Comparative Criticism Discussion Group, Monday 10 March 2014


Participants: Rosie Lavan (St Anne’s/English), Kasia Szymanska (St Hugh’s/MML); Dom Davies (St Anne’s/English); Kaitlin Staudt (Brasenose/Oriental Studies); Rey Conquer (Somerville/German); Lianjiang Yu (English)

Introduction (from Dom Davies):
- Mignolo offers the least Eurocentric but globalised theory around issues of global hegemony.
- We’ve framed this discussion around the idea of post-post-colonialism, but those “posts” are more spatial than temporal.
- Key to Mignolo’s project is there in the grammar of decoloniality: this is a dictionary coining terms. Since late 15th C and emergence of notions of modernity/coloniality critical theory and global knowledge have been Eurocentric.
- Post-colonialism and postmodernity are not necessarily complicit but they still emerge from this context.
- Mignolo’s proposal is with the subaltern knowledges which exist outside the hegemonic web—to see whether they can be de-colonised, de-linked, and to see whether we can think in new subaltern ways.
- Are there problems with his pluriversal theory? Is this not just like another postmodern web?

Discussion:
- Mignolo gives very few examples throughout his discussion of how to implement the theories he proposes.
- Some of these things have been accounted for in the postcolonial project for decades—e.g. representations of the subaltern.
- His definition of “delinking” is very vague. Is he asking for a project to recover non-capitalist, non-modern perspectives, or for a theory from them? Can that exist?
- There is almost a metaproject here—an attempt to locate himself and who he represents, his colleagues in this endeavour, in relation/opposition to the grand narratives of the west. But he still has to write back to these in order to advance from them.
- His idea of border thinking, between local knowledges and universalities, to connect places where coloniality and modernity haven’t penetrated, without reducing them to one thing—this too is problematic. Isn’t it essentially postmodern? Which underpins capitalism and colonial thinking…?
  o How different is border thinking to e.g. geomodernisms?
  o Why confine his ideas in this way?
  o Are there different things to be taken from this idea for a writer of literature than for a theorist? How can border thinking be conceptualised?
- Cf his idea of transmodernity: this too is vaguely defined and its meaning/use is not clear.
- He has a tendency to lapse into Marxist thinking and this too is problematic for his project.
- There is a gap between what he outlines as a consciousness, a way of thinking, and its possible realisation as a practical project.
- Who is he addressing in this article? The European-educated academy? Or emphatically not them? How does he position himself? Writing from the Global South, in Latin America, yet educated in France and teaching in North America…
- His endeavour to liberate certain terms around which associations cluster in post-colonial discourse is refreshing (e.g., hybridity).
- Questions raised about the politics of influence, of following someone and citing examples, by his discussion of Iran. There’s an element of intentional provocation here—the target of his critique is western free market capitalism.
- He offers excellent intellectual tools, but how does he position himself within the realms of what a critic might be doing; how do we use those tools?
- Can his methodology be separated from the politics? Is there a framework here which is transferable beyond the specific de-coloniality project?
- Is what he’s doing in this article an attempt to create space—to clear a gap within the academy that other voices can then speak into?