

## Underground Networks

### Assignment Sheet: Reading Record

Many of the texts that we will read this semester fall into one of two categories: scholarly writing and critical theory. Scholarly writing is distinct by virtue of its disciplinary responsibility: to comprehensively address a topic in pursuit of an argument that advances a specific field. Critical theory, popularized by both social and literary critics, is distinct by virtue of its interdisciplinary speculation: to weave together a number of disciplines in order to call attention to an overlooked element of everyday life, or to shed new light on a given problem. While these genres generate distinct rhetorical styles—ways of making an argument—they share an unstated belief that knowledge production is a difficult process. Thus one of the defining characteristics of these texts is their notorious difficulty for new readers. In this course, you will learn how to understand, summarize and respond substantively to difficult texts such as these. To this end, you will produce a reading record for each assigned reading marked with an asterisk on the syllabus. **Please submit your Reading Record to our Blackboard Course Blog by midnight on the day before we discuss the assigned reading in class.** You can either cut and paste your Reading Record into the text field or attach it as a separate document.

A Reading Record consists of three components.

- 1) Outline of the Argument
- 2) Concise Response/Your Main Takeaway
- 3) Question for Discussion

#### Outline of the Argument

One of the best ways to argument a text is to track its development. And the easiest way to track an argument is to identify the purpose of each paragraph. In the fewest words possible try to identify the main idea of each paragraph. It is also a good idea to make a note about any evidence or quoted passage that the author uses to make his/her point. I recommend reading with a word-processing document open. Use numerals or bullet points to indicate a new idea (usually one per paragraph) and then indent any additional information below. Again, you want to use the fewest words possible, no complete sentences. It is also a good idea to keep track of page numbers as you go.

#### Concise Response

The goal of a Reading Record is to give you a handy source so that you do not have to re-read a complete text. While the outline is essential for comprehending an argument, it omits perhaps the most important piece of information: your opinion. Therefore, after you complete the outline, while the reading is still fresh in your mind, type up your thoughts about its merits and limitations. This might include a list of critical concepts, a statement about what the text allows you to see in your own life, or a disagreement you may have with the text. Try to limit your response to three sentences.

#### Discussion Question:

Difficult texts have a way of fostering social networks. Multiple perspectives make for a richer interpretation. Group discussion is one of the best ways of coming to terms with a text and preparing a focused question is one of the best ways of pursuing a productive group discussion. After you have completed your outline and your response, write down a single question that you would like to explore in class. This can take the form of asking us to examine a single passage that you think is especially important to the text, yet beyond your immediate comprehension. It can also take the form of an open-ended conversation starter, such as “How might [Blank’s] argument about [Blank] be read as a commentary on [Blank Contemporary Issue].”