Western University * January 2021

GSWS 9463B  FEMINIST IN(TER)VENTIONS IN TRAUMA AND TESTIMONY STUDIES

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. K.J. Verwaayen 661-2111 x 84684 kjverwaa@uwo.ca
CLASS MEETS: Via Zoom, Synchronous 1:30-4:30 pm Tuesdays
OFFICE HOURS: Tuesdays 4:30-5:30 pm or by appointment Via Zoom

How do feminist interventions in trauma studies trouble conventional understandings of history, experience, violence/rupture, and the “everyday” – and with what effect? How are acts of witnessing sometimes made to serve hegemonic interests – and how can this co-optation be contested by in(ter)ventive feminist actions?

“Reading” various practices across feminist theory, literature, art, film (and, to a much lesser extent, clinical therapy), this course explores feminist understandings of trauma, the uses of testimony, and feminist resistance through political, clinical, and aesthetic actions. Specifically, topics include: feminist understandings of trauma, particularly vis-a-vis relationships between the “personal” (that is, private or individual experience, memory, testimony) and the “public” (collective and cultural trauma and its witnessing); conflicts between culturo-historical perspectives on/of trauma and experience; “mislit” and the fetishism of the trauma spectacle; and, most centrally, feminist responses through often experimental forms of witnessing.

TEXTS:
All readings for the course are available online / by EZ - Proxy link via WebCT.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES/OUTCOMES:
Work in GSWS 9463B should enable students to:

• become familiar with some of the major themes, issues, and frameworks in the fields of trauma and testimony studies;

• recognize and critically engage some of the major feminist approaches and debates within trauma studies, including critical feminist interventions in understanding the cumulative effects of [gender] trauma, and both the recuperative and appropriative “uses” of testimony;

• understand how trauma theory and the “practice” of testimony are shaped by the intersecting axes of race, class, sexuality, gender, and (dis)ability, among others;

• develop facility in “reading” feminist acts of witnessing across a variety of in(ter)ventive acts in art, literature, film, political activism, and (to a much lesser degree) clinical practice;

• improve oral skills through critical interaction in class discussions, asking questions, and leading a seminar;

• augment proficiency in written communication – and in critical thinking, research, and analytical skills, broadly.
ASSIGNMENTS:

CLASS PARTICIPATION 20%

Good participation entails active listening, coming to class prepared to discuss the readings, asking salient questions, and engaging the ideas of other participants in the course – and can include suggesting/ preparing de-briefing material for the last minutes of class 😊.

LEADING A SEMINAR 20%

You will lead a sustained exploration (approx. 40 minutes, plus discussion. Total time: 1 hour) of the assigned text or texts (your choice) for that week, with a combination of close and critical reading, and a framing of the text(s) in relation to trauma theory / trauma and/or testimony studies more broadly. Please do not simply summarize the readings. Hand in a written detailed summary or outline of your seminar prior to presentation.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY & THESIS PROPOSAL 20%

Annotate with critical evaluation 5 outside sources you will be using for your research paper; include your tentative thesis embedded in a preliminary introduction. Identify potential obstacles in your process as applicable. Approx. 350-400 words per annotation (~2200 words total for assignment). Due March 2. Note proposal sharing workshop in March.

MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER 40%

On a topic of interest to you, emerging out of course concepts, write a major paper. I can also propose suggested topics if you’re stuck. Use at least two course readings (recommended readings can count, if you like) as well as outside sources. Paper is due by April 20. 17-22 pages.

RECOGNITION OF FIRST NATIONS TERRITORY

The Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies recognizes the First Nations territory on which the University stands. As the University acknowledges, UWO is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenausaune, Lenape and Attawandaron peoples “who have longstanding relationships to the region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. In close proximity to Western, there are 3 local First Nations communities: the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region of southwestern Ontario, there are 9 First Nations and a growing Indigenous urban population. Western recognizes the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America) to the development of Canada”

ENJOY THE COURSE!