Call For Papers
Comparative Studies in Literature and Culture (CSLC) Annual Symposium
Vital Lies: The Aesthetics and Politics of Disregard
University of Southern California
February 28 & March 1, 2019

Keynote Speaker: Professor Ann Laura Stoler, Willy Brandt Distinguished University Professor of Anthropology and Historical Studies at The New School for Social Research (Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Time, Along the Archival Grain)

The CSLC Symposium Graduate Planning Committee invites graduate students from across the humanities at USC to participate in a multidisciplinary conversation with Professor Ann Laura Stoler. The symposium will look to Stoler’s work in historiography and (post)colonial studies as a starting point to investigate the minor histories, visceral archives, and visual economies that maintain, complicate, or disrupt imperial structures.

While imperial power has often been analyzed as a panoptic, surveilling gaze, in Along the Archival Grain, Professor Stoler extols us to consider instead the “politics of disregard”: the “acts of ignoring rather than ignorance” that “circumscribe what one can know” under empire. Vital Lies takes up this task by casting a more careful regard on the histories, archives, artworks, and events that have been persistently and systematically occluded or ignored under dominant scopic, political, linguistic, or mediatic regimes. At the heart of this project is a desire to tarry with, rather than elide or dismiss, the processes and products of active unseeing and self-deception that condition the reproduction of the everyday—the “vital lies” and secular mythologies that Stoler identifies at the core of imperial dispositions.

Given the reactionary disregard of extrajudicial murders, defunding of social welfare programs, and impending ecological collapse, it is essential that we interrogate the affective, historical, and epistemological structures underpinning the “vital lies” that maintain such political dispositions and the forms of life they index and inscribe. We therefore seek submissions that explore how the aesthetics and politics of disregard work on levels both intimate and public, bureaucratic and political, theoretical and historiographical (to name but a few key registers), and how these currents of attachment and detachment shape some of the most pressing issues of our time: e.g., migration, incarceration, racism, imperialism, environmental catastrophe, and insurgent fascisms.
The symposium will take place over two days. The first day will feature the speaker’s keynote address while the second day will be devoted to showcasing the work of graduate students at USC. We invite paper proposals that address the symposium theme from a variety of linguistic, historical, disciplinary, theoretical, and geographical perspectives. Some questions to consider might include:

- In what ways does the “politics of disregard” manifest itself? What archives does it leave, what technics/techniques does it rely on, and what reading practices does it require?
- What are the visual (and avisual) economies supporting today’s imperial formations? What scopic relations does the notion of “disregard” introduce and imply? How does it complicate, advance, and/or depart from existing histories and theories of imperial visuality?
- What forms of neglect, oversight, and untruth are necessary to the reproduction of daily life in the present? What (ongoing) historical precedents do they have? What practices of self-deception enable us to go on living in perilous times, and what sorts of ethical, political, and aesthetic concerns do they raise?
- In what ways do colonial structures permeate the realm of the everyday—the intimate, the personal, the quotidian, the visceral—and what do such intimacies reveal about the abiding forms of attachment and detachment that are integral to the experience of self, living, history, and world?
- As scholars in the humanities, what novel modes of critique, scholarship, and disciplinarity might we develop to solicit and disrupt the imperial dispositions underwritten and maintained by disregard? How might we as scholars seek to cast a more careful, inclusive, and caring gaze toward our aesthetico-political pasts and present?

**Keywords:** visual studies; visuality; affect; intimacies; structures of feeling; archive studies; postcolonial studies; critical environmental studies; historicism; colonial legacies; ethics of the self; materialisms;

**Submission:** 250-word abstract with short bio, submitted to cslc.symposium@gmail.com

**Deadline:** Jan 4, 2019

Sincerely,
The CSLC Symposium Graduate Planning Committee and Event Organizers

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