CALL FOR PAPERS

Theory Reading Group

presents

Listening to Trauma:
Unclaimed Experience’s 20th Anniversary Conference
April 26-28, 2017

Invited Speakers: ULRICH BAER New York University, BRETT DE BARY Cornell, FRANÇOISE DAVOINE L'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, TRACY MCNULTY Cornell, JARED STARK Eckerd College, JEANNE SUK GERSEN Harvard Law School, ARNIKA FUHRMANN Cornell, MARÍA DEL ROSARIO ACOSTA LÓPEZ DePaul and AMY ZIERING Documentary Filmmaker

Cathy Caruth’s Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History, first published in 1996, celebrated its 20th anniversary last year. To mark the occasion, Theory Reading Group will host a conference entitled, “Listening to Trauma,” which brings together Caruth’s past students and colleagues whose work has been influenced by her two decades of teaching and writing about trauma.

Unclaimed Experience encouraged its readers to reconsider traditional boundaries between the literary and philosophical, the fictional and historical, the individual and political, by complicating our conception of the relation between ‘knowing and not knowing.’ Through close readings of literary and psychoanalytic texts, Caruth illustrated the way traumatic memory becomes recognizable through what remains unclaimed, but nonetheless functions as a ‘constituting’ force. Unclaimed Experience argued that in the twentieth century trauma is tied up in the “possibility” and “surprise” of an “encounter with another.” That to understand the conditions under which we share the world, we must create and foster modalities of listening to the disappearing voices which nonetheless haunt and demand our presence. Two decades later, we ask, how have theories of trauma developed new modalities of listening to another’s wound? What are the ways in which we can think of these acts of listening within racialised and gendered worlds?

Caruth’s recent work, Literature in the Ashes of History, seeks to investigate what kind of histories can be told from a disappearing or self-destructing archive. The title of Caruth’s book, taken from Toni Morrison’s A Mercy, considers what kind of narrative emerges from the ‘ashes of history,’ when the future remains uncertainly lodged in a disappearing past. Part of the enigma of traumatic experience, Caruth argues, is that it is marked by the touch of death. What does it mean to be both touched by, but not touching death? What kind of claim to life is made through a relation to death?

The idea behind this conference is to bring together various scholars working on trauma in diverse fields including law, cinema, theology, philosophy, historiography, translation studies and
literature. We hope that the conference will sustain an ongoing conversation around trauma studies at Cornell.

**Submission Information:**

We warmly invite faculty and graduate students to submit 250-300 word abstracts via e-mail to Nasrin Olla & Elizabeth Wijaya at theory@cornell.edu by **February 18th 2017**. All papers will be reviewed by TRG organizers by the end of February.

*This conference is generously sponsored by The Society for the Humanities, Institute for Comparative Modernities, The Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies, The Cornell Program on Ethics and Public Life, The Departments of Romance Studies, Performing and Media Arts, Comparative Literature, History, Jewish Studies, Feminist, Gender & Sexuality Studies, American Studies, German Studies and the East Asia Program.*