

**DISTANCE, DECEIT, DENIAL**  
The University of Massachusetts  
Amherst  
POLSCI 792DD, Fall 2015

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Seminar Meetings:

Wednesdays, 18:30 – 21; Machmer E23  
\*\* Our seminars will often deviate from these hours. Please consult the syllabus well in advance of each week and plan accordingly.\*\*

*Shevek added, “Mercury mining,” and nearly said, “Shit processing,” but recollected the Ioti taboo on scatological words. He had reflected, quite early in his stay on Urras, that the Urrrasti lived among mountains of excrement, but never mentioned shit.*

-- Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*

*Bloodless categories, narrow notions of the visible and the empirical, professional standards of indifference, institutional rules of distance and control, barely speakable fears of losing the footing that enables us to speak authoritatively and with greater value than anyone else who might...Our methods have thus far been less than satisfactory for addressing the very nature of the things and the problems it is our responsibility to address...A different way of knowing and writing about the social world, an entirely different mode of production, still awaits our invention.*

-- Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*

*I can't breathe.*

-- Eric Garner, July 17, 2014, Staten Island, New York

**AMUSE-BOUCHE**

This course explores the roles of distance, deceit, and denial in structuring, reproducing, and contesting relations of domination and exploitation. Drawing on a wide range of ethnographic, historical, sociological, psychological, architectural, and anthropological case studies, as well as novels, short stories, and military manuals, the course aims to stimulate imaginative theorizing and generative research projects about the operation of distance, deceit, and denial in three specific dimensions: language (euphemism, dysphemism, public and hidden transcripts, etc.), space (borders, walls, checkpoints, special economic zones, camps, policing and surveillance technologies, modes of experience-distant warfare, etc.), and social organization (the division of labor, hierarchy, chains of command, etc.). In addition to exploring distance, deceit, and denial as mechanisms of domination and exploitation, specific attention will also be given to the efficacy and ambiguities of movements and technologies that aim to collapse distance.

The seminar is intentionally interdisciplinary and provocatively eclectic: its purpose is expressly *not* to present you with tidy theories or a concrete body of organized knowledge but rather to spur and inspire you to bold and creative thinking that draws on, but is not shackled to, the insights produced by various academic disciplines. In addition to traditional written assignments, you will be asked to keep a weekly journal of provocations and produce a visual and/or aural essay. Reading genres include: a psychological experiment, ethnographic case studies, history, social theory, architecture and visual theory, short stories, novels, and U.S. military training manuals.

The primary measure of your success in this seminar will be your capacity, at semester's end, to talk, think, write, and—above all else--*ask questions* about about distance, deceit, and denial in ways that are empirically specific, theoretically generative, and politically productive.

## MAIN COURSES

In week one we whet our appetites for the key themes of the course by reading Stanley Milgram's (in)famous 1961 *Obedience to Authority* experiments alongside *The Reverse Bug*, a short story by Lore Segal about a hidden sound transmitter that projects the screams of the suffering and must eventually be buried deep in the desert, along with the demolished building in which it was hidden. Next, we consider the political geographies of distance, deceit, and denial through the exemplary cases of barbed wire (week two); the systematic, routinized killing of over 50 billion nonhuman animals each year (week three); a forensic architecture of occupation (week four); and the deliberate creation of non-state spaces in highland Southeast Asia (week five). In week six, we turn our attention to the uses of language as both weapon and shield, drawing on tools provided by George Orwell, Murray Edelman, and Stanley Cohen to deconstruct the substantive, orthographic, and grammatical features of the 2013 *United States Marine Corp Infantry Readiness and Training Manual*, the 2014 United States Senate *Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program*, and the United States Army's 2006 *Counterinsurgency Manual*. In week seven, we attend to the contrasting arguments of visual theorists Susan Sontag and Susie Linfield to better understand the visual representation of hidden suffering as a political tactic of collapsing distance. Week eight advances the theme of distance-collapsing with a screening and discussion of *Citizen Four*, Laura Poitras' photojournalistic documentary of Edward Snowden, the former U.S. National Security Administration employee who has been charged with treason for leaking documents about the nature and extent of N.S.A. surveillance. In weeks nine and ten, we take up Luisa Valenzuela's *He Who Searches* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, two novels that provide us with footholds to explore what it might mean to enact affectively powerful and politically relevant inquiry into "those repressions, disappearances, absences, and losses enforced by the conditions of modern life."<sup>1</sup> Finally, we dedicate the final week of our semester (eleven) to studio crits of your own visual/aural/written essays with the aim of furthering your independent inquiries into distance, deceit, and denial as mechanisms of power.

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<sup>1</sup> Janice Radway, Foreword to Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*.  
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## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

### In order of appearance

Please hasten to obtain [buy, rent, borrow, download or otherwise appropriate], in any format, each and every text on this list preceded by a \*. (Texts without a \* will be sent to you directly via email.)

- \* Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (Harper and Row, 1974 or any subsequent edition)
- Lore Segal, "The Reverse Bug," in *Shakespeare's Kitchen: Stories* (The New Press, 2007), also available as an audio reading by Jennifer Egan at:  
<<http://www.newyorker.com/podcast/fiction/jennifer-egan-reads-lore-segal>>
- \* Reviel Netz, *Barbed Wire: An Ecology of Modernity* (Weslyan, 2004)
- \* Timothy Pachirat, *Every Twelve Seconds: Industrialized Slaughter and the Politics of Sight* (Yale, 2013)
- Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* [selections]
- \* Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (Verso, 2012)
- \* Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture, Notes from Fields and Forums: 100 Notes, 100 Thoughts* (Gedanken: Documenta 13, 2012)
- \* James Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (Yale, 2010)
- Hakim Bey, "The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism"
- George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language"
- Murray Edelman, "Political Language and Political Reality"
- Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (Polity, 2001) [selections]
- United States Navy, *United States Marine Corp Infantry Readiness and Training Manual* (2014)
- United States Army Headquarters (David Petraeus), *Counterinsurgency Manual* (2006)
- United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Study of the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program* (2014)
- \* Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003)
- \* Susie Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* (Chicago, 2012)
- Laura Poitras, *Citizen Four* (The Weinstein Company, 2014)
- \* Luisa Valenzuela, *He Who Searches*, translated by Helen R. Lane (Harcourt Brace, 1987); originally published as *Como en la guerra* (Buenos Aires, 1977)
- \* Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (Alfred Knopf, 1987)
- \* Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, with a new introduction and foreword by Janice Radway (Minnesota, 2008).
- Avery Gordon, "Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity"

## ETIQUETTE, AKA, REQUIREMENTS

**1. Presence** (20%): Your presence means (almost) everything! Carefully complete the readings, be on time, bring all relevant texts, and contribute enthusiastically to seminar discussions. Unexcused absences, lateness, or an obvious lack of preparation will weaken the camaraderie of the seminar and diminish what we can achieve, collectively, as a community. You are responsible for keeping up with all email communication from your classmates or me. Note that the reading and workload for this course are unevenly distributed. You are strongly encouraged to work ahead during weeks with lighter reading and work loads so that you are not overwhelmed in weeks with heavy reading and work loads. Please also be aware that the class will be structured in accordance with so-called principles of "Socratic" pedagogy. There will be intensive back and forth discussion. You may be asked, without forewarning, to elaborate on any aspect of the readings for the week. I will

interpret your physical presence in seminar as a signal of your readiness to intellectually engage with the material listed under the syllabus for that week.

**2. Provocations** (30%): No later than 21:59 p.m. Amherst time on Tuesday of each week, you will submit, in the body of an email and as an attached document to the entire class, a “provocation” not to exceed 1,000 words in length. Your provocation should be explicitly structured in five parts: 1) a cogent summary of What Most Matters [W.M.M.] about the reading (no more than 200 words); and elaborations of : 2) praise [P.] (what can be learned, what should be emulated; what is beautiful); 3) constructive critique [C.C.] (what can be challenged or pushed further); 4) synthesis [S.] (how does this text advance the themes of the course?; what relations can be drawn to prior readings and discussions?; what difference does the appearance of this text make to our semester together?); and 5) wonderings [W.] (what are the two—and only two--questions that you would most like to put forward for group discussion of this text?).

You will be explicitly evaluated on how robustly you meet the W.M.M./P./C.C./S./W. requirements of each provocation.

Note that no provocations are due in weeks six (Oct. 14), eight (Oct 28), or eleven (Dec. 9). Provocations in weeks nine.33 (Nov. 4) and nine.66 (Nov. 11) are due at 21:00 on Wednesday instead of 21:59 on Tuesday (see Timetable, below).

Your provocation should be pasted in the body of the email and attached as a Word document. Your email should contain the following subject line: "D3 Week X Provocation: LAST NAME," where X is the week of the class as outlined in the syllabus and LAST NAME is your last name. Your Word Document should have the same title as the email subject line. Please adhere strictly to this subject line requirement: it will help all of us keep the influx of weekly email provocations organized and allow us to search for them by week or by author (note: if you wish, you can create an automatic filing rule for these emails so that they go into a specially designated folder rather than your inbox).

Late provocations will not receive credit. You are strongly encouraged, but not strictly required, to read the provocations of your peers prior to attending each Wednesday’s seminar.

**3. Lost in Translation** (20%):

On the first day of class, you will sign up in advance to join a small group working on one of the following three texts:

- a) United States Navy, *United States Marine Corp Infantry Readiness and Training Manual* (2013)
- b) United States Army Headquarters (David Petraeus), *Counterinsurgency Manual* (2006)
- c) United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Study of the Central Intelligence Agency’s Detention and Interrogation Program* (2014)

Due October 14: Individually, take any five pages from your chosen text and rewrite it in plain language without the use of technical jargon, euphemism, or dysphemism. Be sure to include the original text as a comparison point. Following your rewrite, also include a short commentary, not to exceed 1,000 words, on the orthographic and grammatical features of your chosen text, as well as reflexive attention to the issues raised by the translation process itself (12%).

Also due October 14: Together with the other members of your small group, prepare and deliver a 20 minute presentation in class on the major features of your chosen text as they relate to the themes of distance, deceit, and denial generally and specifically to the tools offered by Orwell, Edelman, and Cohen. In this presentation, be sure to showcase some of the central features of your individual translation projects (8%).

**4. Visual/ Written Essays and Crit Session Presentation** (30%): Presented in class December 9: Using photography or another visual/audio medium, compile a portfolio that evokes one or more dimension of distance, deceit, and/or denial—or their collapse--as mechanisms of power. Your images and/or recordings may be specific to one locality (e.g., a hospital, a University, a housing project, a protest occupation), or they may be thematic across multiple localities (e.g., barbed wire, surveillance cameras, or unauthorized housing structures across multiple locations). Each photograph or visual representation should be accompanied with the title, date, time, and location of the photograph or recording, and a brief interpretive statement of no more than 9,000 words, excluding bibliography and footnotes, should introduce and frame the visual/audio essay as a whole. This written essay must explicitly incorporate and cite, either individually or thematically, each of the dramatis personae featured in this seminar. You will email both your visual essay and interpretive statement to the entire class and give a 15-minute presentation of your project to the class in the December 9 crit session.

5. It (almost) goes without saying, but **plagiarism** of any assignment will result in a failing grade for the course. If you are not sure whether you are plagiarizing, please (please!) err on the side of caution.
6. There will be **no extensions or incompletes** granted in this course. Late work will not be evaluated.
7. There are **no exams**.

## TIMETABLE

*Consult the “Plot” and “Dramatis Personae” sections of this syllabus for context and bibliographic citations.*

### **Week One: September 9: Electric Shocks and the Reverse Bug**

Introductions  
Milgram (entire)  
Segal (entire)

Provocations due.  
Sign-up for week six individual translation projects and small group presentations.

### **Week Two: September 16: Barbed Wire**

Netz (entire)

Provocations due.

### **Week Three: September 23: Industrialized Killing**

Pachirat (entire)  
Elias (selections)

Provocations due.

### **Week Four: September 30: Forensic Architecture**

Weizal, *Hollow Lands* (entire)  
Weizal, *Forensic Architecture* (entire)

Provocations due.

### **Week Five: October 7: Non-State Spaces**

Scott (entire)  
Bey (entire)

Provocations due.

### **Week Six: October 14: Language**

Orwell (entire)  
Edelman (entire)  
Cohen (selections)

+ one of the following (see requirements section):

*Infantry Manual* (entire)

*Counterinsurgency Manual* (entire)

*Report on C.I.A. Interrogations* (entire)

Translation projects due (see requirements section).

Small group presentations due (see requirements section).

### **Week Seven: October 21: Regarding the Suffering of Others and The Cruel Radiance**

Sontag (entire)

Linfield (selections)

Provocations due.

### **Week Eight: October 28: *Citizen Four*: SEMINAR RUNS UNTIL (at least) 22:30**

Screening of Laura Poitras' *Citizen Four*.

+ other unannounced "documentaries"

+ presentation from Pachirat on "The Glass Walls Fallacy"

Discussion of visuality and the collapse (?) of distance.

No provocations due.

### **Week Nine.33: November 4: Beloved: NO SEMINAR MEETING (Reading Week)**

Morrison (entire)

No seminar meeting.

Provocations due Wednesday at 21:00.

### **Week Nine.66 November 11: He Who Searches: NO SEMINAR MEETING (University "Holiday")**

Valenzuela (entire)

No seminar meeting.

Provocations due Wednesday at 21:00.

### **Week Ten: November 18: Ghostly Matters**

Avery, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*

Avery, "Some thoughts on haunting and futurity"

Provocations due.

**November 25: NO SEMINAR MEETING: WORK ON FINAL PROJECT**

Individual consultations as desired.

No provocations due.

**December 2: NO SEMINAR MEETING: WORK ON FINAL PROJECT**

Individual consultations as desired.

No provocations due.

**Week Eleven: December 9: Crit Session: CLASS RUNS UNTIL (at least) 23:59**

No provocations due.

Presentations of final projects.

Final projects due.

Don't hesitate to contact me at [pachirat@umass.edu](mailto:pachirat@umass.edu) with any questions or curiosities.