MODERNITIES IN STRUGGLE: ECONOMIES, POLITIES, CULTURES

Anth 897-53 (Escobar); Comm 754 (Grossberg); Geog 804-2 (Pickles)

Fall 2008       Tuesdays   5-7:50 PM, GEC 1005

Course description

This class will address the questions of how one might revisit ways of thinking about economic realities and relations in the contemporary world by focusing on questions of “economies” and “globalizations” from the perspective of “modernities.” Yet the argument of the class is that such matters (economies and globalizations) cannot be understood in isolation, either from the systems of relations in which they are constituted and operate, or from the broader ethical, cultural and political concerns of the contemporary context. These challenges become all the greater when one consider the growing assumption, common among many scholars and researchers, that we are in a highly transitional moment in terms of both institutional and everyday lives. The challenge is, as Stuart Hall put it, to find ways “to interpret how a society is changing in ways that are not amenable to the immediate political language.” Similarly Boaventura de Sousa Santos—an architect of the World Social Forum movement—suggests that, on a planetary scale, “we are facing modern problems for which there are no modern solutions”.

Disciplinary knowledge is, to a large extent, predicated on the “modern” fragmentation of the social formation into relatively autonomous and often fetishized spheres, such as economy, politics, culture, and nature and largely overlooking or oversimplifying the intricate flows and relations among them. In this class, we propose to look at economies—and, to a lesser extent, polities and cultures—as deeply relational domains; in so doing, the class attempts to de-essentialize these categories and to re-theorize them by embracing the complexity, hybridity, and multiplicity not only of social formations, technologies and organizations of power, forms of agency, individualities and collectivities but also of the forms and practices of mediation and articulation, constituting contemporary economic—and political and cultural—realities. To achieve this end, we believe we need to develop interdisciplinary ways of thinking about these challenges by hypothesizing the possibility and even existence of a multiplicity of modernities (against the most commonly held views of either a universal modernity or alternative modernities that are variations of the universal one). Thinking about economies and globalizations thus entails thinking in new ways about modernity—indeed, in terms of multiple modernities and modernities in struggle.

We do not intend to offer a linear narrative of intellectual progress and transcendence, but rather, a nonlinear and relational logic of reading that will enable us to think about the different ways in which economies and globalization (as spatio-temporal modes of being-in-the-world-together)—and with those, nature, knowledge, and value—have been and are being constituted as having particular sorts of existences and effects.

The course will be structured by three axes: historical conjunctures, theoretical perspectives on modernity and the economy, and epistemologies, as follows (keep in mind that all of these are not so much descriptions about “the real” as discourses about history, economy, and knowledge):

--Three historical conjunctures: First Euro-Modernity (1492-1870); corporate capitalist/consumer modernity (1870-1970); contemporary conjuncture (1973-present?) --although the class will focus largely on the last of these (the possibility of a new conjuncture at present is an idea that may emerge from the class.)
--Three theoretical perspectives on modernity and the economy: a single, universal modernity; alternative modernities; multiple modernities, with their corresponding views of “the economy” -- although the class will focus largely on the last of these.

--Three epistemologies: mainstream realism (e.g., positivism, objectivism); social constructionism and deconstruction; post-constructivist realism (radical constructivism, the thought of the multiplicity), although the class will focus largely on exploring the implications of the last of these, as theories of relationality: e.g., embeddedness, contextuality, articulation, complexity, spatiality (scale), networks, assemblages and immanence; this may also include locating knowledge (and the academy) in a post-enlightenment world; re-theorizing social totalities; reconceptualizing globalization as a pluriverse of modernities.

Readings and discussions will attempt to think about particular issues from the perspective of the various intersections and trajectories across these axes.

**A Laboratory Approach**

It is our hope that the interdisciplinary approach called for by this seminar will foster new pedagogical practices and practices of intellectual debate, creation, and collaboration. We hope to encourage a set of “experiments” and “laboratory practices” in this regard that even go beyond our efforts to take a multidimensional approach to the concerns of the class (including, e.g., ways to write and present notes on books not on the syllabus, interviews, collaborative presentation and writing projects, imaginative use of class time, web-based material, and so forth). Although the class size will pose a limitation in the degree of innovation we might be able to develop collectively, we encourage all participants to think about this aspect of the seminar.

**Course Requirements and Grading**

All participants are expected to do the readings before each session, attend, and participate in discussions.

Participants will also be responsible for periodic group reports

The requirements also include one semester paper or project, or two shorter papers or projects. These are due by the day set for the exam in the case of the former, and by Thanksgiving and the day of exam in the latter case. Papers and projects can be experimental in form, content, and presentation (encouraged), or they can be part of an on-going (proposal writing, dissertation development, etc.). In either case, the content needs to be explicitly linked to and draw upon the content and readings of the seminar to a large degree.

**Weekly Topics**

**Introductions**

1. August 19. Cultural studies, questions of economies and a laboratory-experimental practice
2. August 26. Three views of modernities (universal, alternative, multiple)
3. September 2. Three conjunctures/three (and more) modernities
5. September 16. Three theoretical paradigms (realism-empiricism; social constructionism; radical constructionism/new realism)
Experiments 1
6. September 23. The economy as object
7. September 30. The economy as institutional and cultural practice
(October 14-- No class for Fall break)

Experiments 2
10. October 28. Markets, norms and values
12. November 11. Dematerializing (and rematerializing) economies: information/culture/finance
13. November 18. continued (Knowledge and education)
(November 25—no class for Thanksgiving)
14. December 2. Diverse economies

READINGS

1. Cultural studies, questions of economies and a laboratory-experimental practice
   (August 19)

   No readings

2. Three views of modernity/ies: universal, alternative, multiple (August 26)


3. Three conjunctures/three modernities (September 2)


Antonio Gramsci, “Americanism and Fordism”


http://media.pfeiffer.edu/lridener/courses/WORLDSYS.HTML

http://www.binghamton.edu/fbc/iwwsa-r&.htm


4. Three conjunctures, continued (September 9)

David Harvey, *The condition of postmodernity*. Chs. 9-11 (pp. 141-97).


Nick Dyer-Witherspoon, *Cyber-Marx*, ch. 2 (Revolutions), pp. 15-37,


5. Three theoretical paradigms: realism-empiricism; social constructionism; radical constructionism/new realism (September 16).


6. The construction of the economy as object (September 23)


7. The economy as institutional and cultural practice (September 30)


*Case Study: Neoliberalism and shock therapy in post-socialist Europe:*

Michael Peters. “Neoliberalism, Hayek, and the Austrian School.”
http://www.vusst.hr/ENCYCLOPAEDIA/neoliberalism.htm

8. Nature/culture (October 7)


De la Cadena, Marisol. 2007. “Taking Indigenous Politics in its Own Terms Requires an Analysis Beyond ‘Politics’.” Unpublished ms, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Davis.


9. Persons, collectivities, property (October 21)


10. Markets, norms, and values (October 28)


11. Globalization (November 4)

Part 1: Spacing the Global


Doreen Massey, “Is the world getting larger or smaller," Open Democracy online: [http://www.opendemocracy.net/node/4354/pdf](http://www.opendemocracy.net/node/4354/pdf)

Doug Henwood. *After the New Economy*. Chapter 4: Globalization (pp. 145-186).


Peter Coclanis. Selected op ed pieces from the *News and Observer*.

Part 2: Human geography without scale and the ontological turn


Collinge, Chris. 2006. "Flat ontology and the deconstruction of scale: a response to Marston, Jones and Woodward". *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Volume 31, Number 2, June, pp. 244-251


12. Dematerializing and rematerializing economies: Information/culture/finance (November 11)


Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Empire, Chs. 3 and 4 (280-303)


Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. 1972. Anti-Oedipus. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press. Chs. 3-9, 10 (222-262)


Brian Massumi, "Fear (the spectrum said)." Positions 13 (2005)

http://multitudes.samizdat.net/Fear-The-spectrum-said.html
13. Continued: Knowledge and education (November 18)


14. Diverse Economies (December 2)


Boaventura de Sousa Santos. 2007. En B. Santos, ed. *Another Production is Possible*. London: Verso, pp. xvii – lxii


Timothy Mitchell, ”The properties of markets: Informal Housing and Capitalism’s Mystery” on line.


**Some background readings**


Some useful WEBSITES

Some useful websites on economics and economic thought:

Post-autistic economics network: [http://www.paecon.net/](http://www.paecon.net/)
Commanding Heights: The Battle for the World Economy
The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism
The New Economics Foundation: [www.neweconomics.org](http://www.neweconomics.org)
Manuel De Landa. European Graduate School Lectures 2006 1-8:

Some websites on globalization, economy, and development:

The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation's *What Next* project: [http://www.dhfuu.se/default.html](http://www.dhfuu.se/default.html)
The World is Flat?: [http://www.mkpress.com/Flat/](http://www.mkpress.com/Flat/)
The New Economics Foundation: [www.neweconomics.org](http://www.neweconomics.org)
Navdanya and the Research Foundation for science, Technology and Ecology, India
Focus on the Global South (Focus): [http://www.focusweb.org/](http://www.focusweb.org/)
Third World Forum / Forum di Tiers Monde: [http://www.forumtiersmonde.net/fren/index.htm](http://www.forumtiersmonde.net/fren/index.htm)

Some websites on carbon trading:

[http://www.greenchipstocks.com/subscribe/2193?gclid=CJ-v5e-Ok5UCFQNaFQodAiHDFg](http://www.greenchipstocks.com/subscribe/2193?gclid=CJ-v5e-Ok5UCFQNaFQodAiHDFg)
[https://climatefriendly.com/shop?gclid=COTFxZKPk5UCFQVxFQod4ioNgw](https://climatefriendly.com/shop?gclid=COTFxZKPk5UCFQVxFQod4ioNgw)
[http://www.carbonfund.org/?gclid=CNnZ8uyRk5UCFRoSFQodYU67AQ](http://www.carbonfund.org/?gclid=CNnZ8uyRk5UCFRoSFQodYU67AQ)