

Grammars of Listening: on Memory after Trauma

Seminar at University of Paris 8
Wed. 4:00-6:00 pm (Paris time)
March 10 - May 12 (break on April 28 and May 5)
<https://grammarsoflistening.wordpress.com/>

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This seminar inquires into the kinds of “grammars” that would need to be inaugurated in order to render audible what otherwise remains unheard and unheard-of as a consequence of what we will analyze as “traumatic forms of violence” – in their capacity to silence, erase, hide and deny their own shattering effects. By “grammars” we will understand *frameworks of sense* broadly speaking – taking sense here both in terms of the sensible as well as in terms of meaning, conceptual and otherwise. Accordingly, to ask about these grammars is to ask how to radically redistribute sense in order to subvert the frameworks that decide in advance what “deserves” to be audible, memorable, grievable—or not. In Spanish I call them “gramáticas de lo *inaudito*,” since the word “*inaudito*” points both to the unheard and the unheard-of, namely, what hasn’t (yet) been rendered audible and what is ethically unacceptable. The seminar will trace the close connection between the two: it is precisely because traumatic violence inaugurates unprecedented forms of harm – forms of harm absolutely unheard of and which thus challenge our ethical imagination in radical ways – that we do not *yet* have the grammars to approach them properly and make them *audible*, much less *intelligible* or even *believable*. We will approach the subject by asking first about “trauma” from a philosophical perspective, inquiring into the kind of challenges it poses to our conceptions of experience, in order then to move into questions around the possibilities of its representation, memorialization and historical indexation – that is, into the *conditions of possibility* of more radical forms of listening. Art will play an essential role in this context, and we will study ways in which works of art resist oblivion and inaugurate grammars that make audible what has been rendered *inaudito* (we will bring in examples from Latin America, in contexts of political violence where we find extreme forms of silencing and erasure).

For updates on the seminar sessions, announcements, and discussion forums after the seminar, refer to <https://grammarsoflistening.wordpress.com/>. All the readings will be uploaded online in a google drive. To access the drive and subscribe to the seminar’s email list please send your name, institutional affiliation (if any) and short description of your interests to acostaparisviiiiseminars@gmail.com.

Readings/sessions:

Session 1 (March 10): From Aesthetics as Critique to Grammars of Listening: On Reconfiguring Sensibility as a Political Task (introduction to both seminars)

Session 2 (March 17): Trauma and the Breakdown of all Grammar Main reading: Freud, S. "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," in *The Standard Edition of the Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 18 (London: Hogarth, 1953), sections I-IV, pp. 7-33. Recommended: Caruth, C. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), Introduction and Conclusions; Caruth, C. *Literature in the Ashes of History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), Chapter 1. Other: Berlant, L. *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), Chapter 2; LaCapra, D. "Traumatropisms". *History and its Limits. Human, Animal, Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 59-89; Pérez, J.D. "Hacia una (re)vocalización del trauma: una crítica a Caruth desde la ética de la escucha," *Perfrasis* 9:18 (2018): 117-133; Rottenberg, E. "Freud's Other Legacy", *Parrhesia* 21 (2014): 13-22.

Session 3 (March 24): Storytelling and Grammars of Silence Main reading: Benjamin, W. "The Storyteller", *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (NY: Schocken, 1969): 83- 110. Recommended: Oyarzún, P., "Narration and Justice," in *Doing justice : Three essays on Walter Benjamin* (Polity Press, 2020), 75-107; Wynter, S. "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation," *Savacou*, no. 5 (June 1971): 95-102. Other: Castillejo-Cuellar, A. "La localización del daño: Etnografía, espacio y confesión en el escenario transicional colombiano," *Horizontes Antropológicos* 20:42 (2014): 213-236, Acosta López, M.R. "La narración y la memoria de lo inolvidable. Un comentario al ensayo "El narrador" de Walter Benjamin," in Andrade, M. (ed.), *Walter Benjamin, aquí y ahora* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2018), 175-196.

Session 4 (March 31): Grammars of Listening and the Task of Imagination Main readings: Arendt H. *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Chapter 12 and 13 (Harcourt, 1973): 389-480; Arendt, H. "Understanding and Politics". *Essays in Understanding* (Schocken: New York, 2004), 307-327. Recommended: Sharpe, C. *In the Wake* (Duke University Press, 2016), Chapters 1 and 4; Acosta López, M.R. "Totalitarianism as Structural Violence: Towards New Grammars of Listening," in O'Byrne, A. and Shuster, M. *Logics of Genocide: The Structures of Violence and the Contemporary World* (London/NY: Routledge, 2020): 173-186.

Session 5 (April 7): On Political Violence and the Colonization of Listening Main readings: Cavarero, A. "The Vocal Body," *Qui parle*, 21(1) (2012): 71-83; Cavarero, A. *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence* (NY: Columbia UP, 2009) (selections TBA); Dorfman, A. *Death and the Maiden* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991) Recommended Cavarero, A. *Relating Narratives. Storytelling and Selfhood* (NY: Routledge, 2000) (selection TBA); Fanon, Franz *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008, Chapter 5; Vallega, A. "Displacements—Beyond the Coloniality of Images", *Research in Phenomenology* 41 (2011) 206–227 Other: Acosta López, M.R. "Perder la voz propia: de una fenomenología feminista de la voz a una aproximación a la violencia política desde la escucha," commissioned for Luciana Cadahia and Ana Carrasco Conde, *Fuera de sí mismas. Motivos para dislocarse* (Madrid, Herder, 2020): 121-156.

Session 6 (April 14): Listening to the Erasures of History Main readings: García Márquez, G. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (selected fragment) Recommended: Acosta López, M.R. "One Hundred Years of Forgottenness: Aesth-Ethics of Memory in Latin America," *Philosophical Readings*, Special Issue on Philosophy in Colombia, XI:3 (2019) 163-17. Other: Acosta López, M.R. "La Resistencia de lo inarchivable: del mito a la historia en *Musa Paradisiaca* de José Alejandro Restrepo," in *Dialogo: a Journal for Latin American Studies* 22:2 (2019) 35-48; Caruth, C. *Literature in the Ashes of History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), Chapter 5; Mendoza, A and Thomas, T. "Literary and Visual Rememory at the 90th Anniversary of the Banana Massacre in Colombia" (cf. <https://zaprunderworld.org/volume-5/literary-and-visual-rememory-at-the-90th-anniversary-of-the-banana-massacre-in-colombia/>); Uribe, A. "¿Pueden los hechos históricos resistirse a la mendacidad? Sobre la matanza de las bananeras," *Revista Co-herencia* 7:13 (2010), 43-67.

Session 7 (April 21): **The Sound of Disappearance** Main readings: J.D. Pérez, “Sonorous Rubble, Mourning Affect,” in Echeverri, C. *Duelos* (Museo Nacional y Ministerio de Cultura, 2019) 66-79; Acosta López, M.R. “Art as Resistance to Erasure: on *Fragmentos* by Doris Salcedo and *Duelos* by Clemencia Echeverri”, in Lina Britto and Ricardo López-Pedrerros, *Colombia Revisited* (2 vols) (NY: Routledge, forthcoming). Recommended: Chirolla, G. “The Politics of the Scream in a Threnody,” in Zepke, S. and Sullivan, S. (eds.) *Deleuze and Contemporary Art* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 15-33; Uribe, M.V. “Against Violence and Oblivion: The Case of Colombia’s Disappeared,” in Polit Dueñas, G. and Rueda, G. (eds.) *Meanings of Violence in Contemporary Latin America* (Palgrave): 38-52 Other: Bargu, B. “Sovereignty as Erasure. Rethinking Enforced Disappearances,” *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 23: 1 (2014): 35-75.

NOTE: this session could be moved to the last session and session 8 would become the 7th. Follow announcements in the wordpress blog for an update later during the semester.

Session 8 (May 12): **Decolonizing Grammars, Decolonizing Memory** Encina, P. *Hamaca Paraguaya* (film) Recommended: Acosta López, M.R. “Hamaca Paraguaya de Paz Encina (notas sobre la resistencia de la memoria)”; N. Brizuela, “A Sense of Place: Paz Encina’s Radical Poetics”, *Film Quarterly* 70: 4 (2017) 49-64 Other: Acosta López, M.R. “*Gramáticas de lo inaudito* as Decolonial Grammars: Notes for a Decolonization of Memory,” in Alejandro Vallega (ed.) *Philosophy and Liberation in Latin America, a Primary Source Reader* (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming); S. Rivera Cusicanqui, “Palabras mágicas: reflexiones sobre la crisis presente” y “Oralidad, mirada y memoria del cuerpo en los Andes”, *Un mundo ch’ixi es posible* (Buenos Aires: Tinta limón, 2018) 93-134; Rocío Zambrana, “Vida póstuma” <https://www.80grados.net/vida-postuma/>