

The Midwest Faculty Seminar  
Presents  
**Crime and Social Order**  
November 3-5, 2011

Social theory has long held that crime, far from a threat to the foundations of social order, is actually fundamental to the ways in which we know and organize the societies in which we live. Crime and its fictions, therefore, have generally been grasped as powerfully productive forces, demarcating the boundaries between lawlessness and legality and calling into being the subjects that make up the order of the modern, capitalist world. This position, however, has found itself under assault in recent years as the rise of neoliberalism and the retreat of the state have produced a deep anxiety on the part of publics the world over about the power of criminals and crime in our modern social spheres. No longer just a potent fantasy for the production of social order, scholars have thus begun to speculate that the seemingly endless proliferation of stories about crime in our present suggests something else: the complexity of our societies might now exceed our ability to know them, and the order of the modernist state may well be breaking down.

This seminar tries to grasp the changing relationship between crime and the order it works to produce, bringing the humanities and social sciences together to reflect on these issues in conceptual and aesthetic terms. On one level, it asks about how crime has functioned in the production of order in the history of our modern societies, and about how the rise of neoliberalism has transformed the foundations of social order throughout the modern world. What, for instance, can we learn about the productive power of crime from the example of the East German secret police, whose techniques were meant to keep an entire society at bay? What does the example of post-apartheid South Africa tell us about crime, neoliberalism and the crisis of the modernist state? And how can the contradictions of a society like the contemporary United States, where ostensibly free markets exist alongside a vast prison-industrial complex, help us to grasp the means by which crime is currently constructed as an object of social control?

On another level, the seminar seeks to understand the influence of these conceptual dynamics on political and artistic representations of crime throughout the course of the twentieth century, with a particular emphasis on how these practices clarify or problematize the conceptual relations articulated above. What does the practice of a social reformer like Jane Addams tell us about the management of criminality in turn-of-the-century Chicago? What can the changing place of crime in Italian cinema throughout the last fifty years tell us about way crime and criminality have been imagined in the context of the modernist state? And what can a television show like *The Wire*--with its peculiar relation to genre and its keen interest in the sociology of crime and policing--show us about the link between crime and social order in the post-industrial American city?

Our hope is that talking about crime in its various shapes will open onto a conversation about the foundations of social order that can take us beyond the current doxa about crime as a productive force in the maintenance of modern societies. It seems clear enough that in a world where crime is at once increasingly common and increasingly hard to define, the old stories about crime don't have the explanatory power they once possessed. The seminar tries to re-examine the recent history of crime and criminality in order to come up with new accounts of crime and its power in an increasingly chaotic global age.

Speakers will include Jean Comaroff (Anthropology), Andreas Glaeser (Sociology), Lina Steiner (Slavic Languages and Literatures), Domietta Torlasco (French and Italian, Northwestern University) Bernard Harcourt (Law and Political Science) and Ken Warren (English).