PART III – Proposed Research Project (to be completed by the student)

My research project will develop the critical concept of “minor territory” in order to analyze an otherwise inaccessible dimension of contemporary literature. The testing ground for the creation and refinement of this new concept will take place between W.G. Sebald’s novel Austerlitz and Gilles Deleuze’s philosophical concept of “territory.” For Deleuze, a territory is an arrangement of elements that are capable of producing an array of affective resonances. A “minor territory,” then, is an alien place within the dominant territory, where unsettling and uncanny affects circulate.

These two texts will be brought into conversation through an analytical process of mapping that is neither entirely inductive nor deductive. Mapping, a Deleuzian practice, allows the reader to survey a textual landscape for the symptoms, irregularities, and blockages that a hermeneutical approach may obscure. Mapping also avoids the practice of reading a concept into a text only to find it again later; instead, one must map the various inconsistencies, paradoxes, and discontinuities that are inherent within a text, and then, only after that process is complete, can concepts emerge from the charted trajectories. Mapping, then, as with any critical practice, does not foreclose the possibility of failure. Any critical concept of “minor territory” that emerges from Austerlitz must reflect the topographical challenges of that specific text.

A concept of “minor territory” will be the end result of this process. This concept will be of aid in not only recognizing the micro-fractures that emerge within a dominant landscape, but it will also help with discovering the modes of thinking that take place within these territories. Without charting new trajectories, the same categories—class, gender, desire—will continue to foreclose readings that exist outside of their limits. A concept of “minor territory” will allow for a reorientation of the dominant view so that new connections can come to the foreground.

My territorial reading of Austerlitz will move beyond the current research focused on history, memory, language, and trauma. I will map the literary landscape of Austerlitz in order to understand how remnants of the past—buildings, photographs, and trinkets—can produce a pervasive post-war affect. If, as W.G. Sebald writes, “everything is constantly lapsing into oblivion with every extinguished life,” how can we communicate with history? How do the remains of the past help to form “minor territories” that speak against the layered, and often artificial, historical present? These questions dwell within Sebald’s Austerlitz, a book that reaches into the past and present to compose a world caught gasping between the nebulous shadow of the Holocaust and the trauma of a repressed childhood.

At the completion of this project, I hope to have produced a high-quality piece of research that is suitable for publication. In addition, the chance to work with a supervisor, whose interests are closely aligned with my own, will be invaluable in developing the skills necessary to produce rigorous and beneficial research. Above all, this opportunity puts me in the position to contribute to the critical discussion taking place at the intersections between literature and philosophy.

SIGNATURE

I hereby acknowledge that the information above is accurate and I agree to abide by the regulations governing this award.

[Signature]

Name of Student (please print)

Date

28th Feb. 2012