

Rhetoric Show & Tell: Narrative, Theory, Discourse

April 16, 2016
1:00 - 4:00 pm
160 Dwinelle Hall

Panel A: 1:10 - 2:15 pm

Natalia Reyes
Hang Phung
Daniel Plautz
Stacey Nguyen

Panel B: 2:15 - 3:30 pm

Christopher Jelinek
Sophie Golub
Alexander Mabanta
Brandt Robin

Reception: 3:30 - 4:00 pm

Panel A

Natalia Reyes

The Rhetoric of Chicano Literary Criticism

This thesis investigates the causes, consequences, and potential alternatives to identity thinking in Chicano literary criticism. To what extent does identity thinking produce or preclude dynamic possibilities of interpretation in Chicano literary criticism? On the one hand, identity thinking allows critics to establish the parameters of a literary field and legitimizes their criticism on the basis of cultural authenticity. On the other hand, identity thinking relegates certain interpretive possibilities to the realm of the unthinkable. This study traces the debate on identity thinking in Chicano literary criticism and focuses on recent works by critics Carlos Gallego and Abraham Acosta. It elucidates how these authors' respective invocations of Alain Badiou's ontology and Jacques Rancière's political theory may suggest alternative understandings of subjectivity in works of Chicano literature. By testing these understandings of subjectivity with and against works of Chicano literature, we can gain a new lease on identity thinking, Chicano literary criticism, and rhetorical theory.

Hang Phung

Identity and Self-Identification in Law: Comparative Case Studies of Transgender and Corporate Personhood Regulations

Modern theories of personhood are strongly influenced by Aristotle's model of singular identity. Such notion of a fixated self is convenient but can be challenged by questioning the constitution of selfhood: who and what factors decide a person's identity? The conflict between identity and self-identification is further amplified in the legal discourse because the law seeks for a perfect notion of the self without having a concrete approach to selfhood. My thesis examines and analyzes the patterns in which the American court system has treated the two subjects that are both equally "creatures of the law"- transgendered individuals and corporations – by examining how these two categories emerged as "unnatural" subjects under the law. The conflict between identity and self-identification is not simply a battle to discern objectivity from subjectivity, but a demonstration of the complexity of selfhood and how the law has so far failed to address the issue of legal identity sufficiently.

Panel A

Daniel Plautz

The Displacement of Cool from San Francisco: Gentrification in Post-Recession Mission District Murals

The Mission District contains 17 murals per block in addition to the highest amount of evictions of any area in San Francisco since the '08 recession. In what ways have local murals changed due to the neighborhood's recent gentrification? To answer this, I look at three murals painted since 2008. The first mural, titled, Mission Makeover, is a before / after depiction of the Mission that encapsulates various local arguments against gentrification. The second mural, Narratives of Displacement, continues this critique in that it is a literal tombstone for the area's recent evictees. The third mural, Victorion, however, is a much less polarized celebration of gentrification that makes no serious attempt at resisting the changes in the neighborhood. Taken together, the three muralists' depictions of gentrification show that this process has already had a significant impact on the long-established Mission mural tradition in the last ten years alone.

Stacey Nguyen

Ambiguity as the Answer to Obligation

The Vietnamese writer who creates works in English faces ethical obligations of writing about the Vietnam War. What mitigates the tension between the obligation of representation and the possibility of creative agency in the works of Anglophone Vietnamese authors in the post-Vietnam War diaspora? To answer this question, this project follows three works: "Love and Honor and Pity and Pride and Compassion and Sacrifice," Vietnamera, and "Someday I'll Love Ocean Vuong." The ambiguity constitutive of these works make possible creative agency without dangerously dissociating from the socio-historical context of the Vietnam War. Resisting the narrative of Western liberation and belonging, these works query the themes of origin, agency of trauma survivors, and impermanence, offering possible forms of resistance and subversion to Western—and possibly even Vietnamese—expectations of representation.

Panel B

Christopher Jelinek

Towards the Rhetoric of Seduction: Discourse, Methods, Tactics

Some claim seduction is an art. Yet the manifold process of conversion—from sexual unwillingness to sexual willingness—which serves merely as the starting point for seduction, raises some concerns. What are the boundaries of seduction, persuasion, and coercion? One might see the raw material for seduction as an assemblage of emotions, which can be mediated discursively, for example, through repetitious schemes, sequential language patterns, and incremental compliance tactics (each functioning to stimulate “self-generated” physiological patterns). If this is the case, and if *kairos* becomes a psychological element which influences how the seducee perceives, conceives, and imagines the seducer’s messages, then the seducer’s stratagem for gaining preferential access to the seducee’s body seems to lead to a problematic zone of contact. But can seduction undermine one’s conscious control? Can the terrain of attraction and desire be circumscribed, undercut, and altered through this process called (“the art of”) seduction?

Sophie Golub

Merely Words: Poetry and Visual Art in Public

In order to explore a number of trends in recent contemporary American and European visual art and poetry, I unpack the Western tradition of “the arts” to contextualize two histories in which categorical limitations are both defended and relinquished. I then examine three visual artists utilizing poetry in their works, specifically in public spaces. American artist Jenny Holzer projects existing poems onto monuments, disregards the poetic history of form, and turns it into a visual spectacle.

London-based Robert Montgomery publishes his own poems on billboards around European cities alluding to a sense of form but refusing to carry it out in a separate practice of poetry. Trained in the visual arts, Kenneth Goldsmith claims himself a poet to champion the conceptual poetics movement that emphasizes the physical existence of a poem rather than its actual content. It is through the work of these three artists that I explore the generative contradictions that arise when calling a work of public art both a poem and visual art.

Panel B

Alexander Mabanta

Panveillance: The Rise of the Body Cameras in the United States

In the aftermath of rioting and organized protests nationwide following the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown, Attorney General Eric Holder and the U.S. Department of Justice launched a national initiative to adopt body cameras in every police department in the United States. I argue that the nationalization of body cameras effectively create what I term a “panveillance” state, a state distinguished from a surveillance state (which watches from cameras above), through constant watching from every direction. I review Foucault’s theory of panopticism as a prism by which to critically explore the body camera as both the latest iteration of panoptic devices and as a device of severely limited visual representation. I then situate body cameras in the existing literature of surveillance studies, the ethical and legal implications for privacy because of their technological adoption, and the ensuing problems of vulnerability individuals discover in the new panveillant world.

Brandt Robin

“Under the Beach, the Paving Stones”:

Swarm Logic, Control Theory, and The Social Body

My thesis discusses the effects of control power upon the social body (a socius): my goal is to provide some useful concepts in figuring out how this body moves and operates. Control power is a concept that was introduced by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze in his 1992 essay “Postscript on Societies of Control,” in which he puts it in theoretical orbit with friend and fellow theorist Michel Foucault’s conceptions of discipline and sovereign power, claiming control has superseded discipline as the primary expression of power in contemporary times. My investigation will consist of illustrating a few concepts to try to make sense of the changes in how a socius moves. My claim will be that the flows of a social body operate like a swarm, and that swarms operate by controlling and weaponizing its own crises: ‘it functions by breaking down’ (Deleuze and Guattari).

