

Feminist Interdisciplinary Histories and Methods (WST 600)

Prof. Lisa Diedrich

Spring 2024 | Thursdays 1-3:50

Office hours: W 2:30-4:30 & Th 4-5 (or by appointment)

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[Method image: Ruth Asawa, Untitled (BMC.127, Meander in Green, Orange, and Brown), c. 1946–49]

Rather than begin with an exploration of “the” feminist methodology in Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, or an account of “the” history of feminism, this course will explore what counts as “history,” as “method,” and as “evidence” in feminist scholarship. Since its emergence as a distinct knowledge project within the academy, feminism has raised questions about how we know what we know, who gets to speak and for whom, and what are legitimate fields of inquiry. Our goal will be to trace some of the ways in which feminist scholars have sought to intervene in debates about disciplinary as opposed to interdisciplinary forms of knowledge, objective as opposed to “situated” knowledge, evidence versus experience, history versus fiction, etc. A central part of the feminist project for many scholars has been an engagement in the self-reflexive questioning of the status, history, methods, and goals of feminist scholarship. This course will continue that practice. To that end, students are encouraged to engage with course material with their own projects in mind, and to use the course to be self-reflexive about the concepts, methods, and materials they are drawn to in their graduate and post-graduate work.

Course texts:

- Alison Bechdel, *Are You My Mother? A Comic Drama* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012).
- Marika Cifor, *Viral Cultures: Activist Archiving in the Age of AIDS* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2022).
- Jaime Cortez, *Sexile* (Los Angeles and New York: The Institute for Gay Men's Health, 2004).
- *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution* (dirs. Nicole Newnham and James LeBrecht, 2020; 106 mins.)
- Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2020).
- Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2021).
- Max Liboiron, *Pollution Is Colonialism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2021).
- Christina Sharpe, *Ordinary Notes* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2023).
- Ashley Shew, *Against Technoableism: Rethinking Who Needs Improvement* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2023).
- J. Logan Smilges, *Crip Negativity* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2023).
- Bishakh Som, *Spellbound: A Graphic Memoir* (Brooklyn: Street Noise Books, 2020).

Course schedule:

Jan 25: Introductions: key terms, concepts, methods

Feb 1: Key terms and concepts (History + Philosophy): genealogy + "experience"

- Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977): 139-164. (BS)
- Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," in *Critical Inquiry* 17:4 (summer 1991), pp 773-797 (BS)



[Method image: Still from John Akomfrah's *The Stuart Hall Project*, 2013, digital video, color and black- and-white, sound, 103 minutes. Stuart Hall.]

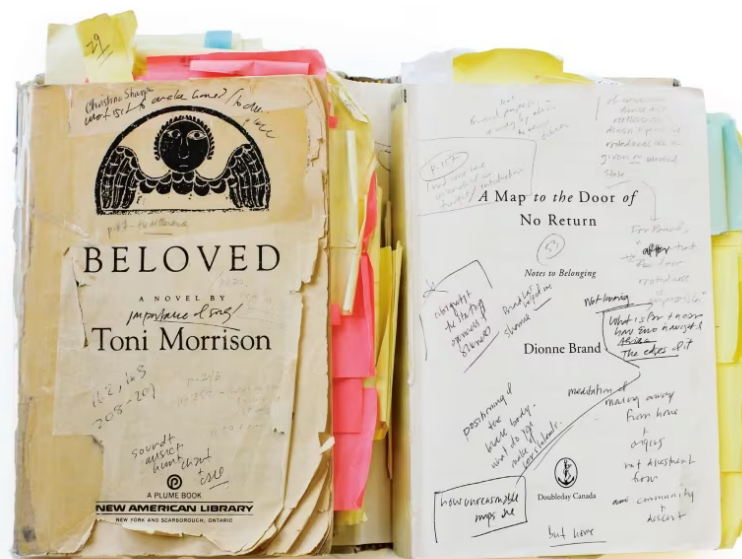
Feb 8: Key terms and concepts (Cultural Studies): structures of feeling + detours + thievery

- Raymond Williams, "Structures of Feeling," in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977): 128-135. (BS)
- Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies," in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds. *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1996): 261-274.
- Charlotte Brunsdon, "A Thief in the Night: Stories of Feminism in the 1970s at CCCS," 275-285. Pdf for both Hall and Brunsdon available at: <https://filsafattimur.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/critical-dialogues-in-cultural-studies.pdf>
- Also recommended: "Studying the Conjuncture" from Stuart Hall: Through the Prism of Intellectual Life (YouTube video)

Feb 15: Key terms and concepts (Literature + Law): deconstruction + crt

"That life is complicated is a fact of great analytic importance."—Patricia Williams

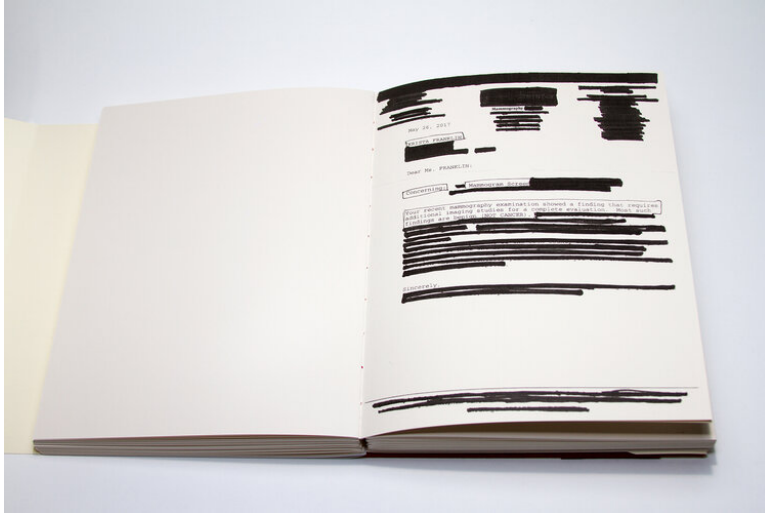
- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994): 66-111. (BS)
- Patricia J. Williams, "On Being the Object of Property," in *Signs* 14:1 (Autumn 1988): 5-24 (BS)



[Method image: Christina Sharpe's annotated copies of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return*. Photograph by Hilary Lo in Sharpe's *Ordinary Notes*, Note 211, p. 302.]

Methods: Annotation as method

Feb 22: “I write these ordinary things to detail the everyday sonic and haptic vocabularies of living life under these brutal regimes.” Note 242, Christina Sharpe, *Ordinary Notes*



[Method image: Page from Krista Franklin’s *Under the Knife*, limited edition book published by Candor Arts, 2018. For more, see [Candor Collective](#).]

Methods: Black Methodologies

Feb 29: “I present *Dear Science* as a series of stories as a way to hold on to the rebellious methodological work of sharing ideas in an unkind world.”—Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories*

Also recommended: Katherine McKittrick’s 2021 Antipode AAG Lecture [“Dear April: The Aesthetics of Black Miscellanea”](#)

Methods: Foregrounding anticolonial Land relations

Mar 7: “I show how methodologies—whether scientific, writerly, readerly, or otherwise—are always already part of Land relations and thus are a key site in which to enact good relations (sometimes called ethics).”—Max Liboiron, *Pollution Is Colonialism*

Mar 14: Spring break

Mar 21: Case Study: Crip shorts

“Crip negativity is intended to be an affective reprieve, a postponement or cancellation of our engagement with the world as it is. As a reprieve, crip negativity is not meant to replace any existing politic. It offers a mode of critique and a method of escape.”

—J. Logan Smilges, *Crip Negativity*

Ashley Shew, *Against Technoableism*

Also recommended: *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution* (streaming available [here](#))

Mar 28: Methods: Practices of psychoanalytics + paranoid and reparative reading

“It is not an arrival but a departure, not a goal but a process, and it conduces to neither an answer nor a ‘cure,’ because it is not engendered in formulae and prescriptions.”—Hortense Spillers

- Hortense Spillers, “All the Things You Could Be by Now If Sigmund Freud's Wife was Your Mother’: Psychoanalysis and Race,” *Critical Inquiry* 22 (Summer 1996): 710-734. (BS)
- Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You,” *Touching Feeling* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002). (BS)

Apr 4: Case Study: Selections from *Parapraxis Magazine*

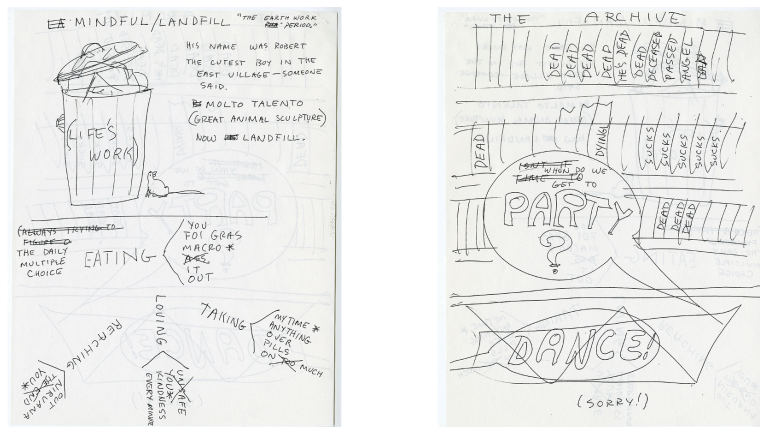
“To inquire into and uncover the psychosocial dimension of our lives—investigating social, political, and personal issues in relation to violence and conflict, gender and sexuality, racism and diasporic experience, and care and welfare...”—About *Parapraxis Magazine* (<https://www.parapraxismagazine.com>)

- Jules Gill-Peterson, “Keyword: The Child” (BS)
- Laila Riazi, “Wild Analysis: Uncanny Persistence: Death in a Detention Center” (BS)
- Zoé Samudzi and Noor Asif, “Breath Back: An epistolary introduction to reparation and repair” (BS)

Apr 11: Methods: Critical fabulation, or troubling the line between history and imagination

“Wayward: the unregulated movement of drifting and wandering; sojourns without a fixed destination, ambulatory possibility, interminable migrations, rush and flight, black locomotion; the everyday struggle to live free.”—Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*

We will focus our discussion on these parts of the book: A Note on Method, An Intimate History of Slavery and Freedom, all of Book Three Beautiful Experiments



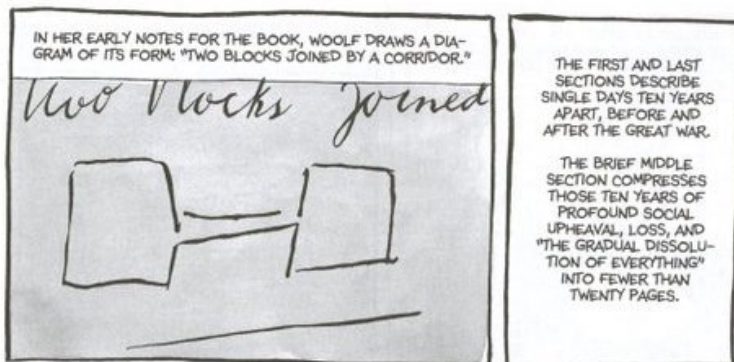
[Method image: Frank Moore, Archive Project Zine, ca. 1995, Visual AIDS Records, MSS.503, Box 3, Folder 17, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University. Image Courtesy Gesso Foundation, New York.]

Apr 18: Methods: Archival acts of homemaking

“[A]rchives are vital and relevant forces, ‘time machines’ that let us bridge past, present, and future.”—Marika Cifor, *Viral Cultures*

Focus on the following chapters: Introduction, Chapters 1, 3, and 5

Check out Visual AIDS's ["The Body as an Archive"](#) Oral History Project



[Method image: Alison Bechdel's redrawing of Virginia Woolf's diagram of the form of her novel *To the Lighthouse* with the note "two blocks joined by a corridor." From *Are You My Mother?*]

Apr 25: Case Study: graphic gender & sexuality

"But why a comic book when so many pressing AIDS issues are worthy of our resources? In order to reinvigorate prevention, we must continue to innovate our concepts and modalities."—Pato Hebert, Foreword, *Sexile*

Alison Bechdel, *Are You My Mother?*

Jaime Cortez, *Sexile*

Bishakh Som, *Spellbound*

May 2:

"_____ as method" symposium and party = **Lightning presentations (5 minutes—that's it!)**

Course requirements:

1. Attendance and participation (or, transversal conversations): For this seminar to work, each of us needs to be an active participant in the work of the seminar! We will likely be a group with various disciplinary and interdisciplinary backgrounds, and our objects of study and approaches to those objects will be disparate. This should provide a framework for lively and challenging conversations. Those conversations need to start with the texts themselves, which is what we will share (not our specific readings of them, but the simple fact of having read them). So, please read the texts closely, and be prepared to refer to them in our class discussions.

2. Book reviews (or, inhabiting the thought of others): Each seminar participant will write 1000-word reviews of two of the texts we will read this semester. This may seem like a rather mundane task, but all scholarly work begins with the review of the work of others. The ability to review—which means to see again and reexamine, as well as to critically evaluate—is one skill you will constantly make use of as a scholar. Reviews are due on the day we discuss the text you review. Students will sign up in advance for texts to review; this will allow an equal distribution of reviewers across texts and ensure that each week several students will be ready to help us inhabit the thought of others. Reviewers will be expected to help lead the seminar discussion. I encourage students to look at reviews in scholarly journals and more mainstream publications to get a sense of the form and different types of review. Some of you may choose articles to review: keep in mind that this too is an academic genre. 1000 words is a standard length for a review, and so try to get as close as possible to this length. This is the challenge of reviewing: to synthesize the scope of an argument, highlight key interventions in a field or fields, and assess the merits of those interventions.

3. “_____ as method” (or, making a method statement): This paper requires that you pose a single word or phrase as method, and then elaborate that phrase into a statement about feminist interdisciplinary methods. This project is an exercise in thought that should emerge out of this seminar, which means that, although I want you to consider the course materials in relation to your own particular scholarly preoccupations, you do need to engage with at least some of the course materials in detail. Some questions to consider: What enlivens you intellectually and affectively in relation to your object of study and approach to that object? What are some key concepts that help to frame the way particular authors make their arguments? What is the shape/form/substance of your method? How does a particular thinker approach a particular research question or object? How do the methods of at least some of the thinkers we have read this semester help you frame your own thought, both with and against? How does this material contribute to and/or challenge the concepts and methods of your discipline?

On Tuesday, May 2, each student will present their “_____ as method” statement in a lightning session. This means each of you will have 5 minutes to present your method. As in lightning sessions at conferences, timing will be strictly enforced. So, prepare for 5 minutes and practice!

Your “_____ as method” statement should be no more than 12 pages. Please submit this by email on May 9 before midnight.

Grading policy: Since this is a seminar, active participation on a weekly basis is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for earning the highest grade (A). Your two book reviews will count for 30% of your grade, participation, and lightning presentation 30%, and “_____ as method” statement 40%.