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Paroles gelées

Title

“Alone Together/Together Alone” and “Spectacle and Spectator: Seeing /Being Seen”

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8xp6g13v>

Journal

Paroles gelées, 28(1)

ISSN

1094-7264

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Publication Date

2014

DOI

10.5070/PG7281025951

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Introduction: “Alone Together/ Together Alone” and “Spectacle and Spectator: Seeing /Being Seen”

As we sat down to compose the call for papers for the 16th annual Graduate Student Conference in French and Francophone Studies at UCLA in the early spring of 2011, we found ourselves in the midst of a world in which technological connectivity was having a profound and tangible effect on the course of history. At home, 100,000 protestors spoke out against budget legislation in Wisconsin, and abroad, the revolutionary spirit of the Arab Spring spread, via Twitter and Facebook, from Tunisia to Egypt and Libya. In light of these events, as well as our now seemingly mundane everyday use of technology to maintain and build social connections, how we were to understand Sherry Turkle’s comment that “Technology proposes itself as the architect of our intimacies”?¹ To what extent was technology a tool in the creation of interpersonal connections, and to what extent was it an actor, capable of taking responsibility for the way we, as both individuals and communities, interact? What kind of intimacies can be nurtured through the distance of technological mediation?

With these initial questions, we opened the call for papers with the question of how to define technology, and how the self and relationships to others might be mediated by various technological means. From the hyper-connected revolutionaries of the Arab Spring to the solitary reader, alone or not alone with her book, we wondered how to expand upon the implications of an experience of the self and other gained through mediation. In return, we received proposals that ranged from discussions of the represented mediated self in literature, to domestic architecture and its use to delineate spaces of intimacy and exposure, to technology as an extension of self, whether through a cinematic apparatus or the media platform of a fashion blog dedicated as much to self-creation as to participation in the online sharing of style. Over the two days of the conference, these papers and others brought us together to discuss self and community from various perspectives within French and Francophone studies.

At the keynote address that ended the conference, Tom Conley combined his research on cartography and twentieth century cinema in a talk that examined how visual media can turn a collective viewing experience into the witnessing of individual experience. The troubling relationship between the figures on the screen in Buñuel’s 1933 film

Las Hurdes: Tierra sin pan and the creation of the spectator's complicity in their suffering through the form of staged documentary brought the discussions of two days into dialogue with the ethical implications of self and collectivity.

Jennifer Misran's examination of the remaking of history as collective history in Patrick Chamoiseau's *L'esclave vieil homme et le molosse* in "Quand l'un forme le Tout : Expérience individuelle et devoir d'écriture dans *l'esclave vieil homme et le molosse*," traces the narrative development alongside the developing subjectivity of the protagonist in the novel. In doing so, she brings the writer's creative process into dialogue with the creation of the representative literary subject as way of questioning the nature of the author as *porte-parole*. She asks us to consider the nature of an individual who is made to or chooses to stand for a group in need of a voice. While Misran brings the nature of the past as collective and individual experience into dialogue with the nature of literary characters in post-colonial fiction, Olivier Roland shifts our perspective forward, examining technology's promise of innovation and its use as a tool of mediation in artistic collaboration and as an extension of the body of the artist/inventor. Roland brings us to the development of early cinematography and a discussion of the possibility of violence and physicality therein. In "L'autographie mareysienne: ou comment séparer les corps pour les rapprocher d'eux-mêmes" he asks how technology changes our relationship to our own bodies.

The final article from the 16th annual conference brings us back around to technological media, of the kind that increasingly forms our everyday experiences and interactions. Hadley Suter takes as a point of departure youthful Parisian bloggers, fans and followers of the city's fashion scene, in her article "Self as oeuvre/other: Parisian fashion bloggers and the new 'culte du Moi'". She uses the projected self of the blogosphere to revisit the question of the artist's self as a component of the artistic endeavor, examining how new ways of broadcasting and maintaining one's persona relate to artistic practice from the 19th century. Why we come together and the ways in which we cultivate and maintain parts of our identity constantly mediate our ideas of self and community, which in turn, are mediated by technological and narrative tools.

The 17th annual Graduate Student Conference in French and Francophone Studies "Spectacle and Spectator: Seeing/Being Seen" echoes many of the questions raised during the previous year's conference, such as the technological mediation of interpersonal interactions. By taking up the relationship between spectacle and spectator as an object of inquiry, we

explored the connotations of spectacle, from the Latin *spectare*, meaning “to view or to watch,” as extravagance, hypnosis, seduction, and voyeurism. In an age of ever shortening attention spans, our aim was to examine the changing audience, affective dimension, and interfaces for the spectacle in today’s literary landscape. While none of the papers here analyze plays or films, the elements of on-stage theatrical performance and cinematic mediation are nevertheless palpable and invite us to think through the spectacle beyond the boundaries of theatre or film, and more as a form of perception or process. The following papers make a compelling case for “performance” within texts, ranging from genetic criticism of manuscripts and authorial self-portraiture to the ways certain technologies distract us from the task at hand.

In “Jean-Philippe Toussaint’s Slow Flight from Television,” Natalie Potok-Saaris proposes that the novel *La télévision* offers an alternate mode of being in the world than that of the hegemony of the televisual gaze and its fast-paced programming. Using mid-twentieth century media theory, Potok-Saaris’s thought-provoking analysis shows how the novel—a slow-paced medium—can continue to be relevant, even a “safe haven” in a rapidly changing, increasingly televisual society.

Lauren Uphaday’s “An Elusive Vision: Genesis and Apocalypse in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*” applies textual genetic criticism to compare manuscripts from Marguerite Duras’s novel with the final, published text, arguing that the female character, “Lol”, represents an allegory of the *subtractive* writing process by which she is created. Uphaday’s meticulous, ground-breaking analysis guides us to an understanding of Lol’s presence and absence as an image created and destroyed by the narrator—this understanding of Lol also speaks to the interaction between the reader and the text.

And finally, Kristen Stern’s examination of the figure of the author in “Performing the Immigrant: The Works of Calixthe Beyala and Fatou Diome” explores constructions of identity surrounding the transnational individual. By examining authorial performativity (“writer-character” figures in the text), Stern shows us the unique subjectivity of minority/female/contemporary/postcolonial authors Beyala and Diome. Stern examines the intricate ways Beyala and Diome problematize how they are “seen” in the public sphere in France and by their audiences in the post-colony. This article explores the “performance” of minority identity in rich ways, including a discussion of the reception of constructed identities by spectators with varying subject positions.

In the spirit of both conference topics as well as in light of the fact that the forthcoming articles speak to each other, the organizers opted to combine our selected conference proceedings so as to be *seen together*. This publication honors the individual efforts of our contributors, as well as the collective spirit with which we continue to hold UCLA's annual French and Francophone Studies Graduate Student Conference.

Notes

1. See Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less from Each Other* (Boston: Basic Books, 2011), p. 1.