Object relating:
Feminist bio-psycho-social science studies
(WST 610)

Prof. Lisa Diedrich
Fall 2017; Tues. 4:00-6:50
Office: 2117 Humanities Bldg.
Office hours: Tu 10:30-12:00 and Wed 2:30-4:00
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In this seminar, we will think and do object relating as an opening into feminist science studies. We will consider what an object is and how it comes into being by working through the conjunction of the biological, psychological, and social—or, the bio-psycho-social, a term coined by psychiatrist George Engel in 1977 in a generalist challenge to the hegemony of an increasingly scientized psychiatry. We will explore practices of object relating in several different yet interconnected spaces: therapeutic, experimental, aesthetic, and political. We will begin with some tools provided by the object relating theories and practices of psychoanalysis: Freud on the uncanny and mourning and melancholia, Klein on reparation, Winnicott on playing, and Fanon on de-colonization. Two important texts first published in the 1990s—an essay from Hortense Spillers on race and psychoanalysis and another from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick on paranoid and reparative reading practices—will function as a vestibule into the second part of the course where we will take up examples of doing feminist bio-psycho-social science studies by writers/thinkers Sylvia Wynter, Evelyn Fox Keller, Donna Haraway, Beatriz (Paul) Preciado, Mel Chen, Alondra Nelson, Ellen Samuels, Elizabeth Wilson, among others. Through these case studies, we will relate to a wide array of course themes: from Wynter’s many genres of the human in history to Wilson’s biological unconscious; from Haraway’s making kin to Preciado’s making sex; from Keller’s take on McClintock’s “feeling for the organism” to Nelson’s take on the Black Panther Party’s social health activism. Finally, we will consider the psychoanalytic unconscious in much contemporary techno-scientific thought.¹

Texts

- Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove Press, 2005).

Course schedule

Aug 29: Introductions: doing bio-psycho-social analysis
Engel, “The Need for a New Medical Model: A Challenge to Biomedicine

Sept 5: Labor Day—No classes

Sept 12: Object relating: psychoanalytic theories
Freud, “The Uncanny” and “Mourning and Melancholia”
Klein, “Love, Guilt and Reparation”

Sept 19: Playing
Winnicott, Playing and Reality

Sept 26: De-colonization
Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (I. On Violence, V. Colonial Ware and Mental Disorders, and Conclusion)

Oct 3: Interior intersubjectivity
Hortense Spillers, “‘All the Things You Could Be by Now, If Sigmund Freud’s Wife was Your Mother’: Psychoanalysis and Race” (1996)
Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You” (2002)
Oct 10: Hybridly human
Katherine McKittrick, “Yours in the Intellectual Struggle: Sylvia Wynter and the Realization of the Living” and Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, “Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations” (pp. 1-106)

Oct 17: Subjects and objects
Evelyn Fox Keller, Part 2 of Reflections on Gender and Science, “The Inner World of Subjects and Objects” and Chapter 9, “A World of Difference” (1985) (BB)
Evelynn Hammonds and Banu Subramaniam, “A Conversation on Feminist Science Studies” (2003)(BB)

Oct 24: Making kin
Donna Haraway, Staying with Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene (2016) (Introduction, 1, 3, 4, 5)

Oct 31: Making sex
Beatriz Preciado, Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era (2103) (Introduction and chapters 1, 2, 4, 8, 12, 13)

Nov 7: Racial mattering
Mel Chen: Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect (2012) (Introduction, 1, 5, 6)

Nov 14: Health activism and illness politics

Nov 21: Fantasies of identification
Ellen Samuels, Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race (2014) (Introduction, 6, 7, 8, 9)

Nov 28: Biological unconscious
Elizabeth Wilson, Gut Feminism (2015) (Introduction, 1, 2, 3)

Dec 5: Lightning Object relating practice paper presentation (5 minutes—that’s it!)

1. Attendance and participation (or, transversal conversations):
In order 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 from various disciplines and interdisciplines, and our objects of study and approaches to those objects will be
disparate. This should provide a framework for lively debate. That debate needs to start with the texts themselves, which is what we will share (not our particular 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, or even silly, task (“didn’t I write book reports in elementary school?” you may be asking), 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. On days you turn in a review, you will help facilitate discussion by coming prepared with themes from and questions about the text.

3. Object relating practice paper (or, reflecting on doing): This paper asks you to reflect on an object or objects that preoccupy you as a scholar. I want you to think about how and why you relate to an object. What the object might be or how you relate to it in practice is open (it could be a material object, an aesthetic object, and event, an era, a concept, a discipline, a feeling, a movement). However, I do expect you to engage with at least two of the course readings in depth to explore your specific practice of object relating.

On the last day of class, each student will present their object and how they relate to it in a lightning session. This means each student will have 5 minutes to present. As in lightning sessions at conferences, timing will be strictly enforced. So, prepare for 5 minutes and practice!

Your paper should be no more than 12 pages, and is due by email on December 12.

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 Object relating practice paper 40%.