclear family as the primary location of affection, expose affective bonds as a matter of choice, and threaten generational inheritance rights that maintain class difference. Davis argued that polygamy is not a challenge to fidelity, since most polygamists follow traditional familial structures (sometimes referred to as polyfidelity), nor is it a threat of excess or multiplicity, a feature the other forms of intimacy share. It is a threat, rather, because it deviates from the legal recognition of what Davis called the heterodyadic marriage. What is key is not the multiplicity of relationships but the mismatches that exist between the two. They are not recognized as such. Davis argued that the ethical arguments against polygamy are actually "miscues" meant to conceal that what polygamy actually threatens is the capitalist mode. The nuclear family, which historically supplanted the Church and the vast extended network of patriarchal familial relations, reproduces the autonomous individual upon which capitalist market logic depends. That is why current pol-_icy discourse figures polygamy as a barrier to democratic progress or regression. It establishes an "intimate citizenship," linking normative intimacy with good citizenship and irregular intimacies with bad citizenship.

For the rest of the lecture, Davis discussed heterogeneous iterations of polygamy using the capabilities approach, hypothesizing how these competing practices may complicate or challenge conventional knowledge by speculating about income generation, the allocation of household duties, and the process of household decision-making. Davis shifted the focus from the conventional image of polygamy in the United States as a white, rural phenomenon to one that is black and urban. She illustrated the difference between the insular, compounding nature of its rural iteration versus the cosmopolitan, porous nature of its urban counterpart. Davis focused on three main prac_ticing communities in Atlanta, Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, and Washington D.C.: African American Muslims (both Sunni and Nation of Islam Muslims), African Hebrew Israelites, and followers of the Asat Asat Society. In the latter, the primary couple only jointly wows and proposes to the potential additional spouse after years of mediation and meditation, encouraging family formations that are beneficial to all involved parties.

Davis closed by arguing that the justice system needs to make policy based on the needs of those disenfranchised citizens. She argued that legalization of polygamy could regulate formal equality in marriages. Davis suggested using commercial partnership law as a model for the legal recognition of polygamy, under which the liabilities of an open-ended, multiple business relationship are limited by regulating the establishment of that relationship and structuring safety measures that secure equality of asset distribution in the face of possible dissolution. Adrienne Davis's lecture developed out of three separate papers on "intimate practices" that do not conform to social norms and are legal outliers: polygamy, sex work, and pet inheritance. These socially marginal practices each threaten the conventional, nuclear family as the primary location of affection, expose affective bonds as a matter of choice, and threaten generational inheritance rights that maintain class difference. Debates against polygamy in particular are figured in moral-ethical terminology, employing rhetoric about the injuries to women and children. But while polygamy is spoken of as ontologically illiberal, Davis pointed to the fact that there are many similar configurations of intimacy that are socially acceptable and legal. She argued that "serial polygamy" establishes similar personal and financial associations between multiple (ex-)spouses and children to those of polygamy. In addition, polygamy, adultery, and "defecto polygamy"—having children with different women outside of marriage—are not perceived with as much antagonism, although their effects are similar. Even bigotry (which Davis defined as having multiple families which are not aware of one another), though illegal, is not debated in the same ethical terms.

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Professors Shelley Feldman and Charles Geisler discussed the genesis and content of their recently released volume, *Accumulating Insecurity: Violence and Dispossession in the Making of Everyday Life* (University of Georgia Press, 2011), which they co-edited with Gayatri Menon—former Ph.D. candidate and post-doctoral associate in the Department of Development Sociology at Cornell University and current professor at Franklin and Marshall College. This collection of essays addresses a paradox central to contemporary social life: concurrent with the increasing preoccupation with terrorism, un-documented immigration, and other so-called “threats” that have justified the militarization of civilian life, crises in healthcare, household debt, housing, and employment (among others) are undermining the day-to-day security for civilian populations around the world.

In addition to discussing this central problematic and outlining the contents of the book, both professors drew out a number of points that they felt were particularly noteworthy. Professor Feldman emphasized the significance of expanding their theoretical lens from one focused on crises of production to one that considers how the conditions of social reproduction are being threatened. She highlighted the increasingly individualistic nature of social logic, the displacement of political rights, and the role of fear as a driving force in contemporary life.

Professors Feldman and Geisler not only sketched out some of the substantive themes of the volume, but also provided a genealogy of the project. Its intellectual roots trace back to a course on in and ex situ displacement that they developed and team-taught. More recently, they convened several workshops and a conference here at Cornell, in which they and the other contributing authors debated, reworked, and refined the key foci of the volume. Indeed, the original focus of these meetings had been on the “militarization of everyday life,” but as the discussion progressed it became clear that a focus on the increased fixation with security in its militant sense would be incomplete without acknowledging the profound decline in the security of the fundamental conditions needed for everyday life (e.g., employment, healthcare). The final product, *Accumulating Insecurity: Violence and Dispossession in the Making of Everyday Life*, provides a critical examination of the contemporary paradox of increasing militarization and decreasing social security. It is a timely collection in light of the continued entrenchment of the national security state, erosion of social security institutions by fiscal-austerity hawks, and global economic uncertainty. The book informs these challenges in a theoretically rich, substantively broad, and geographically diverse way.

Brian Thiede
Department of Development Sociology, Graduate Student

DAGMAWI WOBSHEFT

The Feelings of Motherless Children: AIDS Orphans and their Epistles to the Dead

Wednesday March 28, 2012

Referring to the work of Hannah Arendt, Professor Feldman also discussed the growing number of people who have been rendered superfluous around the world as labor markets contract and state apparatuses are restructured. Critically considering the contemporary moment in relation to the work of Marx and scholars who have theorized the so-called “disposability” of labor, Feldman observed that the so-called “reserve army of labor” — which had once supported the accumulation of capital — has become so large relative to stagnant labor demands that it is now a hindrance to that very logic of accumulation. Microcredit schemes, mass incarceration, and new forms of surveillance and discipline are among the disparate ways in which this crisis is being managed.

Shifting the focus of the discussion, Professor Geisler observed that immigration emerged as an unanticipated focal point between the two foci of the volume. On one hand, undocumented immigrants are portrayed by many conservative politicians and commentators as a security threat, which justifies the militarization of the border and draconian enforcement and surveillance practices within those borders. On the other hand, undocumented immigrants experience an exceptional degree of insecurity due to their uniquely disadvantageous position vis-à-vis the state. Although they are excluded from the rights of citizens and documented immigrants, they are subjected to the threat of incarceration and dispossession of personal property by the very state that denies their right to exist within its borders.

In the course of their presentation, Professors Feldman and Geisler not only outlined some of the substantive themes of the volume, but also provided a genealogy of the project. Its intellectual roots trace back to a course on in and ex situ displacement that they developed and team-taught. More recently, they convened several workshops and a conference here at Cornell, in which they and the other contributing authors debated, reworked, and refined the key foci of the volume. Indeed, the original focus of these meetings had been on the “militarization of everyday life,” but as the discussion progressed it became clear that a focus on the increased fixation with security in its militant sense would be incomplete without acknowledging the profound decline in the security of the fundamental conditions needed for everyday life (e.g., employment, healthcare).

The final product, *Accumulating Insecurity: Violence and Dispossession in the Making of Everyday Life*, provides a critical examination of the contemporary paradox of increasing militarization and decreasing social security. It is a timely collection in light of the continued entrenchment of the national security state, erosion of social security institutions by fiscal-austerity hawks, and global economic uncertainty. The book informs these challenges in a theoretically rich, substantively broad, and geographically diverse way.

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in fact be living, registering the instability and permeability of the border between living and dead in children’s conceptions, and drawing attention to the extent to which their ideas about death are unmediated by the mourning rituals and religious eschatology that structure adult mourning and structure their relations to the dead.

Attention to the affective dimensions of the letters further elaborates how children experience loss somatically, temporally, and spatially, and Woubshet argued convincingly for the twofold importance of such scholarly attention to the affect of these young mourners. He works to foreground the interiority of Ethiopian AIDS orphans precisely because the complexity of their experience is routinely elided by international NGOs and rights-based discourse, as well as paternalistic and sentimental modes of engagement that shape the international conversation about African AIDS orphans.

Woubshet critiqued Lee Edelman’s 2004 polemic No Future, which arrives at a definition of queer that makes the “universal figure of the child” its antithesis. This opposition is crucial for Edelman because “the political regime of futurities” insists on preserving the status quo in the name of the angelic child. In fact, Woubshet argues, the universal “figure of the child” that Edelman invokes is a privileged child and reminds us of the Reconstruction image of the pickaninny, a figure of juvenile abduction often contrasted with the angelic white child. Troubling Edelman’s distinction between the “figure of the child” and “historical children,” Woubshet insisted that we cannot easily assent to Edelman’s asymmetry between the queer and the child.

The sponsorship letters in particular display an intense anxiety about coming of age and the children raise questions about will happen to them when they are no longer under care of the state. This anxiety by the orphans of their own precariousness returned Woubshet to his notion of compounding loss, through which he tied the orphans’ expressions of loss to those of gay artists and writers in 1980s New York. For this latter class of mourner, the absence of life-preserving anti-retroviral drugs meant that they anticipated their own deaths even as they mourned their loved ones. Similarly, the orphans mourn the deaths of loved ones while at the same time anticipating their own insecure futures.

While Sigmund Freud’s model of loss opposes mourning to melancholia, Woubshet’s compounding loss nuances AIDS scholarship that has largely relied on Freud’s structuring paradigm for understanding AIDS mourning. Woubshet circumvented Freud’s dichotomy and the association of melancholia with pathology by bringing African American literary expressions of loss to bear on thinking the particular temporality of AIDS mourning. He drew from the temporality of loss articulated in African American slave songs chotom y and the association of melancholia with pathology by the possibility of consolation assuming an end to loss, the enslaved standing AIDS mourning. Woubshet circumvented Freud’s di-

competence between the “figure of the child” and “historical children,” Woubshet insisted that we cannot easily assent to Edelman’s asymmetry between the queer and the child.

Gerard Aching’s project explores the relationship between Western European thinking on just war at the dawn of this region’s empires in the Americas and the juridical/theological creation of the indigenous American man. Drawing principally from St. Augustine, Vitória, Sepúlveda, Las Casas, and Mair, Aching’s presentation described and interrogated the rationalizations for and against declaring war against the Indians in order to examine the creation of the Indian as a specific and unprecedented category of the human and a fundamental paradigm for subsequent, imperial regimes in the extra-European world.

Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space

The exhibition shown in spring 2012 at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University.

Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space was a large-scale art exhibition shown in spring 2012 at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University. More than forty prints, photographs, paintings, sculptures, videos, and installations by thirty-three international artists and groups grappled with issues that arise when territories are divided and borders are drawn to create new nations. Living within and across these lines can be a messy, bloody business, but it also offers a productive space where new nations, identities, languages, and relationships get forged.

As its core, Lines of Control investigated the historic upheaval of the 1947 partition of India that spawned the nations of Pakistan and later Bangladesh. The exhibition was part of an ongoing investigation initiated in 2003 by Green Caradonna, a London-based nonprofit arts organization. Expanding on the significance of partition in South Asia, Lines of Control also addressed physical and psychological borders, trauma, and the reconfiguration of memory in other partitioned areas: North and South Korea, Sudan and South Sudan, Israel and Palestine, Ireland and Northern Ireland, and Armenia and its diaspora. It also addressed questions of indigenous sovereignty in the United States. The exhibition was curated by Green Caradonna curator and co-founder Hammad Nasar, Cornell faculty member Iftikhar Dadi, and Johnson Museum chief curator Ellen Arril, with assistance from London-based curator Nada Raza. It will travel to Duke University’s Nasher Museum of Art in 2013.

Lines of Control was accompanied by a film program at Cornell Cinema, a substantive catalogue, and a symposium held on March 3 and 4. A number of prominent scholars and artists spoke at the symposium, including UCLA-based scholars Azaan Mufidi and Saloni Mathur, Duke University historian Sumathi Ramaswamy, Guggenheim Museum curator Sandhini Poddar, Cornell faculty Salah M. Hassan and Joline Rickard, and artists Naeem Mohaiemen and Seher Shah from New York and Ambar Kanwar and Shuddhabrata Sengupta from New Delhi.

GERARD ACHING

Just War Theory and the Invention of the American Man

Tuesday April 10, 2012

Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space

Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space was a large-scale art exhibition shown in spring 2012 at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University.
A two-day workshop organized as a collaboration between the Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR) of Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda and the Institute for Comparative Modernities (ICM), Cornell University

May 10–11, 2012
The Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR), Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda

WORKSHOP STRUCTURE

The workshop took place in the MISR conference room. Participating were six major speakers, twelve discussants (two per session), and six moderators. (See program details below.) The audience, estimated at fifty people, included scholars and professors from Makerere University and neighboring institutions, as well as graduate students in the newly constituted interdisciplinary doctoral program at MISR, established under the directorship of Professor Mahmood Mamdani. The introduction of the Ph.D. program marks a major shift in the history of MISR, which started as a colonial think tank designed to research nationalism and the role of the urban native elites, and evolved into a consultancy-oriented research entity that catered to Western NGOs in the aftermath of the Structural Adjustment policies driven by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund’s reforms in Africa. This movement into what Mamdani has described as a “process of development of endogenous knowledge creation, including a full-time, coursework-based, inter-disciplinary Ph.D. program,” marks MISR’s evolution into a forward-looking postcolonial research institute. For more information on the Makerere Institute of Social Research see http://misr.mak.ac.ug/.

The major speakers included Professors Manthia Diawara (New York University), Salah M. Hassan (Cornell University), Fouad Makki (Cornell University), Mahmood Mamdani (Columbia and Makerere Universities), Natalie Melas (Cornell University), and David Scott (Columbia University). Each speaker submitted a draft of his/her paper, as well as a maximum of one hundred pages of related work (books and/or articles), in advance of the workshop for distribution to discussants and participants. During the workshop each speaker was allotted forty-five minutes to elaborate on or speak to their paper, followed by fifteen minutes for each discussant to respond, then forty-five minutes for other participants to ask questions and make comments. This particular format encouraged complex levels of engagement and substantive exchanges of ideas across the full range of participants. Distributing the papers in advance allowed everyone time to prepare to offer in-depth feedback.

THEME/CONCEPT

In 1955 the town of Bandung in Indonesia signified a meeting place for non-aligned powers determined to chart a relatively independent course from the bi-polarity of Cold War politics. Over time, Bandung came to signify a larger agenda pursued through the United Nations and other international and regional fora, calling for a more egalitarian and pluralistic world represented in various domains: from the New International Economic Order to the New International Information Order. Today Bandung reflects a time in which we can imagine the end of Western hegemony and the onset of a new plural order.

From this perspective, the workshop provided the opportunity for a multi-faceted reflection on historiography; social, political, and cultural relations; and the production of knowledge. Is it possible to think of the modern study of society and the humanities as something other than a post-Renaissance Western endeavor? To what extent have critiques of modernist and Western ethnocentric categories in different disciplines led to the shaping of less ethnocentric social science and humanities scholarship in different parts of the world? If the development of knowledge production in institutions of higher learning globally has been tied to the development of a Western-dominated international system since 1492, to what extent have intellectual pursuits within the academy realized an autonomous critique of the dominance of categories reflecting Western hegemony in political, social, and intellectual life? What has been achieved and what remains to be done?
As Homer Jack once proclaimed, the historic Asian Congress of 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia, “may just be the hinge of History.” Using Homer’s brief proclamation metaphorically, Bandung might be thought of as a “hinge” on which the “sovereignty” idea in the Third World turns. More specifically, the aim is to think of “nonalignment” as one of the most provocative ideas to be generated around the problem of Third World sovereignty, and of the Bandung conference as the first major international occasion where this idea of sovereignty as nonalignment was staged and articulated as an international-political demand. My overall concern here is to sketch a partial genealogy of nonalignment as the idea of an international position or status unwilling to be subordinated to the global will of one or another superpower. Nonalignment, a political neologism if ever there was one, named the particular version of a wider idea and ideal of international personality, namely neutralism.

Discussants

Adam Branch, Senior Research Fellow, Makerere Institute of Social Research, Makerere University

Session II: 1:30 – 4:15 pm

The Hinge of History: Bandung and the Genealogy of Sovereignty as Non-Alignment

D iscussants

O kello O gwant, Professor and Dean of School of Languages, Literature & Communication, Makerere University

May 11, 2012

Session IV: 9:30 am – 12:45 pm

Mahmood Mamdani

Herbert Lehman Professor of Government, Professor of Anthropology, Columbia University; Director, Makerere Institute for Social Research, Makerere University

Reading Ibn Khaldun in Kampala

Session V: 1:30 – 4:15 pm

Fouda Makkii

Professor, Development Sociology, Cornell University

Rethinking Development as Uneven and Combined Process
Decolonization and liberation movements in the Third World were struggles in which Marxism played an important role as an ideology. In all of these events, the specter of Karl Marx loomed large. Yet, most of the current scholarship on Marxism and the non-West has focused on redeeming Marx as less Eurocentric by recovering his lesser known writings on the non-Western world. Such efforts might have affirmed Marx as less of a class-based thinker and more of a theorist who was sensitive to nationalism and issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity of human and social experiences across the globe. However, such contributions tended to ignore that Marx was a product of his time and of Europe as a rising colonial empire, and that the larger framework of his analysis was bound by the evolutionary thinking of the time. Such efforts also ignored non-Western (and more specifically African) contributions to Marxism as it has been appropriated and reshaped in the context of decolonization and postcolonial struggles. This paper pays homage to Karl Marx as one of the most influential thinkers in the twentieth century by revisiting Marxism from an African/Black perspective, as well as exploring the global impact of his ideas, which have been appropriated, rethought, and localized in different settings (such as Sudan, among others) in ways that Marx himself could not have anticipated or imagined.

Discussions
Antonio Tomas, Research Fellow, Makerere Institute of Social Research, Makerere University
David Scott, Professor, Anthropology, Columbia University

Speaker Biographies

Manthia Diawara holds the chair of University Professor of the Arts and Humanities at New York University, where he is also professor of comparative literature and film, and director of the Institute of African-American Affairs at New York University. Diawara is the author of several books on Black culture, film, and literature, including In Search of Africa (Harvard University Press, 1998), We Won’t Be Stopped (Basic Books, 2005), and African Film: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics (Prestel, 2010). His most recent films include Masaii Tropiques (2008) and Edouard Glissant: One World in Relation (2010).

Salah M. Hassan is director of the Institute for Comparative Modernities (ICM), Goldsmith Smith Professor in the Africana Studies and Research Center, and professor of African and African Diaspora art history and visual culture in the Department of History of Art and Visual Studies at Cornell University. He is an editor of Nike Journal of Contemporary African Art (Duke University Press) and consulting editor for Atlantica and Journal of Curatorial Studies. He has authored, edited, and co-edited several books, including Diaspora, Memory, Place (Prestel, 2008), Unpacking Europe (NAI Publishers, 2001), Authentic/Ex-Centric (Forum for African Arts, 2002); Gendered Visions: The Art of Contemporary African/Women Artists (Africa World Press, 1997); Art and Islamic Literacy among the Hausa of Northern Nigeria (Edwin Mellen Press, 1992); and most recently, with Carita Ray, Darfur and the Crisis of Governance: A Critical Reader (Cornell, 2009). He has contributed essays to journals, anthologies, and exhibition catalogues of contemporary art. He has curated several international exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale and Dak’Art, the Dakar Biennale. He is the recipient of several fellowships, such as the J. Paul Getty Postdoctoral Fellowship, as well as major grants from the Ford, Rockefeller, and Andy Warhol Foundations, and the Prince Claus Fund.

Fouad Makki is assistant professor of development sociology at Cornell University. His research interests revolve around the historical sociology of modernity, the political economy of development, and the contested transition from empires to nations. Some of his essays have appeared in journals such as the Review of African Political Economy, Africa Today, the Journal of Peasant Studies, the Journal of Historical Sociology, Third World Quarterly, South Atlantic Quarterly, the Cambridge Review of International Affairs, and Social History. He is currently studying the socio-ecological implications of the enclosure of the commons in contemporary Africa.

Muhammad Mamdani is the Herbert Lehman Professor of Government and professor of anthropology at Columbia University. He is also the director of the Makerere Institute for Social Research, Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda. He received his Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1974 and specializes in the study of African history and politics. Prior to joining the Columbia faculty, Mamdani was a professor at the University of Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania (1973–79), Makerere University in Uganda (1980–90), and the University of Cape Town (1996–99). He has received numerous awards and recognitions, including being listed as one of the “Top 20 Public Intellectuals” by Foreign Policy (US) and Prospect (UK) magazines in 2008. From 1999 to 2002 he served as president of the Council for the Development of Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA). His publications include Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on Terror (Pantheon, 2009), Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terror (Pantheon, 2002), When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism and Genocide in Rwanda (Princeton, 2001), and Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonisation (Princeton, 1996). His essays have appeared in the New Left Review and the London Review of books, among other journals.

Natalie Melas is chair of the Department of Comparative Literature at Cornell University. She holds a Ph.D. in comparative literature (English, French, Ancient Greek) from University of California, Berkeley. Her areas of interest include transcultural theory (between postcolonialism and globalism); the politics of disciplinary histories, cultural comparison; postcolonial neo-formalism; turn-of-the-century English literature, Anglophone, and especially Francophone, Caribbean literature and theory; modern reconfigurations of antiquity; and Homer. She has written published essays on the fate of the humanities in the contemporary university, incommensurability, Joseph Conrad, and French Caribbean literature. Her books include All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison (Stanford, 2007) and the co-edited collection The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature (2010). Her current project addresses the formation of alternative modernities in the broken link between modernism and colonialism.

David Scott is professor of anthropology and research fellow of African-American studies at Columbia University. He earned his Ph.D. from the New School for Social Research. Scott’s scholarly interests include the problem of postcolonial politics, diaspora, and cultural history; with the Caribbean and South Asia as his main historical and geographical areas of preoccupation. He is the author of Formations of Ritual (Minnetonka, 1994), Refashioning Fasten (Princeton, 1999), and Consciences of Modernity (Duke, 2004), and is the co-editor of Powers of the Secular Modern (Stanford, 2006). He is also the founder and editor of Small Axe, a journal of Caribbean criticism.
In our year-long reading group “Critical Perspectives on Political Economy,” we aimed to look beyond the “scientific” presentation of theories of political economy to bring their social and political origins and implications into focus. In our original proposal we highlighted three major issues for investigation and discussion. First, the academic constructs of economy, policy, and society are in fact inseparable parts of one whole. Throughout the year, we sought to identify how authors have acknowledged, ignored, or distorted this reality. This tension is especially evident in the different ways in which authors present the nature of “economic” mechanisms, motivations, and discourse. Second, and related to the first point, we discussed the social foundations of economic theory. How do social factors affect the creation of theory? And what does it mean that “the economy” has been defined the way it has? Finally, the third issue relates to the master narratives of Western economic thought, both in its classical as well as critical varieties. What do stories of economic progress or exploitative domination tell us about the realities of the world inside and outside of the West? How necessary are they given that a nuanced full comprehension of economic history is not generally practical?

Through these guiding questions we established three overall themes in the work read and discussed. The first theme involved the “invisible” and “visible” hands of the market. This theme questions the potential for human agency in market relations. On one hand, this includes how theorists such as John Maynard Keynes and Friedrich von Hayek have argued over the potential for order or chaos, planning or spontaneity in the market. On the other, this is a question of top-down economic implementation and bottom-up economic resistance. According to James Scott, human agency manifests in two forms: the high modernization drive of technocrats, and the tendency towards subversion that everyone else seems to have. States attempt to categorize market relations, while people attempt to be uncategorizable in order to avoid regulation. At its most basic level, this question interrogates the relationship between the “politics” and “economics” of political economy.

The second theme considers the social economy. This theme involves questions such as the following: What does “economic” include as a set of epistemological and causal categories? When thinking about political economy in the abstract or studying its particularities, how do we contextualize the economic within intellectual histories of ideology or within linguistic structures and language games? How does the “reach” of the economic influence critiques and theories of political economy? Notable examples of work in this theme include writings by Donald MacKenzie, who looks at how financial models shape markets and argues that financial models are not cameras, in the sense that they are not photographic representations of reality. Historical and linguistic approaches such as those of Albert Fuchsman or D. McCloskey consider the economic as it is expressed in intellectual culture or language, expanding the “economic” to multiple social categories.

Finally, the third theme might be thought of as political economy’s use of grand narrative. Scholars of political economy have consistently relied on grand narratives to frame various arguments and claims about the nature and functioning of the economy. How do we explain the reliance on narrative in critiques of political economy? Are there dangers or encumbrances incumbent in the use of narrative to think about economic development? Is there a way to think about economic development that does not espouse the use of grand narrative? Both James Scott and Karl Polanyi use grand narratives to frame their renditions of economic history. Both accounts are critiqued for their historical accuracy and tendency toward generalization, but both offer useful heuristics for understanding economic relations—and particularly the role of state and society in understanding economic relations. Other theorists such as Immanuel Wallerstein or Giovanni Arrighi use grand narrative in order to both comprehend economic history as well as to predict its future. Finally, grand narrative may be used to frame economic histories through particular categories, such as in David Graeber’s investigation of debt.

This brief summary provides only a sketch of texts and topics discussed during our year-long approach to “Critical Perspectives on Political Economy.” For the most part, our conversations have left critical concerns over the relationship between the political and the economic open—these themes represent the foundational work that may contribute to further surveys and inquiries into critical political economy.

**Contours of Eastern Marxism**

**Members**

Matteo Calla, Department of German Studies
Kevin Duong, Department of Government
Béguier Medak-Seguin, Department of Romance Studies
Mariana Saavedra, Department of Anthropology
Nathan Taylor, Department of German Studies
Facundo Vega, Department of Comparative Literature

In response to recent attempts to revive theoretical discussions about communism and a renewed interest in the works of thinkers situated at the margins or outside of a predominantly Western-oriented tradition of Marxism, our reading group sought to investigate what elements of an Eastern Marxism, ranging from the Lenin-Trotsky-Mao triptych, may be useful in addressing contemporary conditions under late capitalism. By reading key texts by Marxist thinkers that address a repertoire of issues crucial to conditions of non-Western modes of production and social organization, we attempted to interrogate the legitimacy of Western Marxism’s logic of modernity. Questions posed in our readings and discussions addressed the Eurocentrism of Western-European Marxism, the usefulness of the latter’s conceptual framework with its foregrounding of ideology, commodity production, exchange processes, theories of value, totality, reification, and historical progress, as well as the perhaps vulgar dichotomization of theory and practice, both generally in Marxist thought and to the extent that this dichotomization is used to differentiate Western from Eastern Marxism.

In the course of our readings, it became clear that any understanding of Marxism and the role it plays in modernity is incomplete without an engagement of Lenin, Trotsky, and Mao. Indeed, we found that our interrogations and readings of their texts allowed for a deeper dialectical engagement with key Marxist ideas. For instance, we discussed the role of spontaneity in collective social organization as negated by Lenin and valorized by Rosa Luxemburg in her treatment of Lenin, oscillating between the merits and disadvantages of a vanguard party. Additionally, we addressed the roles of synthesis and con-
This reading group led us to many new questions, but it also gave rise to two main conclusions. First, following Stuart Hall and his 1996 essay “When Was the Postcolonial?” we suggest that while nations are never postcolonial in the same way, the rubric of postcolonialism remains useful for analyzing the global relations of power that emerge within and beyond nations in the period following European colonialism. Second, as Ahmed’s work productively suggests, postcolonial theory might benefit from further theoretical inquiry into the encounter as a politically and affectively situated phenomenon. Even though scholars in postcolonial studies often have significant personal and political commitments to the field, convention holds that the “I” does not belong in academic discourse. Is this proscription a kind of hegemony? What space exists for embodied encounters in the academy? As we advance as critics and academics, we will continue to ask what a truly postcolonial criticism would look like and what form(s) it would take. We aim to continue to explore these questions and to push the boundaries of critical form within postcolonial scholarship.
Secularism and the Islamic Political Subject

Members
Max Ajl, Department of Development Sociology
Kyle Anderson, Department of Near Eastern Studies
Noor Hashem, Department of English
Pinar Kemelri, Department of Government
Andrew Simon, Department of Near Eastern Studies
Brian Thiede, Department of Development Sociology

What is “secularism”? How does it connect to the multivalent project of secularizing global public culture? Who are the progenitors, the territories that formerly composed the Ottoman Empire? To begin to answer such questions, we started by trying to pin down a precise notion of “secularism.” In his seminal work A Secular Age, Charles Taylor does exactly that. He begins by taking up two definitions. First, he outlines the “liberal-humanist” definition, which stresses that as modern society develops, it gives rise to various spheres of human activity, including economic, political, cultural, educational, professional, recreational, and other such spheres. In turn, each sphere develops its own particular rationality. Finally, the modernized human acts within each sphere according to the considerations of its own specificity. The second definition that Taylor considers, the “reactionary” definition, stresses the decline of religious belief and practice in modern society—people “turning away from God.” These “reactionary” definitions are both equally available and directly accessible to every member of society. Asad rejects this picture and argues that it ignores the immense process of normalization that takes place in the acceptance of this social imaginary. Second, Asad argues that this modern political subject is grounded in secular, homogeneous time, which necessarily excludes other conceptions and so implies a degree of “epistemic violence.” Instead of looking at secularism as an independently achieved political ethic, Asad ties secularism with practices of statecraft and modern governance. He argues that individual conceptions of society are mediated through state institutions such as opinion polls, the media, and political lobbying. In the last instance, we can see that the secular is applicable outside of modern Europe, so long as it is understood as an essential practice of mediation between state and society in the modern era of global capitalism.

We then moved on to analyze the secular in four case studies. Turkey, Iran, Indonesia, and the “aesthetic” are assembled, separated, and policed; problematize many of the all-encompassing terms scholars have historically deployed to discuss change in South Asia. Rarely radically different from one another, in each case we examine how the very same “secularism” continues to indicate with an ingrained cultural structure or logic of capital. Further comparison of research geared towards these assemblies—and this too on each side of each epochal divide—will enable our group’s members to further specify such forms of newness and historical indebtedness.

The Mind/Ear Binary and Transnational Modernities

Members
Arina Rotaru, Department of German Studies
Caroline Wight, Department of Music
Clare Hane, Department of Performing and Media Arts
Jen Pei Chen, Department of Asian Studies
Minhwa Ahn, Department of Asian Studies
Samuel Dwinnell, Department of Music
Walter Jen-Hao Hsu, Department of Performing and Media Arts

Our group structured our agenda according to a syllabus divided into subthemes. The readings ranged from the 2011 issue of American Quarterly on sound culture studies (starting with Michelle Hilmes’s “Is there a Field Called Sound Culture Studies?”) to sound travels (Paige McGiernick’s Sound Travels, Nyong’o Tavie’s Amalgamation Waltz, or Fred Moten’s In the Break) and transnational sound (Anne Tsunusensou’s Women, the Recited Qu’ran and the Indonesian or Ana Maria Ochoa Gauthier’s “Social Transculturation, Epistemologies of Purification and the Aural Public Sphere in Latin America.”). Other topics we discussed were “sound in the machine age,” “the voice in psychoanalysis,” “noise and its discontents,” “sound structure,” and “sound communities.” The readings provided a gradual reconstruction of a rising field and its relevance for an alternative understanding of modernity.

One of our seminar questions was whether the mind and the ear are locked into a relationship of categorical altemity and whether sonic/visual readings of modernity are to be treated in consonance rather than disparately. As our readings suggested, through a relation of mind and ear, usual assumptions about modernity’s formation as influenced by ratio or by vision can be deconstructed and expanded. Recent studies by Véit Ermann and Jaime Moreno reach beyond both a consideration of Descartes as a philosopher of ratio and the visual bias ascribed to Cartesianism: these studies highlight instead the importance of listening and acoustic principles for Descartes and Diderot’s philosophies, and encourage future understandings of modernity as physical vibrations of strings rather than as compounds mediated by vision. In his Compendium Musicum, Descartes calls sound an object to be investigated (“objectum est sonus”), a means towards enjoyment and a medium both based on and conceived for the purpose of a system that “presses itself upon speakers and actors following each concept’s “translation” and through pre-existing repertoires. However, to some degree both of these methods remain too genealogical to account for the uncertainties and sparks of creativity that mark each reconfiguration of the economic, the religious, and the aesthetic.

Andrew Sarton’s recent work on the circulation of intellectual categories and practices alongside capital may help reframe these uncertainties and creativities, but we are less willing to define all cultural and intellectual practices as finally and completely shaped by capital.
Open-ended communities mediated by sound, noise, and vibration. Subscribe to replacing these teleological versions of modernity with wireless imagination. Nicole Bourriaud once stated that it is not iPod culture and urban experience and ear to the interfering and enriching function of noise. We follow within the economy of music and Karin Bijsterveld’s works on communities of sound and the importance of the world and the early conflicts between spatial and acoustic communities.

We aim to focus on two areas of Caribbean postcolonial theory: 1) a review and analysis of the related concepts of Creole, créolité, and creolization and 2) the challenge that Peter Hallward’s Absolutely Postcolonial Writing presents. The Singular and the Specific represents to the field of contemporary Caribbean Studies.

If there is any cluster of concepts that the Caribbean colonial and postcolonial experiences has brought to the attention of theorists, that of Creole, créolité, and creolization stands out as both singularly foundational in the region’s literature, arts, philosophy, and political discourse outside of the metropole, or is it reducible to the imperatives and rationalities of the modernizing mode that combines ratio with the sense of hearing. Following up on Martin Jay’s argument on sound from the perspective of an opposition to the vision-mediated masculinist field of psychoanalysis and phallogocentricism, we devoted some time to readings from the field of film and opera studies, which proved important for an understanding of gender within the sonic discourse of modernity in conjunction with the mind. Equally relevant were the classic works “The Grain of the Voice,” by Roland Barthes; “Between Sound and Silence,” by Alice Llagay; Opera’s Second Death, by Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar; and “The Voice in the Cinema,” by Mary Anne Doane, all of which helped us inquire into the function of voice as sound and vibration, in correlation with the understanding and conceptualization of gender in cinema and opera, but also with a view to their applicability in other disciplines.

This intermediate readings helped us transition into the second related question to which we committed our efforts: whether a modernity “undivided” by the split of mind and sound/vision can enrich discussions on gender, race, and community. In this respect, works by Alexander Wehdey and his inquiries into diasporic communities, as well as Gayatri Gopinath on queer diasporas in South Asian cultural politics and José Esteban Muñoz’s Stages: Queers, Punks, and the Utopian Performative proved interesting to us from the perspective of returning to the importance of sound in the formation of transnational identities: these identities are mediated precisely by the interplay of the sonic and the ratio. Readings based on different methodologies, such as works by film scholar Wang Zingheng on “gendered voices” and Steve Goodman on “sound and all,” and “sonic warfare,” expanded our understanding of the acoustic communities first sketched by pioneer sound scholar of modernity Murray Schafer and his first attempt at systematizing the tuning of the world and the early conflicts between spatial and acoustic communities. New works on communities of sound and the importance of noise helped us expand the role of the pure interplay between mind and ear to the interfering and enriching function of noise. We followed up with works by Jacques Attali and his analysis of noise within the economy of music and Karin Bijsterveld’s Mechanical Sound: Technology, Culture and Public Problems of Noise in the Twentieth Century.

Other directions of investigation led us to consider the role of digitalization for the present understanding of modernity as interplay of mind and ear, also from the perspective of looking back on Descartes’s little regarded thoughts on acoustics. Works by Allen Weiss and his peculiar understanding of “lyric” and Michael Bull’s Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience completed early studies on the wireless imagination. Nicole Bourriaud once stated that it is not modernity that is dead, but its idealistic and teleological version. We subscribe to these replacing those teleological versions of modernity with open-ended communities mediated by sound, noise, and vibration.

**Inquiries in Latin American Philosophy and Critical Thought**

**Members**

Geraldo Montermino, Department of Romance Studies
Bret Lerau, Department of Comparative Literature
Mandy Gutmann-Gonzalez, Department of English
Lacie Buckwalter, Department of Romance Studies
Rebecca Kovick, Department of Comparative Literature
Christina Soto van der Plas, Department of Romance Studies

Despite the best efforts of pluralist ideology since the late 1980s to globalize the American academy, the United States and Europe continue to monopolize philosophical and critical discourses in and around Latin America and human sciences. Against this reality, our groups ought to rethink our founding assumptions in an effort to truly engage in a more global dialogue. In theorizing Latin America, those discourses have long overlooked the region’s political and social traditions, focusing almost exclusively on its literary production, often confined to the narrow genre of magical realism and a few others. Latin American critical thought is accounted for, it is inevitably placed under the generalizing rubric of “postcolonial studies” or dismissed outright as insufficiently rigorous to be of critical, let alone philosophical, interest. Academics, thinkers, and cultural elites within the region are not innocent in this evaluation and often collude with their North Atlantic counterparts in marginalizing the region’s critical thought. In 1969, in response to the question that titles his seminal text, “The Grain of the Voice,” the Italian philosopher Augusto Salazar Bondy concluded that there is not. In light of changes over the last five decades throughout the region and in North American and European universities, we feel it is time to ask Bondy’s question again.

What is the state of Latin American philosophy and critical thought today? How do thinkers represent and theorize regional cultural and political discourses? In what way does Latin American critical thought relate to prevailing European and North American schools of thought? In other words, does it redefine similar concepts and models first elaborated in the metropole, or is it wholly different in light of its particular objects, concerns, and history? In either case we may ask how the Latin American critical tradition contributes to or challenges prevailing epistemological, historiographic, and political methodologies and theories.

Departing from seminal critical texts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the region (Salazar Bondy, Bondy, Dussel, Lipton) our group will read contemporary Latin American contributions and interventions in fields ranging from logic and mathematics (Zalamea, Villiers) and politics (Dussel, Lacatra, Moreiras, Scavino, Castro) to visual arts (Vera, Villar), and cultural and linguistic discourses (Mignolo, Beverley, Freire), as well as critical essays (Lalo, Sarlo, Richard).

Staying with the thought of a diverse geographical region poses from the start an epistemological problem, which we can only briefly sketch here. Can we even speak, as Bondy does, of a single Latin American critical tradition? Is it a coherent, unified project or one with multiple voices? In the latter, we may ask how the various objects, ideas, and theories can co-exist without being marginalized. That elusiveness also motivates our investigation. For heuristic purposes, we will approach the Latin American critical tradition as a mosaic-like mode of inquiry composed of a complex multiplicity of different and independent traditions. Against this backdrop of a plural multiplicity of voices, ideas, and objects, our groups will read them in conjunction with Hallward’s Absolutely Postcolonial Writing: The Singular and the Specific.

One way or another, each of our disciplines must come to terms with this complex object or its absence, both on its own terms and as it is constructed and construed from without. To do so, we must carefully situate our individual disciplines and the trajectories of our research across the various challenges and questions that are currently being debated. In what ways do popu­lar and elite conceptions of nationalism intersect or diverge? What are the short-
Reimagining Global Politics: Power, Freedom, and Culture

Members

- Michael ‘Fitz’ Barrett, Department of History
- Nanjie Caihua, Department of Anthropology
- Toby Susan Goldbach, Law School
- Matt Hill, Department of Government
- Wendy Leutert, Department of Government
- Chan Suk Suh, Department of Sociology
- Rebecca Townsend, Department of History

This group aims to critically engage mainstream narratives in international relations and global politics. Its focus is the intellectual tension between critical theory’s critique of structural power and its constitutive implications for societal relations and identity in historically specific contexts. The group will study how sound constitutes and is constituted by the temporal, the spatial, and the social. Our discussions of sound studies, both in this and the earlier reading group, will allow us to reconceptualize these cultural-studies texts in terms of the co-implications of sound and space.

Today the interdisciplinary field of sound studies spans and draws into dialogue a range of disciplines and methodologies, including historical, theoretical, and ethnographic modes of critical inquiry; disciplinary trajectories located in both the humanities and the social sciences, and a broad spectrum of artistic and activist ventures. Our group will seek to highlight the spatial dimensions of sound within global political economy, exploring the ways in which sound is both produced and circulates in the contemporary moment, along with the need for scholars to understand sound and the sonic as resonating across seemingly innumerable sites of critical and cultural concern, but as doing so profoundly.

Thus, this second iteration of our reading group, “Sonorial Cartographies: Sound, Space, and Social Praxis,” takes as its point of departure the resonance of sound within transnational modernity, examining the relationships among sound, globalized and globalizing spaces, and the cultural and social experiences—material, spatial, and material-imaginary—of a modern world.

Specific topics the reading group will discuss include the following:

- Sovereignty, nationalism, and self-determination, imposition of imperial or colonial constructions of region and time, construction of North-South identities, gender, globalization, transnationalism, the role of framing and psychology in structuring the perspectives of actors and institutions, and the nature of power and strategic behavior.

- Drawing upon works primarily from political science, sociology, and anthropology, we will discuss these topics in the context of specific political and historical events, as well as at the theoretical level.

- Our group will begin by critically engaging the constitutive impact of power hierarchies on discourse and knowledge creation, through a selection of works by Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, Gayatiri Chakravorty Spivak, and Dipesh Chakrabarty. We will continue to consider the production and contestation of state sovereignty and its constitutive implications for societal relations and identity in works by writers including Christian Rees-Mogg, Antony Anholt, and Catherine MacKinnon. Building on this topic, we will examine understandings of nationalism and movements towards self-determination as both instances of internal structural political change and externally-inspired ideological entrepreneurship, through writings by authors including Eric Hobsbawm, Omar Dabbour, and Partha Chatterjee. The impact of imperial construction of spatial and historical time will be explored by reading James Ferguson, Uma Narayan, Donel Carson, and Tizuka Shibuji. The construction of North/South identities and the powerful impact of gender are discussed in writings including those by Faranak Mirzakhani, Louise van Gennip, and Deirdre Merriman. Writings from authors such as Sidney Tarrow, Aihwa Ong, Saskia Sassen, Peter Katzenstein, and Arjun Appadurai will focus on the tensions of power and hierarchy/agency, as illustrated by experiences (on both the national and individual levels) of globalization and transnationalism.

- Sonorial Cartographies: Sound, Space, and Social Praxis

Members

- Sam Dwnelll, Department of Music
- Arina Rotaru, Department of Performing and Media Arts
- Claire Hans, Department of Theater, Film and Dance
- Caroline Wight, Department of Music
- Jen-Hao Walter Hsu, Department of Performing and Media Arts
- Pei-chen Joan Chen, Department of Asian Studies

Proposal Submissions

Please include all of the following:

- 500-word statement of intent.
- Bibliography.
- List of the names, departmental affiliations, and e-mail addresses of the proposed group members, along with the curriculum vitae of each participant.

Submit proposals to Molly Kerker, ICM program coordinator: mck226@cornell.edu.

Deadline: Friday, March 1, 2013

Notifications will be sent out the week of March 25, 2013.
Recent Publications by ICM Members

Shirley Samuels
Advisory Board


ICM INTELLECTUAL VISION AND OBJECTIVES

The Institute for Comparative Modernities (ICM) addresses a key problem in the study of modern culture and society: the transnational history of modernity and its global scope. A broad range of scholarship over the last few decades has contested and complicated the two primary dimensions of the received narrative of modernity: that it arose strictly within the confines of Europe, and that its extension outside Europe was a matter of simple diffusion and imitation. The Institute is dedicated to the emerging study of modernity as a global process in which deep and multifarious interconnections have created complementary cultural formations.

The Institute’s primary emphasis falls on neglected or under-studied articulations of modernity outside of the historically constituted hegemonic spaces of Europe and the United States, but it also gives serious attention to conflicts and complexities within the West. Inadequate understandings of the complex history of modernity have led to simplistic and untenable positions that unknowingly repeat colonialism’s ideological juxtapositions of “us” and “them,” with modernity (and all the positive connotations of historical progress) on one side and inscrutable backwardness all on the other. This results in ghettoized scholarship that is damaging to all.

The standard equation of modernity with the West needs to be problematized and opened up to comparative examination. The Institute hopes to galvanize work in this direction by encouraging cross-disciplinary collaborative research that advances a genuinely global analysis of modernity that is also empirically faithful to geographical and historical specificity. By bringing attention to less frequently studied historical communities, the Institute hopes to correct accounts of modernity as primarily Western in origin and dynamics.
ICM 2011/2012 in pictures