

Special Session: Bridging Art and Scholarship, in Theory and Practice

Discussion of Papers Format

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Abstracts:

First Presenter

Title: Be It As If I Were With You: On Saying Yes to Whitman
Author: Caroline Carlsmith
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Historically, artists have sought to achieve forms of immortality through the production of art. Writers such as Whitman and Proust have been particularly interested in ways of decorporealizing and embedding avatars in their writing, so that they can attempt temporal leaps via text. This paper follows from an ongoing artistic exploration of the manifestations, motivations, and mechanisms of these endeavors, how they interlace with erotics and the structure of language, and how they can reconfigure contemporary relationships to history, identity and time. This practice necessitates a hybrid mode of artistic production and scholarship in order to make my performance of the literary literal.

This paper focuses on the invitation Walt Whitman offers the future reader in his homoerotic “Calamus” cluster that that person “[b]e not too certain but I am now with you.” I argue that, for the reader to accept this proposal of contemporaneity, s/he must negotiate multiple differentials of sexuality, intention, power, and time, and that these negotiations must be not just analytical but staged in a reciprocal attempt to receive what is offered. I accompany my paper with examples from my artistic practice, which include interdisciplinary exercises in impersonating (via wax cylinder recording), interlocution (via games of Nomic), and interpreting (via intuitive translation) of Whitman. As both my artwork and academic explication will illustrate, to expose activity in the roll of reader or viewer is to reveal and interrogate the tasks of evaluation, reception, and refusal, and to reinterpret the artistic solo as a pas de deux.

Second Presenter

Title: "The more I see of the stage": Performance, Transmission, and the Literary Scholar

Author: Veronica Goosey, Omar F. Miranda, and Randall Sessler: Romanticist Research Group of New York University

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In the Fall of 2012, the Romanticist Research Group of New York University collaborated with Red Bull Theater Group to put on a staged reading of Lord Byron's drama *Sardanapalus*. Our group had two principal objectives. First, to use performance to re-examine long-standing scholarly assumptions regarding the place of drama in British Romanticism. Second, and more importantly, to identify the differences in how literary scholars and performance artists approach a dramatic artifact. Byron's play, according to literary scholars, lacked the necessary stage direction, dramatic structure, and "touch" of a playwright needed to be successful as a drama. When taken up by a theater company, however, *Sardanapalus* transformed into a successful, hugely entertaining, and, in the words of the director, "eminently stageable" piece of drama. In critical terms, the performance emerged as a type of ethnographic research uncommon in literary study. Our collaboration raised several questions: What are the benefits of this type of ethnographic research? How do we situate this type of research in literary study? In performance study? How can a scholar transmit a performance to as wide an audience as more traditional forms of research like articles and conference papers?

Third Presenter

Title: The Memoir Book Review in Theory, in Practice

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Memoir's scholarship is unique in that it is written across mainstream media accessed by a variety of readers. Blogs, magazines, and newspaper articles, and most often the memoir book review show us that memoir's value is assessed by our culture at large rather than by a small group of academic specialists. In these book reviews we are told of the genre's narcissism, its art-for-profit nature, its bad behavior, but more than anything we are told that through the act of composition itself, an author's moral failings become clear. But the most prominent yet never discussed element of the memoir book review is the moral high-grounding its critics invoke. This paper asks, how does the interior, autobiographical landscape of the critic define the genre for our culture at large, and is that a good thing? And then, how is scholarship on memoir a new kind of autobiographical writing that performs rather than argues for the direction of the genre? By recalling some of memoir's most famous book reviews that double as its most cited scholarship, this paper argues that memoir has become a genre of literature made of commentary on it rather than a collection of like "primary" texts, and discusses both the power and problems when academic scholarship is made of a generalist's performance.

Fourth Presenter

Title: From Watching to Reading – Theorizing a Performative Manuscript

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I will examine my performative installation “Current of Air,” which employs the structural strategy of a time-based “reading,” a performance book. The audience experiences scenes according to chapters, shifting the audience from passively “watching” to a more pedagogic “reading.” In the final scene of this performance, audience members physically enter the performance-installation space. Within the whole performance/reading process, a deeper exchange between affective/intuitive feeling and intellectual thinking is observed. I assert that the role of spectator/audience is a crucial site for bridging art and scholarship. In his article “Interaction between Text and Reader,” Wolfgang Iser discusses the interaction between a literary work and a book reader. He claims that a literary work has two poles, the artistic aspect produced by the author’s text and the aesthetic aspect realized by the reader. The reader goes through a dynamic process to fill in the “blanks” between the textual segments. This experience often produces a sequence of imaginary and interpretative visuals, sounds, or other sensory outputs. I argue that the literature reader’s participatory experience shares similar properties of a spectator in a performance installation. Both reader and spectator are active and unstable in nature. They create experiences for themselves in order to complete the structural and temporal attributes of either a book or an artifact (in my case, the performative installation). Indeed, how might these similarities inform the scholarship of art practice? How can art practice be read intuitively as an intellectual activity? In fact, R.D. Laing states in his book ***The Politics of Experience*** that experience is invisible. This invisibility forms the basis of interaction between the viewer and the viewed. Laing, like Iser, discusses the “gap” in which interactions are rooted. I believe such gaps provoke thinking processes, similar to filling in the “blanks.” In this sense, the reader/spectator is an active agent in connecting and filling the blanks and gaps, resulting in completion of a book or an artwork. Conceptualizing my performative installation “Current of Air” as a book provides a creative synergy to integrate the roles of spectator/audience and book reader and examine the connection between art and scholarship.