

(GNDR 21400/31400; PLSC 21410/31410)
ADVANCED THEORIES OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY
Winter Quarter 2021

Course Description

Beginning with the fraught legacy of the New Left and the proliferation of “new social movements” such as feminism and gay liberation, this seminar explores the key debates around which gender and sexuality were articulated as tenacious but open structures of power subject to political critique and social transformation. The relatively stable yet dynamic character of what Gayle Rubin in 1975 famously called “the sex/gender system” raises basic questions of structure and event: (1) how are systemic relations of domination and rule historically constituted and sustained over time?; and (2) how can that which is regularly reproduced be not only momentarily interrupted, but fundamentally altered through both quotidian and extraordinary forms of action and worlding? The unexpected character of the new social movements, their contingent emergence in the real and imagined public spaces in which concerns associated with “ascriptive identities” had been all but foreclosed by the political grammars of both traditional Marxism and bourgeois liberalism, called for a radical rethinking of structures and their transformation. Haunted by unpredictable forms of resistance which did not flow from the mere fact of subordination itself, heteropatriarchal structures challenged theorists and activists to forge new frameworks of critique that refigured basic concepts of power, subjectivity, and agency. These frameworks are examined with an eye to how racialized sexuality and gender are created and contested in the context of modern biopolitical capitalism and its constitution of naturalized conceptions of rule.

Course Readings:

All required and many recommended readings are available on Canvas, listed under their weekly “modules.” An asterisk * denotes required reading. READ ESSAYS IN ORDER LISTED.

Course Requirements

You will submit one to two questions or a short critical comment to the instructors on the reading each week. These questions/comments should be carefully crafted and accompanied by textual passages that you would like to discuss. They should be sent to the instructors by 8:00 PM Central the day before class. Late questions cannot be considered for discussion. One 12-15 page paper (a close reading of one or two texts) is due by Friday, March 19th at 5:00 P.M. Central.

Zoom Protocol

To facilitate seminar discussion under Zoom conditions, please keep your video on and your microphone muted (when not speaking).

January 12/14

Introduction: Rethinking Systemic Oppression and Redress

Our first session takes up three influential texts, the first two of which survey the state of gender and sexuality theory in the wake of identity politics and the social transformations wrought by 1980s and 90s feminist and lgbtq activism: Wendy Brown’s “Wounded Attachments” (1993) and Eve Sedgwick’s “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading” (2003). Brown’s essay addresses the kind of political recognition that identity-based claims seek in liberal democracies and “the logics of pain in subject formation within late modernity” that subvert emancipatory projects. How do subjective investments in suffering keep “politicized identities” in the grip of rancor and resentment, rendering them reactive formations that lose track of the project of freedom and become perversely dependent on “sustained rejection by a hostile external world”? Similar questions are taken up in Sedgwick’s critique of “the hermeneutics of suspicion” in critical and queer theory. Drawing on Melanie Klein’s contrast of paranoid and reparative positions, her text explores theory production as entailing different political stakes and contrasting modes of attunement. The search for a systemic explanation of domination and suffering, as

George Shulman parses Sedgwick, “tends to anticipate injury and humiliation, precludes surprise, polarizes friend and enemy, and denies value to reparative action.” Expanding but also implicitly challenging the framings offered by Brown and Sedgwick, our third text, “Fugitive Justice” (2205) by Stephen Best and Saidiya Hartman, asks: “what “kinds of political claims can be mobilized on behalf of the slave (the stateless, the socially dead, and the disposable) in the political present?” Questioning what “redress” for slavery could possibly mean, they identify “the political interval [between the no longer and the not yet] in which all captives find themselves.” In this interval, “pragmatic political advance [mixed] with a long history of failure” gives rise to “fugitive forms of justice” that shuttle between unending grief and unanswerable grievance. What if the expectation of failure is not so much a paranoid but a realistic position? Might reparative and non-wounded attachments keep the future open at the cost of racialized self-blindness? Such questions will motivate Afropessimists (Week III), for whom the endless loop between grief and grievance cannot be negotiated but only exited. How can we think about modern forms of power in ways that capture at once their genuinely systemic features and their availability for transformation? What does it mean to talk about “white heteropatriarchal capitalism” as a “structure” that produces systemic forms of domination? And how can we do this in a way that remains radical in the etymological sense of going to the origins or the roots, while also remaining alive to radical politics in the sense of the unexpected, the spontaneous, that which could not have been anticipated or known?

Reading:

- * Wendy Brown, “Wounded Attachments,” *Political Theory* 21, no. 3 (1993): 390-410.
- * Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You,” in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Duke UP, 2003), 123-151.
- * Stephen Best and Saidiya Hartman, “Fugitive Justice,” *Representations* 92, no. 1 (Fall 2005): 1-15.

Recommended

Donna Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century” (1991).

Asma Abbas, *Liberalism and Human Suffering: Reflections on Politics, Ethics, and Aesthetics* (Palgrave, 2010).

January 19/21

II. Structures as Open Systems

In our second session we address the conceptual lexicon of structures. What do we mean when we talk about structures today? After the poststructuralist critique of structuralism, which arguably originated in Jacques Derrida’s “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” (1966/67), the idea of structures fell into disrepute. Derrida critically interrogated the “center” as that which anchors the structure and contains the free “play” of its elements, the “fixed point” that seems to escape the rule of structuralism: that all meaning is defined relationally. But even for those thinkers in the social and political sciences, who did not adopt the deconstructive approach pioneered by Derrida, the idea of structure came, in the 1980s and 1990s, to be increasingly burdened with aspirations towards totalization and closure, which led to the collapse of societies that implemented them in the fatal form of official public policy. Likewise, feminist and gay/lesbian theories of power, which too had originated in studies of structures (patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality), came slowly to relinquish that conceptual grammar to increasingly complex ideas of difference under pressures that were at once political and intellectual. And yet the concept itself did not disappear. “We [social scientists] find it impossible to do without the term ‘structure,’” observed William Sewell in 1992 and again in 2005—quickly adding: “we also find it nearly impossible to define it adequately.” The conundrum identified by the historian Sewell resonates with anyone trying to make sense of relations of subordination and domination, how they originate and how they are sustained. The relatively recent return to the study of “capitalism” and “patriarchy” in certain circles of contemporary critical thought, for example, suggests that the need to make sense of structures persists—but once again, what is a “structure”? Although there is no single answer, we can start by thinking of structures as open systems that conceal their dynamic and dependent character under the guise of necessity and inevitability—a fixed “center,” as Derrida put it, untouched by contingency and history. This creation of given reality is at the core of Gayatri Spivak’s influential idea of “worlding,” a central term of postcolonial criticism. Spivak explicates

worlding as the process through which the imposed structures of colonialism attain timeless reality and are reproduced by colonial subjects. Rejecting the idea that figures such as the “Third World Woman” can be undone by returning to the “untouched reality” of the colonies before colonialism, “worlding otherwise” would start by exposing the “fabrication of representations of historical reality,” whose power over subaltern subjects is lived as practical consciousness. But how?

Reading:

- * William Sewell, “A Theory of Structure” and “A Theory of the Event,” in *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*, (Chicago, 2005), 124-151, 197-224.
- * Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, 1978), 278-293.
- * Lee Morrissey, “Derrida, Algeria, and ‘Structure, Sign, and Play’,” *Postmodern Culture* 9, no. 2 (January 1999). [NOTE: AVAILABLE ONLINE]
- * Gayatri Spivak, “The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives,” *History and Theory* 24, no. 3 (October 1985): 247-272.

Recommended:

- Gayatri Spivak, “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism,” *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985):243-261.
- _____, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, eds. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (MacMillan, 1988), 271-313.
- William Sewell, “Historical Events as Transformations of Structures,” “Refiguring the ‘Social’ in Social Science: An Interpretivist Manifesto,” *Logics of History*, 225-270, 318-372.
- George Steinmetz, “Logics of History” as a Framework for an Integrated Social Science;” Dylan Riley, “The Historical Logic of Logics of History: Language and Labor in William Sewell Jr.,” David Pedersen, “Keeping it Real: Semiotic Practice and Fateful Temporality in William Sewell’s Logics of History,” William H. Sewell Jr., “Response to Steinmetz, Riley, and Pedersen,” in *Social Science History* 32, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 535-593.
- Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (Bloomsbury, 2019 [1988]).
- Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Duke UP, 2011).
- Caroline Williams, “Structure and Subject,” in *Edinburgh Companion to Poststructuralism*

January 26/28

III. Structures of Late Capitalist Modernity

Our third session addresses contemporary (re)turns to the language of structures in the debate over heteropatriarchal and racial capitalism. Recent efforts to rethink capitalism through the prism of race and sex/gender build on but also radically depart from earlier attempts to square non-class relations of domination with the inherited conceptual vocabulary of Marxism, especially its central category of “exploitation.” Focused on the wage relation, earlier accounts of gender and race tended to locate these at the level of the “superstructure”: reproducing the worker (e.g., housework) and dividing workers against each other (e.g., racial animus). With class as the primary social antagonism, race and gender were understood as “identities.” By contrast with the structural character of class (i.e., the proletariat is not an “identity” but a “position” that stands in antagonistic relation to the bourgeoisie within capitalist “relations of production”), gender and race are derivative forms of oppression that will dissolve along with their root, the class relation, in the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. Simplistic though this characterization may be, it captures a central feature of earlier attempts to make visible gender and race as categories of social division: namely, the occlusion of the “conditions of possibility” for capitalism qua structure,” which Nancy Fraser calls Marx’s “hidden abodes.” To make these conditions visible, we need to change our focus from “the front-story of exploitation to the back-story of expropriation,” the story of accumulating capital through episodic and everyday acts of (often violent) dispossession and appropriation quite outside the wage relation. This move, claims Fraser, amounts to “a major epistemic shift, which casts everything that went before in a different light.” In his reply to Fraser, Michael Dawson argues that her new story fails to account for “the hidden abode of race”: the ontological distinction between superior and inferior humans—coded as race—that was necessary for slavery, colonialism, the thefts of the lands in the Americas, and genocide.”

Dawson's critique, which raises the question of "the human" as a fundamental term of social division that underwrites expropriation, is taken in a significantly more radical direction by Afropessimist thinkers Frank Wilderson, III and Orlando Patterson. For them, anti-Blackness rather than class is *the* founding division of the modern social order, that which divides those who are in the orbit of the human and those who are not. "This division is not contingent, it is structural and, above all, gratuitous." This ontological division in the human itself is irreducible and irreparable, i.e., not available for political articulation into a new hegemony or common sense that unites diverse oppressed groups. Like class, Black is not an identity but a structural position; unlike class, slavery is distinguished not by intensified exploitation of labor but by 'social death.' Modernity emerges in the equation of slavery as social death with blackness, and this social death for those marked as black is the disavowed condition of possibility for the economy and culture of those defining themselves as human. "Afro-pessimism is premised on the idea of a categorical antagonism that cannot be transcended. Or that can only be transcended through a war that is and is not a mere civil war; a war that would be waged against the very concept of humanity since this concept is indeed the Trojan horse which trapped us in a permanent state of death," observes Achille Mbembe. How can we remain alert to "the *historical processes* by which "blackness" was *invented* as an "ontological" category, in any case as a legal category, as a social status, and more importantly as the hole into which the distinction between the human and the non-human vanishes"? he invites us to ask. How can we keep in view the reality of an ontological cut in the human while critically foregrounding its historical construction?

Reading:

- * Nancy Fraser, "Behind Marx's Hidden Abode: For an Expanded Conception of Capitalism," *New Left Review* 86 (March-April 2014): 55-71. "Legitimation Crisis? On the Political Contradictions of Financialized Capitalism," *Critical Historical Studies* (Fall 2015): 157-189;
- * Michael Dawson, "Hidden in Plain Sight: A Note on Legitimation Crises and the Racial Order," and Nancy Fraser, Expropriation and Exploitation in Racialized Capitalism: A Reply to Michael Dawson, *Critical Historical Studies* (Spring 2016): 143-161; 163-178].
- * Orlando Patterson, "The Constituent Elements of Slavery," *Slavery and Social Death* (Harvard UP, 1982), 1-16.
- * Frank Wilderson, III, "Gramsci's Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?," *Social Identities* 9, no. 2 (2003): 225-241; F. Wilderson in Conversation with Saidiya Hartman, "The Position of the Unthought," *Qui Parle* (Spring/Summer 2003): 183-201.
- * In Conversation: Achille Mbembe and David Theo Goldberg on Critique of Black Reason <https://www.theoryculturesociety.org/blog/interviews-achille-mbembe-david-theo-goldberg-critique-black-reason>

Recommended:

- Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Laurent Dubois (Duke UP, 2017).
- Stuart Hall, "Gramsci and 'Us'," in *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (Verso, 1988). 161-174.
- Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 2nd edition (Verso, 2001[1985]).
- Lewis Gordon, Annie Menzel, George Shulman, and Jasmine Syedullah, "Afro pessimism: A Critical Exchange," *Contemporary Critical Theory* 17, no. 1 (2017): 105-137.
- Frank Wilderson, III, *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Duke UP, 2010).

February 2/4

IV. The "Sex Gender System"

In this session we (re)read Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women" (1975) together with Hortense Spiller's "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" (1987) and "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words" as related but different ways of theorizing hegemonic practices of kinship and the modern constitution of "the human." Working with Engels and Levi-Strauss to explain the "structural positioning" of women in patriarchy, Rubin sought to explain the exchange of women (as quasi-human objects) as the very condition of 'human' life and culture. Drawing on Freud and Lacan, she went on to examine the

ongoing reproduction of heteronormativity and men's property in women through psychic forms of internalization. The differences that chattel slavery instituted in this sex/gender system of exchange, left undiscussed by Rubin, are the topic of Spiller's classic essay. The origins of modern forms of gender in Spiller's view cannot be grasped apart from the world constituting power of white supremacy. Foreclosed from entry into the sex/gender system, female slaves were reduced to "flesh." In Spiller's account, it is not the heteropatriarchal exchange of women's bodies as such but the enslaved black female body that became "the principle point of passage between the human and the non-human world." What are the consequences of this reduction to "flesh" for how we understand modern gender construction and theories of embodiment? Spiller's text would be later taken up by Afropessimists as a founding critical statement on the ontology of antiblackness, whereby "black" is not an "identity" but a structural position characterized by a form of radical and nonreparative exclusion. But her own view of the legacy of slavery and the possibilities opened up Black maternal flesh and Black women's sexuality are more complex. What does it mean to think about gender versus racialized flesh as structural positions versus identities? What political consequences follow from an equation of either the "feminine" or (female) "flesh" with non-being and as the inaugurating foundation of modernity? How do Rubin and/or Spillers make visible this exclusion while remaining open to different futures?

Reading:

- * Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes Towards a Political Economy of Sex," in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Duke UP 2011).
- * Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 64-81.
- * _____, "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words," *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago, 2003), 152-175.

Recommended:

- Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, et al., "Whatcha Gonna Do?: Revisiting 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book,'" *Women's Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 2007): 299-309.
- Saidiya Hartman, "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors," *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 18, no. 1 (January-Mrarch 2016):166-173.
- _____, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)
- _____, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2008).
- Tiffany Lethabo King, Black 'Feminisms' and Pessimism: Abolishing Moynihan's Negro Family," *Theory & Event* 21, no. 1 (January 2018): 68-87.

February 9/11

V. Sexuality and Biopolitics

This session examines Gayle Rubin's 1984 essay, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" and Michel Foucault's 1976 *The History of Sexuality* (Vol. I), two founding texts of queer theory. Foucault critically questioned the "repressive hypothesis": the established view that the development of capitalism was characterized by increased sexual repression. Rather than silence, the seventeenth century onwards saw a "veritable discursive explosion." This "incitement to discourse" was accompanied by the increasing encroachment of the state into the realm of private desire: "one had to speak of [sex] as of a thing to be not simply condemned or tolerated but managed, inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good of all, made to function according to an optimum. Sex was not something one simply judged; it was a thing one administered." The subsequent reception of *HSI*, argues Penelope Deutscher, has tended to divide into two camps: those who read it through the "prism of biopolitics (vector of governmentality, management, administration and intensification of life)" and those who read it through the "prism of sex (vector through which the repressive hypothesis is rejected)." Taking up Foucault's rejection of biological or libidinal explanations of sexuality, Rubin powerfully elaborated the prism of sex by analyzing various mechanisms of sexual stratification through which certain sexual acts and identities are codified as deviant

and criminalized. Departing from feminist theory and her own earlier argument in “The Traffic in Women,” Rubin held that that a critical account of sexual variation cannot work through the category of gender but requires “an autonomous theory and politics specific to sexuality.” Sexuality is a distinct and nonderivative vector of systemic oppression. Partly in reaction to Rubin’s reading, the feminist critique of Foucault read him as unconcerned with sexual difference or theories of reproduction that center relations of gender domination. Receptions of *HSI* catalyzed the virtual splitting of the tasks and objects of feminist and queer theory in the 1980s. But what if we were to read Foucault’s account of the socialization of procreative sexuality or reproduction, as Deutscher suggests, through a different prism, “that of reproductive biopolitics, one of a number of phenomena operating at the nexus between the biopolitical administering of life and the biopolitical intensification of sex”? On this shared terrain of biopolitics and sexuality, not only the “sexual deviant” but also the “reproductive woman” are key figures.

Reading:

*Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I: An Introduction*, trans. R. Hurley (Random House, 1980).

*Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Duke UP 2011). [NOTE: FOR THIS READING GO TO “DEVIATIONS” IN MODULE IV]

*Penelope Deutscher, “Foucault’s History of Sexuality, Vol I: Re-reading its Reproduction,” *Theory, Culture, and Society* 29, no. 1 (2012): 119-137.

Recommended:

Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended, Lecture 11 (March 1976)*, 239-264.

Penelope Deutscher, *Foucault’s Futures: A Critique of Reproductive Reason* (Columbia UP 2017).

Rostom Mesli, “Gayle Rubin’s Concept of ‘Benign Sexual Variation,’” *South Atlantic Quarterly* (October 2015): 803-826.

Thomas Lemke, *Biopolitics: An Advanced Introduction* (NYU Press, 2011).

February 16/18

VI. Sexual Hegemonies of Historical Capitalism

In our fifth session we read *Sexual Hegemony: Statecraft, Sodomy, and Capital in the Rise of the World System* (2020), the posthumously published work of Christopher Chitty, which builds on concepts of hegemony derived from Gramscian Marxism and the historical construction of sexuality derived from Foucault. “A relationship of sexual hegemony exists wherever sexual norms benefiting a dominant social group shape the sexual conduct and self-understandings of other groups, whether or not they also stand to benefit from such norms and whether or not they can achieve them.” Hegemony captures the labile nature of power, its reproduction and its undoing, as a lived system of meaning and values experienced in and through practical consciousness. “A lived hegemony is always a process. It is not, except analytically, a system or a structure,” writes Raymond Williams. And it needs to be understood in and through struggle: “it does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all of its own.” The historical formation and dissolution of sexual hegemonies, argues Chitty, demands a “queer realist” account that tracks emergent capitalism. If the premises of queer theory are often seen as antithetical to a historical materialist understanding of the origins of capitalism, this is in no small measure due to a certain reading of *HSI*. According to Chitty, Foucault was an astute reader of Marx’s *Capital Volume I*, but to draw the materialist story of the “history” Foucault tells in *HSI* requires a little “massaging” of its basic thesis. Foucault sees that sexuality could only appear problematic for societies in which human life is augmented by new technologies, optimizing the powers of individual bodies according to disciplinary norms, so that they were increasingly productive. It can only appear problematic for societies in which human life is reproduced and regulated by economic pressures and objectives, or biopolitics. The underarticulated premise of that Foucauldian argument, says Chitty, is that sexuality could only become a problem for societies in which communities of producers have been separated from their means of production. At what Foucault calls the “biopolitical threshold of modernity” is the development of large-scale industry in the factory system, replacing manufacture and handicraft production, which forced women and children onto the job

market, creating anxieties regarding illicit sex among the poor and giving rise to the famous Malthusian concerns of the nineteenth century discussed in *HSI* and highlighted by Deutscher. Rereading *HSI*, Chitty brings together what Deutscher called “the prism of sex” and the “prism of biopolitics” to generate a historical materialist history of sexuality that, though Foucauldian in spirit, moves significantly beyond the argument of *HSI* and offers promising trajectories for contemporary queer theory. Refusing to dematerialize what Foucault understood by “discourse” and the “incitement” to it, Chitty offers a powerful critique of tendencies in queer theory to “hypothesize Foucault’s categories of power and resistance into a free floating normativity standing above an equally nebulous resistance potential, subversion among queers.”

Reading:

- * Raymond Williams, “Hegemony,” “Ideology,” and “Structures of Feeling” in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford UP, 1977).
- * Christopher Chitty, *Sexual Hegemony: Statecraft, Sodomy, and Capital in the Rise of the World System* (Duke UP, 2020).

Recommended:

Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (International Publishers, 1971).

February 23/25

VII. Patriarchy, Capitalism, and Primitive Accumulation

In our sixth session we read the classic feminist work of Silvia Federici: *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*. Taking up the 16th and 17th century witch hunts in Europe, Federici tells a feminist story that “rarely appears in the history of the proletariat.” To this day, she observes, the witch-hunt remains one of the most understudied phenomena in European history—this despite the fact that by the 17th century, at least 100,000 (mostly peasant) women were killed, and many more had their lives destroyed by accusation. Further, the killing of witches were public events that often involved new and sadistic forms of torture approaching the 1757 torture and vivisection that opens Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, which examines changes in modern forms of power. By the 16th century, the charges shifted from being primarily about religious beliefs to concentrating on sexual perversion, infanticide, and reproduction. Federici thus sees herself as offering a feminist critique of Marxist accounts of class formation and Foucauldian analyses of the body and its place in our understanding of power and capitalist development. Hundreds of thousands of women could not have been massacred and tortured unless they posed a challenge to the existing feudal, and the emerging capitalist, structures of power. The witch hunt was no mere relic of a dying feudal world, as Enlightenment stories about the imbricated development of capitalism and rationalism would have it. It was integral to the triumph of mercantile capitalism, for which peasant resistance to land privatization and the reproductive power and nonreproductive sexuality of peasant women were all real and perceived threats. The witch hunt occurred simultaneously with the colonization and extermination of populations of the New World, the English enclosures, the beginning of the slave trade, and the criminalization of vagabonds and beggars. What would Foucault have seen had he started his story about sexuality and biopower with the witch hunt (instead of focusing on the pastoral confession)? What would Marx have seen had he examined what he otherwise described as the brutal violence of capitalist primitive accumulation through the viewpoint of the witch? How does Federici’s retelling of the history of capitalism through the violence against and appropriation of poor women’s bodies alter our understanding of heteropatriarchal capitalism today?

Reading:

- * Silvia Federici: *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (Automeia, 2004).

Recommended:

Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*, 3rd edition (Zed, 2014 [1986]). [chapter]

March 2/4

VIII. Biocapitalist Reproductive Politics, Settler Colonialism, and the Slave Episteme

In the last lecture of “*Society must be Defended*” and in the last chapter of *The History of Sexuality (Vol. I)*, Foucault noticed how biopolitics or the positive power over life can become a deadly form of power. It is not only a “calculated management of life” but also a “power to expose a whole population to death.” For Foucault, biopower seeks to control and optimize both the individual human body and the species body (population). Central to biopolitics is the calculation of life, turning life, and by extension death, into something that can be measured, administered, and the object of state and market intervention. We have seen how, in *HSI*, Foucault tied the emergence of biopower to the incitement to discourse around sexuality; in his later work he explicitly related it to race and racism, but his historical focus was on the Nazi and Stalinist regimes. As Achille Mbembe and Alexander Weheliye observe, Foucault neglected to examine New World slavery, European colonialism, and settler colonialism as biopolitical formations, just as he neglected questions of gendered bodies. This session examines the biopolitical commodification of human bodies in historical and contemporary capitalism through the legacy of New World slavery and settler colonialism. As two imbricated but distinct racial regimes, each was constructed and sustained through the regulation of sexual relations, gender identity, marriage and reproduction. We begin with Jennifer Morgan’s foundational work, which investigates the “paradigms that enabled the exchange of human commodities” and how “race became the key to enslavability.” European accounts of the monstrous sexuality of the African woman provided ideological ballast to an emerging view of naturalized and inheritable slavery. White male obsessions with African women’s bodies took the form of a growing arsenal of representations of the “unnatural” reproductive behavior of African women and black maternity. These became part of what Morgan shows to be the gendered ideology of inheritable, racialized slavery, whose reproductive logic sustained the idea of enslaved people as originally “dispossessed, outside of the normal network of family and community” in order to produce the next generation of slaves. Building on the work of scholars who see capitalism and slavery as co-constitutive, Alys Eve Weinbaum examines the racial and gender logics of the “slave episteme” that underwrites contemporary reproductive technologies and commodification. “In all situations in which human biological life is commodified, processes of commodification must be understood as subtended by a long history of slave breeding as it was practiced in the Americas and Carribean.” Looking at the formation of settler colonialism, Andrea Smith’s and Breonna Theobald’s essays investigate the specificity of settler colonial contexts, where what Patrick Wolfe calls the “logic of elimination” constitutes a rather different reproductive biopolitics from chattel slavery. How has settler colonialism as an ongoing “structure [of indigenous destruction] rather than a historical event” shaped reproductive politics and placed the female body at the center of historical and contemporary strategies of racialization?

Reading:

- * Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Pennsylvania, 2004), ch. 1., 12-49. [NOTE: THIS BOOK IS AVAILABLE AT THE LIBRARY ONLINE]
- * ____ Partus sequitur ventrem: Law, Race, and Reproduction in Colonial Slavery,” *Small Axe* 55 (March 2018): 1-17.
- * Aly Eve Weinbaum, *The Afterlife of Reproductive Slavery: Biocapitalism and Black Feminism’s Philosophy of History* (Duke UP, 2019), chs. 1-2, 1-60.
- * Andrea Smith, “ ‘Better Dead than Pregnant’: The Colonization of Native Women’s Reproductive Health,” in *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Duke UP, 2015), 79-108.
- * Breonna Theobald, “Settler Colonialism, Native American Motherhood, and the Politics of Terminating Pregnancies,” in *Transcending Borders: Abortion in the Past and the Present*, ed. S. Stettner et al. (Palgrave, 2017), 221-237.

Recommended:

- Scott L. Morgensen, “The Biopolitics of Settler Colonialism,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 1 (2011): 52-76.
- Dylan Rodriguez, *White Reconstruction: Domestic Warfare and the Logics of Genocide* (Fordham, 2021).
- Breonna Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Colonialism in the Long Twentieth Century* (North Carolina, 2020).
- Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387-409.

Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Settler Colonialism as Structure: A Framework for Comparative Studies of U.S. Race and Gender Formation," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1, no. 1 (2014): 55-74.

March 9/11

IX. Genres of the "Human"

In *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966), Foucault memorably described the appearance of "the figure of man" as "the effect of a change in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge. If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared," he added, "one can certainly wager that man would be erased. As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end." Foucault's startling observation was taken up in many fields of study to announce "man" as a historical rather than natural being, and one that would soon meet its end. Among these, so-called "posthumanist" studies, which took off in the 1990s, invoked this idea of man to contest Enlightenment ideas of sovereignty, agency and a whole range of subject/object distinctions that undergirded capitalist technoscience and the mastery of "nature." However subversive posthumanism's conceptual point of departure, argues Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, it remained committed to a specific order of rationality, one rooted in the epistemological locus of the West and thus in its history of colonialism, slavery, and heteropatriarchy. The call to become "post modern" and "post human," which animated an enormous body of Western critical theory, was viewed by many scholars of race and gender with uneasy skepticism. It is easy to relinquish a category in which your membership has gone unquestioned. And yet this assumes that excluded groups merely seek their inclusion into the "human" understood as "Man." In our final session, we read challenges to that view, including the work of Jackson, Sylvia Wynter, and Mel Chen. If nonhuman animals have been the ground against and out of which human identity has been defined—an operation that Giorgio Agamben refers to as the working of the "anthropological machine"—how has that ground been figured and how might it be figured differently? What is the relationship between what Cary Wolf calls the "discourse of species" and racialized gender and sexuality? Following the transformative scholarship of Wynter and her call for new "genres of the human," of which Man was only one, we explore departures from biocentric and teleological accounts of the human that abject the animal and are mutually imbricated in the structures of power with which this course began. Wynter's refusal to reduce the human to biological properties and her fierce insistence on the co-emergence of the human as symbolic and biological, a "hybrid" or bio-mythic being "born of the womb . . . [and] reborn [through story] . . . *homo narans*," animates Jackson's *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiracist World*. Jackson challenges prevailing ontologies through an account of "ontological plasticity" that shows the limits of former critiques of exclusion and bestialization as the source of antiracism. Uncovering antiracism in the very constitution of the human/animal divide, not simply as a feature ascribed to racialized peoples after the fact, Jackson critiques the identification of the "fleshly being of blackness" with animal abjection as the condition of reimagining the human. Mel Chen's *Animacies: Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (2012), extends the inquiry opened up by Wynter and Jackson into the creation of the human/animal distinction that undergirds "Man" and its biopolitical regime. More skeptical of the argument that humans alone possess language, Chen holds that it has been used to render sexual, racial, and national others less animate, via comparison to animals. The representational politics of hierarchies in animacy, however, misrecognize the ways that affect subverts—or queers—these linear hierarchies as nonhuman matter makes affective demands on humans, thus also confounding racial, gendered, and sexualized orders. Refusing to allow the figure of Man to occupy the entire sociosymbolic space of "the human," each author charts new forms of worlding that draw on past practices and discourses, outside the orbit of sex/gender systems and European modernity's self-understanding.

Reading:

- * Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, "Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations," in Katherine McKittrick, ed., *Sylvia Wynter, On Being Human as Praxis* (Duke UP, 2015), 9-89.
- * Zimitri Erasmus, "Sylvia Wynter's Theory of the Human: Counter-, not Post-humanist," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 37, no. 6 (2020): 47-65.

- * Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiracist World* (NYU Press, 2020), selections.
- * Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Duke UP, 2012), selections.

Recommended:

- David Scott and Sylvia Wynter, "The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter," *Small Axe* 8 (September 2000): 119-207.
- Greg Thomas, "Sex/Sexuality and Sylvia Wynter's 'Beyond .. .': Anti-Colonial Ideas in 'Black Radical Tradition,'" *Journal of West Indian Literature* 10, no. 1 & 2, Special Issue on Sylvia Wynter: A Transculturalist Rethinking of Modernity (November 2001): 92-118.
- Alex Weheliye, "Blackness: The Human," *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Duke UP, 2014).
- Elizabeth A. Povinelli, "The Ends of Humans: Anthropocene, Autonomism, Antagonism, and the Illusions of Our Epoch," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* (April 2017): 293-310.