

Anthropology Department Spring 2013 Colloquia

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Mobilizing Life: Citizenship, Subjectivity, and the Quest for a Molecular Medical Clinic

This paper, based on ethnographic research in the United States, examines scientific and popular renderings of molecular therapies as a site for the projection of cultural fantasies involving the desire for human perfectibility and fears of degeneration. Such practices as gene therapy, pharmacogenomics, and stem-cell therapies promise transformative interventions into human life and health. The recognition of the potential flexibility of biological material and of life itself has facilitated the establishment of a new set of research efforts and allied commercial ventures seeking to transform such potential into medical therapies. I will argue that in the gap between the contemporary reality of available therapies and the potential of future therapies we find diverse efforts at imagining and building particular futures. Here significant work is being undertaken to create the material, political, economic, and conceptual means deemed necessary for facilitating the realization of a molecular medical clinic. At the heart of this work is the constitution of the ambiguously human as a biological resource for future humanness under the terms of human health and well-being. This paper focuses on everyday practices aimed at creating citizens knowledgeable about genomics to examine the cultural fantasies embedded in the conceptual work undertaken by scientists and others as they work to elaborate a human future enhanced by a new molecular medical toolkit.

KAREN-SUE TAUSSIG is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Minnesota. She received her Ph.D. in Anthropology at The Johns Hopkins University. She has previously taught in the Department of the History of Science at Harvard University where she also held a two year post-doctoral position in the Department of Social Medicine. She is the author of *Ordinary Genomes: Science, Citizenship, and Genetic Identities* (Duke University Press 2009).

She currently has two projects underway. The first, *Genetics and Its Publics: Crafting Scientific and Medical Literacies in the New Age of Biotechnology*, examines the diverse future building activities set in to motion by the explosion of knowledge in the life sciences, particularly efforts to develop a molecular medical clinic. More recently, she also has begun a new project theorizing the concept of "potential" in relation to humanness in the context of the life sciences. In particular she is interested in the way the concept of potential works at different scales, from understandings of what cells can do or be made to do, to how it motivates research in laboratories and how it is mobilized to set social action into motion.

MONDAY, MAY 6TH
3:30 - 5:00PM
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