HU5116: The Rhetoric of Difference (Reading and Teaching Testimonio)
Spring 2003

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Office hrs: MW 11-12
F 11-1 or by appt.

Course Description:
Testimonio and testimonial narratives evolved as a "concrete historical genre" (Arias) between 1960 and 1990 in parts of the so-called "Third World," including Latin America, during the various revolutionary or resistance movements that came to define this period as particularly insurgent. Testimonial writing has been defined as "an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g. war, oppression, revolution, etc.). Emphasizing popular oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her own experience as an agent (rather than a representative) of a collective memory and identity. Truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or exorcising and setting aright official history (George Yudice, 1985; n. p. italics in original). Each of the italicized terms in this definition points to the complexity and problematics of reading testimonio. Despite relatively clear definitions, other critics insist that testimonio remains undefined (Sklodowska). In this course we will explore the complexity and ambiguity of testimonial discourse, as well as examine some of the cultural, ethical, philosophical, pedagogical, and theoretical questions raised by the reading of testimonial narrative (see questions/issues).

Undoubtedly, testimonio is best read when the political, historical, economic and social issues that set these narratives into motion are not ignored. Hence, it will be helpful to balance our readings of testimonio with the necessary contextual information (whether for Guatemala, Bolivia, Peru, etc.). I am hopeful that most of this work can be undertaken by individual members of the class and reported to the group in conjunction with responses to the readings of the testimonios (see bibliography).

What comprises "testimonial" narrative and even testimonio itself varies widely. A mere attempt at a comprehensive list would exceed the bounds of any 15-week graduate seminar. Hence I have tried to limit my focus to a sampling of Native American testimony primarily, concentrated in the North American, Central American and Andean (South American) regions. The other factor that I have used as focal point is mediation. All of the testimonial narratives we will read—except one—are mediated by the translation, transcription or editing process of an editor, anthropologist and translator who mediates the voice of the native witness, or otherwise controls the process of cultural translation. This pattern/convention is disrupted in many testimonios and testimonial narratives of the Southern Cone (Argentina, Chile), however (i.e. The Little School). Nevertheless, the convention of mediation allows us to examine other (and Othering) philosophical, ethical, and political issues pertaining to the ramifications of cultural translation. Some of these questions appear on the handout (see Issues/Questions).

Since I realize this is a very small group, and needs, interests, agendas may vary greatly, I have provided two evaluation options. Your selection may depend on your research interest, career goals, familiarity or unfamiliarity with these texts. Please select one option by no later than the 4th week of the semester. Regardless of which option you select, I will expect a high level of intellectual engagement with these texts.

Reading List:
Testimonial texts:
Let Me Speak!: Testimony of Domitila, a woman of the Bolivian mines. 1978. [First
published as *Si me permiten hablar ... Testimonio de Domitila, una mujer de las minas de Bolivia* 1977, Mexico: Siglo XI Domitila Barrios de Chungara with Moema Viezzer. Translated by Victoria Ortiz. New York: Monthly Review Press


*A Storied Life or Testimonial Narrative? (Whose Text?)*


**Theoretical texts:**


We will also be reading an occasional article from the attached bibliography list. You should be able to access most of these texts using Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe (via the library’s website). The other materials on the list will be available to you for copying (and prompt return) from our class file cabinet, or upon request. I have also prepared a series of questions/issues to serve as guideposts for readings as well as reading journal critical commentary.

**Course Goal:**

To read a selection of testimonial narratives, and consider the ideological and practical interrogations that such readings present. To survey some of the cultural, ethical, historical, philosophical, pedagogical, and theoretical perspectives that influence current approaches to teaching testimonio and testimonial narratives in the humanities.

**NB:** Anyone with any disability that could affect class performance (e.g. hearing, vision, learning disabilities, etc.), or which might fall under the Americans With Disabilities Act, should see me as soon as possible. I will be happy to accommodate anyone who needs assistance.

**Required Course Work:**

Mostly, we’re reading and discussing that lengthy list of books on testimonio, testimonial theory and the teaching of testimonio. This is a graduate seminar. Class members are expected to do all of the readings as they are due and to come prepared to discuss them. To facilitate good discussions and to further extend the range of theories and ideas we survey, there are three other assignments:

- **Reading journal and discussion entries:** For each book we read, write a two-to-three page critical commentary on it (I will collect and respond to these as they are due). These
commentaries should be substantive—genuine, committed, intellectual engagements with the readings. They should address or attempt to clarify some of the issues/questions herein attached. The commentaries and/or discussion entries may take a number of different forms, and you are encouraged to dabble in all of these:

**Attempts to articulate and clarify for yourself difficult passages/arguments from the readings**

**Attempts to develop further, and/or to extend to different contexts, the arguments/proposals/ideas advanced in the readings**

**Attempts to develop your own position on issues raised in class and in the readings, and to solicit critical feedback from other class members**

**Stories, oral histories, other testimonial narratives etc., that draw, reflect on, or develop the readings**

**Responses to class discussions and to the entries of others, and so on...**

Discussion entries (taken from your reading journal all or in part) should be posted weekly to our class e-list, HUS116rl-l, by Sunday evenings. These will then constitute part of the class readings for the next day (Monday).

**Oral Presentations:** You will be asked to do three presentations. The first two (in Weeks 2-12) will be based on the readings for the specific days, though you are encouraged to incorporate further research on the topic(s) that you may have done as well. The third in weeks 13-15 will be on your work-in-progress, that is, your final course project or book review (see below). You will need to provide us with a two-page abstract, or sketch, outlining your plans, approach, thoughts, concerns, etc. to date. (This is a minimum. More is fine.) In principle, all forms (story-telling, traditional essays, dialogues, co-authored work, oral histories, etc.) are open to you. But these need to be dealt with individually, so please be sure to talk to me first.

**Final Project:** This may take the form of a) a traditional essay (critical reflection paper) of approximately 20 pages, b) a 45-minute final presentation with visual (media) and written (10-12 pages) components, or c) a non-traditional work (i.e. oral history/testimony, co-authored work, literary expose, media project, graphic illustration, etc.). In selecting your final project, you should first carefully consider the relevance of the topic (testimonio and testimonial discourse) to your own career goals and interests. You should also consider the questions/issues presented and discussed in class.

**Book Review:** Select a testimonio, a testimonial novel or testimonial narrative (one not on the required list of texts and one you haven’t already read), write a five-ten page book review (see guidelines), and give a 10-15 minute report to the class on it. [The bibliography lists several testimonios and testimonial narratives that we will not be reading in class. You may select from this list or consult with me if you have another specific type of narrative in mind. For example, some of you may wish to read a Jewish holocaust testimonial or a Palestinian resistance narrative].

The due date for Final Projects or Book Reviews is **Friday, May 2 at 5 p.m.** Since I will be leaving town and country shortly after this date, and have been discouraged from assigning incomplete (I) grades, you will receive a B in the course if your final project or book review is not completed by the due date.

**NB:** All requirements must be completed in order to pass the course.

**Evaluation Grid I:**

- Reading Journal and Discussion Entries: 40%
- Presentations: 30%
- Final Project: 30%

**Evaluation Grid II:**
SYLLABUS and Reading Schedule

Jan 13
Introduction
Film: The Genocide Factor (Episode 2) [50 mins]

Jan 20
Excerpt from “The Praxis of Suffering” [A very brief history of Latin America]
I. Rigoberta Menchú, Translator’s note – pg. 121
Film (in class): The Genocide Factor (Episode 3/Central and South America)[10-15 mins]

January 27
I. Rigoberta Menchú, Conclusion
Arturo Arias, “From Peasant to National Symbol”
Film (in class): Rigoberta Menchú (Broken Silence)
Reading journal due

February 3
Mary Louise Pratt, “Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú: Autoethnography and the Recoding of Citizenship”
Victor Monejo, Testimony: Death of a Guatemalan Village
Film (in class): Monuments to Truth [25 mins]
Reading journal due

February 10
Peter Hitchcock, “Dialogics of the Oppressed: Theorizing the Subaltern Subject”
Judith Thorn, The Lived Horizon of My Being: The Substantiation of the Self & the Discourse of Resistance in Rigoberta Menchú, MM Bakhtin and Victor Montejo
Reading journal due

February 17
Neil Larsen, “‘People without History’: Central America in the Literary Imagination of the Metropolis”
Daniel Goldrich, “Bridging the Gap: Modes of Testimony and Teaching Central American Politics”
John Willinsky, “Rigoberta Menchú’s Secret: Culture and Education”
Andean Lives: Gregorio Condori Mamani and Asunta Quspe Huamán (Introduction and Chps 1-3)

February 24
Andean Lives, Conclusion
Reading journal due
### Spring Break

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<td>March 10</td>
<td><em>Native American Testimony</em>, Chps. 1-10</td>
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<td>March 17</td>
<td><em>Native American Testimony</em>, conclusion</td>
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<td>Film: “Teaching Indians to Be White”</td>
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<td>March 24</td>
<td>John Beverley, <em>Subalternity and Representation</em>, Chps. 1-3</td>
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<td>Ruth Behar, <em>Translated Woman</em>, Preface, Introduction, Chp. 1</td>
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<td>April 7</td>
<td>Ruth Behar, <em>Translated Woman</em>, conclusion</td>
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<td>April 14</td>
<td><em>Let me Speak!</em></td>
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<td>April 28</td>
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<td><strong>Friday, May 2</strong></td>
<td><strong>Final Projects or Book Reviews due by 5 p.m. today!</strong> (Please leave in my mailbox, 3rd floor WAHC)</td>
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