Trauma and Postmodern City in North American Film and Literature

INTRODUCTION & THE FIVE SENSES
About myself ...

1. Teaching Literature and Film on **Canadian Postmodern Cities** since Fall, 1999 → Taipei

2. Teaching theories of **Trauma and Globalization** since Fall, 2004 → subjectivity, history, postcolonialism and postmodernism

3. This course: a continued exploration of their intersections
Outline

1. **Trauma**: Definition & Contemporary Issues
2. **Postmodern/Global City**: of Connections and Disconnections
3. The Course
4. **The Five Senses**
Trauma

Definitions: Definitions and Issues

Psychological Responses

Issues for us

- Representation
- Reader’s Positions
- Contemporary Extensions
Trauma — Definitions

(1. a bodily wound)

2. a psychic wound, a breach on the mind; --not fully known, comprehended or assimilated at the moment.

3. Whose Trauma?

-- [an event of causing wound or loss] Of victims

-- [a catastrophe] of surviving witness

-- [structural trauma] of all of us

--causes: absence; history’s im/possibility of referentiality.
Trauma – Issues

1. **Traumatic Responses** – symptoms of shock, dissociation, fragmentation, guilt and loss; paralysis or identity re-construction

2. **Representation**: delayed appearance; doubleness and disjunction (between the past/dead & the present/alive; the victims and the reader). (Kaplan p. 7)
Psychological Responses -- Freud’s theories

In the three models in Freud’s theory of psyche -- economic, topological and dynamic

1. The economic model (能量流通) - Repression at the moment and return later with its full impact known; e.g. sexual harassment.

2. Topological model (地形：拓撲) -- trauma breaks the protective shield against stimuli, and thus denies the usual discharge function following the principle of constancy → repetition compulsion.

3. Dynamic model → extended to a general phenomenon -- e.g. Anxiety as a protection signal; Jewish people’s monotheism.
Psychological Responses

Cathy Caruth 1995 “The Wound and the Voice”

- **Uncanny repetitions** of the voice of wound.
- p. 4 “…it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available.”
- Two stories – Tancred and Clorinda; the return of the burning child.
Psychological Responses -- Freud’s theories (2)

different causes of trauma:
- **external**—train accident, war, sexual abuse;
- **internal**—Oedipal crisis, fear of castration and absence of the mother

Responses – *mourning* (gradual detachment) and *melancholia* (identification and incorporation of the lost object)
- **Melancholy**: repetition compulsion,
- **Mourning**: acceptance/sublimation of absence thru’ symbolization in games (e.g. fort-da game or peek-a-boo) and arts,
- **disavowal** – denying while admitting in forms of fantasies and fetishism (e.g. the mother’s lack of phallus/power)
Names for Different Responses

PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) vs. PTG (Post-Traumatic Growth)

DENOS (Disorders of Extreme Stress Not Otherwise Specified)

- describe the more subtle and characterologically imprinted effects of long-term, chronic trauma, and would allow for the recognition of a distinct kind of traumatic experience in those for whom the experience may not be available as flashbacks or simple memories but may be exhibited in more subtle kinds of behavior (Caruth 1994 viii).
Issues in Representation (1)

Survival and Life vs. Betrayal of the Dead–

◦ What is ‘ethical’ or possible to tell. (‘betrayal of the past’ – a worry of the woman in *Hiroshima*) → indirect telling.

Incorporation into Official History: The past can be easily effaced in official history, or inscribed/translated into ‘an anonymous/general’ narrative of peace, national progress or trauma. (e.g. the death of some = the victory and liberation of others)

im possibility of witnessing and full representation

How: Through what (documentaries, archive, letters) can we understand the past?
Issues in Representation (2) – Trauma Culture

from psychic screen (screen memory) to photography and TV screen

Chang’s questions:

-- How is the collective memory of 921 Earthquake formed (entering our consciousness, becoming images or being verbalized)?

-- How do we **disavow** history of the earthquake by consuming its images?
The Viewers/Readers’ Perspectives

Four main positions in viewing trauma films (Kaplan pp. 9-10)

1. the position of being introduced to trauma in a film which ends with a comforting ‘cure.’ (e.g. disaster films, Vietnam war films such as *In Country*)

2. The position of being **vicariously traumatized**; (e.g. *Videodrome, The Fly* by David Cronenberg)
The Viewers/Readers’ Perspectives (2)

- The position of a voyeur – of films and TV programs which turn others traumas into spectacles.

- The position of a witness. (Being there and not there; aware of the distance.) “This position of ‘witness’ may open up a space of transformation of the viewer through the empathic identification without vicarious traumatization. . . . It is the unusual, anti-narrative process of the narration that is itself transformative in inviting the viewer to be at once emotionally there . . . but also to keep a cognitive distance and awareness denied to victim by the traumatic process.” (e.g. Hiroshima mon amour, Lingchi)
The Viewers/Readers’ Perspectives (3)

- Is sympathy or empathy possible?
- Is being a sympathetic witness enough?
- Reading can involve action; critical reading is critical practice (with a purpose to change)
Trauma: Contemporary Extensions

1. **postcolonial trauma**: Attention to its various locations, refuting Eurocentrism

2. **trauma culture** – spectacularization of trauma

3. **biopolitics of trauma** – surveillance, abjection and bare life

3. **risk and future-tense trauma** – related disruptive forces

**Intersectionalist Approach**
Postmodern/Global Cities

CONNECTIONS AND DISCONNECTIONS IN FLOWS
1. The City in 3 Phases
2. City + Trauma in Global Flows
The City in three phases since the 19 century

1st – *industrial city (city with heavy industry)* --> serious social problems and environmental problems. (e.g. Dickens’ and Blake’s London)

2nd – **Modern city**: utopian city, or a split between the spectacular metropolitan centers, **declining downtown and spreading suburbs** (e.g. Brasilia)
Modern City

1) City Jungle
2) Kaleidoscope →

Fragmentation, numbness (blasé) and isolation
Postmodernization of City

Post-Industrial Society

-- Urban Construction: Internet and High-Speed Rail

-- 2nd Industrial Revolution: electronic reproduction

-- Late Capitalism:
  • Multi-National Cooperation and Flexible
  • Accumulation, Dominance of Service Industry
  • Overall Commodification
Postmodern Urbanism: 3G + 1 P

1. *globalization*, (globalizing capital) -- increasing fragmentation and assimilation by global culture; Mega city and Inner City (Merger vs. demerger)

2. *gentrification* (土地增值; e.g. East Area in Taipei),

3. *ghettoization* (陋巷區隔) → discrepancy between the rich and the poor
Postmodern Urbanism: 3G + 1 P --

Pluralism

(1) **diversification of regions** and their functions, manufacturing sites reinvented as tourist destinations (e.g. Taipei?)

(2) **spectacular and multi-functional sites** of consumption, **architectural pastiche** & restoration (e.g. Berlin’s parliament building;) **Architectural Pluralism**

(3): **The new underclasses (immigrants)** in the urban centers

The future of cities? De-centralization? Part of service industries move to the outskirts; a mega mall (cultural, entertainment and shopping center) (ref. Kotkin)

- Ref. **Panoramic view** of Berlin from the Parliament
Architectural Pluralism and plural function
Postmodern Urban Culture

1) Garden City or Mega Mall?
2) Urban Spectacle or the City Vanishes?

Heteroglossia
Or Floating People & Signifiers
City + Trauma in Global Flows?
Global City

1) an important node in the global economic system (Wikipedia), with global city index to rank the cities

2) cities in global flows

3) a relational approach to cities
Connected by Global Flows: An Economic View

- Flows of goods, services and finance
- Flows of people – the most limited
- Flows of data and communication
  -- knowledge-intensive flows vs. labor-intensive flows

Impact:
- 1/3 of goods flow across national borders;
- “left behind if not being connected.”


Worldwide economic crisis
De-Territorialized and Re-Territorialized by **Cultural Flows**: A Cultural View

*Modernity at Large* (Arjun Appadurai)

- mediascapes
- ethnoscapees
- technoscapes
- financescapes
- Ideoscapes —

- With conjunctions and disjunctions in and among them, with shapes changing or amorphous

- loss of city space, interconnectivity or intersectionality
Space of Flows and its Infrastructure

**Flows:** “purposeful, repetitive, programmable sequences of exchange and interaction** between physically disjoined positions held by social actors in the economic, political and symbolic structures of society” (Castells 1996: 412)

*e.g.* information, goods, people—whatever travel in information systems, telecommunications, and transportation lines

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Expert system and its unreliability ➔ risk
Space of Flows (2)

Manual Castells: Network Society and Space of Flows

3 levels of flows:
1. The flows of information (electronic communication) – and virus
2. The network of nodes (節點; e.g. mega-cities like Taipei) and hubs (中繼站; e.g. station, airport, port and telecommunication system)
3. Transnational Elite groups (decision makers, entrepreneurs and technicians)
Flows/Space vs. Place

Global Flows

Loss of identity?

Local History and Identity

Space of Flows

Space of Place

Flows/Space vs. Place

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Loss of identity?
Flâneur, Migrant, Nomad, Terrorists

Flâneur: a stroller on the street

“As such, ‘[i]t is not the pedestrian flâneur who is emblematic of modernity but rather the train passenger, car driver and jet plane passenger’” (Lash and Urry, 1994: 252).

Migrant Worker

Urban Nomad (Traveler)

Terrorists in the Neighborhood

Paul Gavarni, Le Flâneur, 1842.
Global City
Summary: Possible Issues

1. **Different or old geometry of power?**
   a. People with different degrees of mobility;
   b. the global vs. the local in the uneven flows of goods (➔)
   c. **Loss of the local**: Compression of time and space (space virtualized or non-place)

2. **risk factors**

3. **Loss of stable relations and identity**
Global Trauma (1): Collective Trauma

Wars → Genocide:
- e.g. Holocaust (the systematic state-sponsored killing of six million Jewish men, women, and children and millions of others by Nazi Germany and its collaborators during World War II. -- “The final solution to the Jewish question.”)
- 9/11 *

→ Migration (e.g. partition in India; migration to Taiwan)
Trauma Globalized?

• **Natural Disasters** (earthquake, typhoon, hurricane; virus and transmittable diseases (AIDS, SARS, Ebola) technology breakdown & accidents (plane crash, blackout).

• **Economic crises** – interconnected

• **Anti-Globalization** (corporate-driven globalization; resistance to U.S. government, to the West, to ‘McWorld’) in the form of terrorism;

• **Global Spreading of News** about traumas

[Global Risks 2012 Report](#)
City and Trauma: Receivers & Intensifiers of Global Flows

The Globe

City

Trauma
The Five Senses

CONNECTIONS AND DISCONNECTIONS
The Five Senses: Discussion Questions

(central events: disappearance of Amy Lee + arrival of an Italian lover + Richard’s illness)

1. What does the title mean?
2. What has it to do with the city? And trauma?
3. How is the city presented in terms of connection and disconnection, w/ families and outsiders?
Roberto

Rona

Anna Miller

Ruth Seraph

Robert

Amy Lee

Gail

Richard

Rupert

Rachel Seraph

Romance

Friends

Mother Daughter

Client/Massagist

Mother Daughter

Take care of

Friends

Friends
Main Characters

Richard

Ruth & Rachel

Rona & Robert
Jeremy Podeswa

• a native of Toronto,
• has been making movies about the nature of love since 1983.
• *David Roche Talks to you about Love* – cynical monologue;
• *Eclipse* – 10 sexual encounters occurring in the days leading up to a solar eclipse.
• Also the director of *Fugitive Pieces*
"For me, it was important that I did not have the tyranny of happy endings in the movie where everything works out happily for Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks. I wanted a complexity and diversity in terms of what happens to all the characters."

(source: http://www.boxoff.com/issues/jun00/podeswa.html)
About his Style (2)

**Reversal of expectations**

--”about making people rethink something they think they’ve already thought through.”

e.g. Richard seems to be suspicious;

Two responses to Amy Lee’s disappearance:

-- blame it on the mother
-- nobody’s fault
The Five Senses

-inspired by Ackerman’s *A Natural History of the Senses* (1991)

Her call to focus on each sense as a means to re-examine world around us.

--The characters with a similar need—”to go back to a more innocent place in their lives, . . . and approach connecting people in a more innocent way so that it’s not so confused. What the movie became, in a way, is really about emotion over intellect or instinct over rationalization” (*Take One* Fall 1999 Goslawski 21) → Is that so? Rona’s and Robert’s instinct does not seem right.
The Five Senses & Traumas in a City – Social and Familial Disconnection ➔ Expressed thru’ their Senses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Traumas</th>
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| Rona            | • Numbness & distrust
|                 | • Fear of loss of mother                                                |
| Robert          | • “Smell of love”?                                                      |
|                 | • Loss of love                                                          |
| Ruth & Rachel   | • Accident in a neighborhood ➔ Loss of daughter                         |
| Richard         | • Physical trauma ➔ Loss of daughter                                    |
| Rachel          | • Identity crisis – Loss of father                                      |
| Anna & Amy Lee  | • Loss of daughter                                                      |
### Characters –”R’s” & Their Deviation from Their Professions (and their Normal Senses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Senses</th>
<th>Associated with</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rona</td>
<td>Baker’s numbness</td>
<td>(-) Taste</td>
<td>Roberto</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Monica</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Cleaner’s exquisite sense</td>
<td>(+) Smell</td>
<td>Raymond &amp; Rebecca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>Ophthalmologist’s loss of power</td>
<td>(-) Hearing</td>
<td>Gail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Massagist’s projection</td>
<td>(-/+ )Touch</td>
<td>Anna Miller and Amy Lee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Teenager (a drop-out)</td>
<td>(+) Vision</td>
<td>Rupert</td>
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The City & Its Connecting Device

1. **The apartment** – where Richard, Ruth/Rachel and Rona live

2. **Robert**, the cleaner

3. **The missing girl** – an innocence [or a daughter] all the other characters have lost
“Home”

CONDOMINIUM

CLEAN AND GEOMETRIC IN SHAPE

a barrelful of amphetamines.
Lawyers are all the same.
Home (2)

RAYMOND’S

PERFUMES

She designs fragrances.
Connection or Disconnection?
Connection or Invasion
Home: Connections or Holes

WARM COLORS—NARROW SPACE

HOLES FOR OVERHEARING THE VOICES
Public Spaces for Dis/Connection

AIRPORT

RESTAURANTS

but the investigation is now expected to broaden.
Park & Construction Site – Spaces of Deviation?

SPACE OF DEVIATION

LOFT ROOM AT A CONSTRUCTION SITE
Secret Place for Sharing – Also a Construction Site?
TV Screen: For Connection

RUTH → AMY LEE

RICHARD → HIS DAUGHTER AS A YOUNG GIRL

was found to be in surprisingly good health.
Robert

Meeting his old lovers to smell love –

1. Distrust: “Are you ok?” (suspecting AIDS)
2. Mismatch: Not having the same view of their sexual relationship

What do you think about his love with the Raymond couple?

- He wants to have “that,” their intimacy
Rona

Cynical about love

Suspicious about Roberto’s coming to join her // not being able to taste the cakes she makes
Ruth and Rachel

• **Rachel** -- identity problems

• **Connection: Sympathy between two teenagers:**
  • 1 about their families;
  • 2. About sexual identity (It’s like looking at you from inside-out.)

• **Ruth & Anna** -- between and two mothers
  • Ruth rejected by Anna first;
  • mutual understanding – losing and regaining their daughters
Traumatic Community

RUTH AND HER CLIENT

RUTH AND ANNA

I know.

Your little girl, she is gonna be fine.
Rachel: Discovery of the soprano’s sexual identity

SPLIT IDENTITY

STILL SPLIT, BUT WITH CONFIRMATION OF OTHERS
Richard, Trying to keep a library of sounds

Watches his daughter’s tape;
listens to the railway, the birds, the sea, . . . , a library of sounds to save in his mind before he becomes totally deaf.

◦ There are other voices
◦ Gail’s interpretation of her daughter’s deafness: ”Things happen. You give and keep going” → survival.
Happy Endings? Still connections and disconnections

Connections

◦ between Rachel and the boy ➔ more complicated view of sexual identity;
◦ between Richard (seen as an outsider) and Gail ➔ mutual support
◦ between Ruth and Anna,
◦ Rachel’s hand ➔ in touch with the world again
◦ Between Robert (outsider) and the couple?

Disconnection between Rona and Roberto (outsider)
Richard and Gail: Two Outsiders

You can feel the vibrations.
Ending

SMELL OF LOVE

THE LIST – NO LOVERS
Endings

RONA

RICHARD AND GAIL