**Traveling Concepts in Gender Studies**

Department of Gender Studies, CEU

Fall 2019/20

# PhD course, 2 credits

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SYLLABUS

**Course Description**:

Generating ‘traveling concepts’ is an inherent feature of all theories. And in feminist theory, with its intentional, self-reflexive eclecticism, the question of traveling concepts is of particular importance. Producing an interdisciplinary frame of thinking, where traditional modes of knowledge production are put in question, feminist theory is continually re-thinking its key concepts, thus creating changes in conceptual framework that have significant theoretical and methodological implications.

In this course students are invited to participate in a critical debate over several key concepts in contemporary feminist thinking, exploring the ways these concepts have been used in more recent theoretical debates. The emphasis is on feminist perspective, but in some cases, for the sake of clarity and better understanding of specific conceptual histories, other perspectives are also included. The final format of the course is always the result of close cooperation between all participants since students are invited to participate in the final selection of the concepts to be closely investigated.

The course starts with Mieke Bal’s claim that concepts ‘if well thought though, offer miniature theories, and in that guise, help in the analysis of objects, situations, states, and other theories’ (Bal 2002, 22). It is also assuming that, in order to function as ‘shorthand theories’, concepts have to be used in a self-reflexive way, with an understanding of theoretical framework(s) they belong to, and with a critical assessment of their traveling histories.

In the first part of the course an overview of Mieke Bal’s interpretation of the specific problematic of ‘traveling concepts’ is given, together with an introduction into an interdisciplinary project named ‘Traveling concepts,’ developed by European women’s studies network Athena, which has brought together a number of feminist theorists and feminist thinkers across European academia. Secondly, the complexities of interdisciplinary and intersectional perspectives in women’s studies and gender studies are re-visited

In the core part of the course specific histories and current uses of a number of interrelated concepts are discussed more in detail, in particular their ‘traveling’ from individual scholar to individual scholar, across historical periods, and between academic disciplines. In the present syllabus the proposed concepts are: theory, gender, body, narrative, visuality, transnational. Students are expected to read the texts offered for discussion, and to come prepared to talk about their own understanding of the given concepts.

For the class on gender students are expected to suggest up to 10-15 pages paper/excerpt from a paper/book chapter which describes as close as possible their understanding of the concept of gender. The deadline for suggested texts to be uploaded to the e-learning site is October 4.

Classes 8 and 9 will be discussing two concepts from a larger list offered to students to decide what they want to work on (including culture, identity, reading, post-humanism, reality, agency, etc.). Students can also propose other concepts as well.

In the last part of the course students are invited to prepare presentations on one of the key concepts they will be using in the preparation of their Ph.D. proposals. Each presenter will have to suggest an article for general discussion in the class. The deadline for uploading these texts is November 18 at latest.

**Course Goals**

The course aims to involve students in interdisciplinary critical thinking which would help them to position themselves theoretically and methodologically in regards with their actual research projects. Discussing a number of traveling concepts and their theoretical and methodological trajectories, students will become more clearly aware of their own locatedness in regards with different disciplinary traditions, and within feminist theory and women’s studies/gender studies as an interdisciplinary field of research. In this way, they will be forced to think critically about their own theoretical framework, and the ways they are using their main concepts.

**Learning Outcomes**

After passing the course, students should be able to:

- understand and discuss critically the idea of ‘traveling concepts’;

- to re-think critically the scope, the meaning, the history of several key concepts in women’s studies/gender studies with an understanding of theoretical and methodological implications of different shifts in their use;

- to look into different trajectories of the given concepts, and interrelatedness between their paths;

- to understand the consequences of significant shifts in conceptual frameworks within a larger theoretical frame;

- to be able to perform similar critical analysis for other key-concepts they will be using in their Ph.D. proposals, and later, their Ph.D. research.

**Course Requirements and Assignments**

Students are expected to read all the required material and fully participate in class discussions. They have to participate in final creation of the course curriculum by helping chose the most relevant concepts for the whole group. They have to have on oral presentation on a concept of their own choice, and to produce a final paper of some 15 pages on that concept.

Full participation: 10%

Class discussions: 30%

Presentation on a traveling concept, student’s choice: 25%

Final paper 15 pages: 45%

**Course program and basic readings (students will also contribute to this list throughout the course):**

September 18

***Traveling******concepts***

Mieke Bal, ‘Concepts’, in *Traveling Concepts in the Humanities*, University of Torronto Press, 2002, pp. 22-55.

Eva Bahovec, Claire Hemmings, ‘Teaching Traveling Concepts in Europe’, Feminist Theory, December 2004, Vol. 5 Issue 3, pp. 333-342.

September 25

***Traveling******theories***

Hawkesworth, Mary and Lisa Disch. 2016. «Feminist Theory: Transforming the Known World». U Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory. Ed. by Mary Hawkesworth and Lisa Disch. Oxford University Press, forthcoming in 2016.

Said, Edward. 1983. «Traveling Theory». U The world, the Text, and the Critic, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, str. 226-247.

Elizabeth Grosz, ‘The Future of Feminist Theory: The Dreams of New Knowledges’, in *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice,* eds. Henriette Grunkel at al., Palgrave 2012, pp. 13-22.

October 9

**Gender**

Short student presentations: Each student has to come with his/her explanation of gender as a traveling concept and suggest 10-15 pages paper/excerpt from a paper/book chapter which describes as close as possible their understanding of the concept of gender. The deadline for suggested texts to be uploaded to the e-learning site is October 4.

October 15

**Body**

Shatema Threadcraft, “Embodiment,” in *Oxford Handbook to Feminist Theory*, ed. by Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth, Oxford University Press, 2011.

Iris Marion Young, “Lived Body vs. Gender”, in *Female Body Experience: “Throwing Like a Girl” and Other Essays*, Oxford Scholarship Online: September 2006, accessed August 19, 2019 at 10:40.

October 16

***Narrative***

Hayden Whyte, ‘The Value of Narrativity in representation of Reality’, in *On Narrative,* ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Daniel Punday, ‘The Narrative turn’ and ‘Struggling with Objects’, in *Narrative after Deconstruction*, New York: The State University of New York, pp. 1-20 and 138-153.

Sidonie Smith, ‘Narrating Lives and Contemporary Imaginaries’, Presidential Address 2011, PMLA 126.3, pp. 564-575.

October 23

**Visuality**

Dona Haraway, “The Persistence of Vision”, in *Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. By Nicholas Mizroeff, Routledge 1998.

Excerpts from Nicholas Mizroeff*, The Right to Look: A Counter History of Visuality*, Durham, NY: Duke University Press, 2011.

November 6

***Transnational (Feminism)***

Laura Brigs, ‘Transnational’, in Mary Hawkesworth and Lisa Disch (eds.), *Oxford Handbook in Feminist Theory*, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 991-1009.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Transnational Feminist Crossings: On Neoliberalism and Radical Critique,” Signs, Vol. 38, No. 4, Intersectionality: Theorizing Power, Empowering Theory

Maylei Blackwell, Laura Briggs, and Mignonette Chiu, Transnational Feminisms Roundtable, in Frontiers/2015/Vol. 36, No. 3 , pp. 1-24

November 13

Concept and readings TBA – student choice

November 20

Concept and readings TBA – student choice

November 27 (double class)

***Student presentations***

Concepts proposed by students will be discussed on the basis of texts distributed at least on week in advance. Each student has to distribute one text related with his/her chosen concept, to in the class and to chair the discussion.

December 6

***Final Discussion – Back to Feminist Theory***

Clare Hemmings, ‘Progress’, ‘Loss’ and ‘Return’, in *Why Stories Matter*, Durham and London: Duke University Press 2013, pp. 31-126.