

Piedmont Project IV  
Summer Research Report  
August 11, 2004

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My experience of the Piedmont Project—both the content of the materials we engaged with and the nature of our interactions as a group—has affected my work in several ways, some of them surprising. In particular, in terms of the course I will develop (and teach as an undergraduate seminar in the spring semester 2005), it has affected: a) the content of the course; b) the way in which I will be teaching the course; and c) the way I find myself thinking differently about things that I thought I already knew. I'll detail briefly what I mean:

A. Course content:

The course I will be offering will be called “History, Memory, Place.” What is new in this configuration, in terms of my teaching, is the explicit focus on place. I have twice offered graduate seminars in the area of memory studies (“Memory and Modernity” and “The Work of Memory”), but while the significance of place was touched on a number of the texts we read (from Frances Yates’ study of medieval memory arts to Maurice Halbwachs’ studies of collective memory and historical reconstructions, to the study of the brain as a site of memory production in cognitive neuroscience), the consideration of placeness remained more or less theoretical. The work of the Piedmont Project has encouraged me to move place to a primary level inquiry and incorporate materials that I have either worked with elsewhere (D. Massey, R. Williams, A. Walker, G. Agamben, E. Levinas, A. Kuhn, P. Yellow Bird and K. Milun) or newly discovered through my association with this group (E. Casey, S. Kuriyama, D. Cosgrove, F. Fernandez-Armesto, Karatani Kojin, J. Berger) into the study of historical memory. Above all, I will never again be able to think of place in more or less purely theoretical terms. As our field trips made unforgettably clear, we can not only see, but touch, smell, taste, and hear them and it is this materiality of place that I want to integrate into my teaching.

B. Ways of teaching:

Believe it or not, I have never taken a class on a field trip. To the extent that the content of my courses has been ideas, concepts and texts, the place has been immaterial, so to speak. We can sit and think and talk in a classroom, a coffee shop, or—if the students prevail—somewhere outside on a pretty day. But the place was never more than the venue. The course I am developing as part of my association with the Piedmont Project will include field trips to sites that will function not simply as different venues, changes of scenery: they will be the actual material of our inquiry. Such sites will include: a) the quad (contrasting visible, marked sites of remembered history such as the flagpole at the quad center with equally visible, but unmarked sites of our community’s memory such as the trees planted in commemoration of members of our community who have died); b) Emory village (from the clothing store to Starbucks to the Village Cleaners, we will inquire into where the things of our daily life come from and how much or little we know and remember of these global links and the ways in which our lifestyle impacts the ecology of places elsewhere); c) community gardens (from the local Emory community garden to the Clarkston

community garden to the Hmong gardens in Carroll county we will try to see how memories of places—both those left behind and those people live in now—are given form as people work the land in ways that embody history.

C. Thinking differently:

Perhaps the most surprising result of my association with the Piedmont Project was the way it changed the way I think about ecology. In a somewhat vague way, I had always thought of ecology as having something to do with nature: animals, green things, trees. And, as I realized at a certain moment during the Piedmont Project workshop, somewhat to my own dismay, while I care about trees and the environment, in the end it's humans and the worlds we live in and create and/or destroy for one another that I care about much more deeply. For a brief moment, I thought that perhaps I was misplaced in this group. However, then I realized something that will probably affect my teaching much more profoundly than any change in content (see above, A and B), namely that how we interact with one another as human beings *is* an ecological issue. Moreover, it is an issue that the planners of and participants in the Piedmont Project were mindful of in ways that were not programmatically articulated, but simply enacted. It is this quality of interaction in which we attend to the immediate and very real needs and possibilities of those people and things with whom and which we come into contact that I was ultimately most astonished and moved by in this group. It is what I will most cherish about the experience and what I most hope to incorporate into my own future interactions with students in learning environments.

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Work Plan for Syllabus Revision  
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I have much more work to do before my course on “History, Memory, Place” is worked out in concrete detail, but the major new elements are in place. Structurally, they include three new units.

One unit is on community gardens as places where past and present—memory and history—are, in both literal and symbolic ways, reworked into a lived synthesis of sorts. The unit will focus around our field trips of three different community gardens, beginning with the one at Emory; then to the one in Clarkston, where immigrants/refugees from a number of different countries and cultures are developing gardens alongside natives from the Clarkston area; finally, I hope to be able to visit the garden created by the Hmong who live in Carroll county. Readings for this unit will include material from trauma theory (which we will reevaluate critically in light of what we find in our visits to the gardens), Alice Walker’s classical essay, “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens,” Pemina Yellow Bird and Kathryn Milun’s essay, “Interrupted Journeys: The Cultural Politics of Indian Reburial” (in *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question*), and excerpts from Yi-Fu Tuan’s *Passing Strange and Wonderful: Aesthetics, Nature, and Culture* (1993) and John Berger’s *And Our Face, My Heart, Brief as Photos* (1984).

Another unit is on the ways in which our awareness of and response to the environment—the larger ecology, so to speak—always and, I believe, necessarily, links the so-called natural and the so-called social worlds: the unspoiled and the degraded, the tamed and the wild. My approach will not be to assume that the one (unspoiled nature, the purity of the wild) embodies the ideal of the good and the beautiful, while the other (the world made productive, bent to human ends by the inventions of our industry) is somehow to be deplored. We will look at paintings and drawings of so-called nature from Dürer to Turner to the French Impressionists to put our assumptions to the test. A primary reading for this unit will be selections from Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (1973). We will read Yi-Fu Tuan selections and Karatani Kojin’s “The Discovery of Landscape” (in *Origins of Japanese Literature*, 1993).

A third unit will test the notion that if ecology is the study of the “relations and interactions between organisms and their environment, including other organisms” (*Random House Unabridged Dictionary, Second Edition*), and that these “organisms and their environment” can be human, then attending to the quality of our “relations and interactions” is an ecological mandate. Toward that end, we will read several short, but difficult, philosophical texts, notably Giorgio Agamben, “The Face,” “Form-of-Life,” and “Notes on Gesture” (in *Means Without Ends: Notes on Politics*, 2000), and Emmanuel Levinas, “Uniqueness” (in *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, 1998), as well as Shigehisa Kuriyama’s “Wind and Self” (in *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine*, 1999).