

Cindi Katz

(Graduate Center, The City University of New York)

Date

Tuesday, 7 June

Time

2pm - 4:30pm

Venue

Building EB, level, 2
room 21 (EB.2.21)
Parramatta Campus
([view map](#))

Convenor

Greg Noble
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[Click here to RSVP](#)

Trace, Memory, Erasure: The Geographical Imagination of Restoration in Detroit, New Orleans, and the Bronx.

This paper addresses the question of urban restoration drawing on an elemental sense of imagination as a way of thinking, of seeing, of being in time and space that fuses past, present, and future, and shimmers with possibilities of futures undetermined and unknowable. Looking at three disinvested US cities, my project aspires to shake loose a specifically geographical imagination of politics, spurred by a 'topographical consciousness' of embodied memory and history and the everyday work (and play) of making new. I will trace presences and absences in three cities where I have some 'investment': New Orleans, where I have done research on the 'scoured landscape of social reproduction' that preceded and was decimated by Hurricane Katrina in 2005; Detroit, where I have written about and long admired the 'Detroit Geographical Expedition', a radical project of knowledge production and exchange whose perils and potentials have largely faded from memory; and The Bronx, New York, where I was born and lived my early childhood, where my father built houses, and to which I may return as native, as gentrifier. In this paper I want to think of what can be gleaned through an embodied knowledge of these sedimented historical geographies, of exploring and making a community of memory in place. I will work across these discrepant and simultaneous geographies - the fierce place attachments of New Orleans, the ruins and absences of the South Bronx, and the productions of nature in Detroit. In each place I will trace the effects of accumulation by dispossession - soft and hard - no less tragic for being well rehearsed. I will look at productions and exchanges of knowledge as organizing, as geographical imaginations in action, insisting on memory as infrastructure (the heart and mind of these cities, no less important to their survival than the 'bones' of roads, buildings, sewage lines), looking for ways to move across space as if it were animate, so that the passage is alive to its pasts as much as to the resonances and shifting stakes of its present; hearing its stories, reading its signs, finding its connections to elsewhere.

Cindi Katz is professor of geography and environmental psychology at The Graduate Center of The City University of New York. Her work concerns social reproduction and the production of space, place and nature; the politics of knowledge; children and the environment; the consequences of global economic restructuring for everyday life; and the intertwined spatialities of homeland and home-based security. She is the author and editor of several books including *Growing up Global: Economic Restructuring and Children's Everyday Lives* (Minnesota 2004), which received the Meridian Award for outstanding scholarly work in geography from the Association of American Geographers. She began her current project on contemporary U.S. childhood as spectacle while a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University and hopes to finish it next year while in residence at Cambridge University as the Diane Middlebrook and Carl Djerassi Professor of Gender Studies.

Eric Lott

(University of Virginia)

Back Door Man: Howlin' Wolf and the Sound of Jim Crow

In June 1960, after nine years of recording and over two decades of touring and performing, Howlin' Wolf and some trusty sidemen entered Chess Studios in Chicago to cut three sides: "Wang Dang Doodle", "Spoonful", and "Back Door Man". There was nothing especially historic about the session. In June of 1960, Howlin' Wolf was fifty years old and an established act. Yet everything about the session's results, and particularly the song "Back Door Man", strikes me as elusive, interstitial. Jim Crow as racial segregation - at least one of the many meanings of the song's title - was now both legally discredited (by *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954) and locally practised, North as well as South. The music produced out of this context was at once urgently urban and country plain, for the most part southern rural in instrumentation and howlingly electric in form - an unstable sonic resolution of the migration of deep South laboring come north. And in retrospect, urban blues at this moment was poised historically between different political, urban, and culture-industry orders. I want to explore this hesitation between tenses, as Raymond Williams might put it, for which "Back Door Man" provides a site, and I do so with the desire to rescue such hugely impacted and enigmatic works from the anodyne clutches of blues buffs and conventional musicologists. Minimal, sinister, and edgy, fueled by images of violence, betrayal, and polymorphous sexual bravado, structured throughout by riddles and dialectical reversals, the song is a sort of historical puzzle, fusing Jim Crow sound, Jim Crow sex, and Jim Crow space; it implies as well a theory of how sound and subject formation, and subject formation through sound, arise out of Jim Crow violence. Ultimately I'm after some sort of response to Robert Palmer's justly celebrated question at the end of his book *Deep Blues*: "How much history can be transmitted by pressure on a guitar string?"

Eric Lott teaches American Studies at the University of Virginia. He has written and lectured widely on the politics of U.S. cultural history, and his work has appeared in a range of periodicals including *The Village Voice*, *The Nation*, *New York Newsday*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Transition*, *Social Text*, *African American Review*, *PMLA*, *Representations*, *American Literary History*, and *American Quarterly*. He is the author of the award-winning *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford UP, 1993), from which Bob Dylan took the title for his 2001 album "Love and Theft". Lott is also the author of *The Disappearing Liberal Intellectual* (Basic Books, 2006). He is currently finishing a study of twentieth century race and culture entitled *Tangled Up in Blue: The Cultural Contradictions of American Racism*.



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