

UCLA

CSW Update Newsletter

Title

test

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0g190651>

Author

test

Publication Date

2012

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

Panel Review - GRRR(L) Futures: Subcultures of Rebellious Women

This *Thinking Gender* panel, moderated by Mishuana Goeman, Assistant Professor in the Department of Womens Studies at UCLA, looked at various iterations of rebellious women, from musicians, to academics. The presenters in this panel included Chloe Diamond-Lenow, a graduate student at UC Santa Barbara in the Department of Feminist Studies, Shelina Brown, a graduate student in the Department of Musicology at UCLA, Alice Royer, a graduate student in Cinema and Media Studies at UCLA, Jonquil Bailey, a graduate student in the Department of English at University of Virginia

Telling Stories about Feminist Futures: From Androcentrism to Anthropocentrism

The first presentation of the panel, given by Chloe Diamond-Lenow, examined the nature of women's studies, and all of its iterations, in an effort to argue that the feminist epistemologies and methodologies developed within women's studies can be successfully applied to other fields to produce new feminist work. In her argument, Diamond-Lenow singles out the developing field of critical animal studies as a prime area of inquiry that would benefit from the adoption of feminist epistemologies and methodologies. She also argues that work in women's studies would likewise benefit from the intellectual frameworks that critical animal studies is grounded in.

Critical animal studies is an academic field that, in a very simplistic sense, rejects the androcentric focus of the vast majority of academic disciplines and instead attempts to collapse the categories and boundaries that separate humans from non-humans. This particular field of study emerged, similar to women's studies, from the social justice movements focused on environmentalism that materialized in the 1960s and 70s. For a bit more context on the foundations of critical animal studies, one of field's most influential works in this field is Jacques Derrida's essay, based off of his address to the 1997 Crisy Conference, *The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)* where he says, "There is no animal in the general singular, separated from man by a single indivisible limit. We have to envisage the existence of 'living creatures' whose plurality cannot be assembled within the single figure of an animality that is simply opposed to humanity."

Diamond-Lenow, a career student of women's studies, feels that both women's studies and critical animal studies could benefit with an academic engagement with each other. She argued that with the dynamic feminist epistemologies and methodologies available in women's studies discourse combined with a history in feminist theory that questions andocentrism, women's and feminist studies engagement with critical animal studies would produce a more vigorous critical theory for feminist thinking.

She concluded her presentation by offering some suggested questions that could engage both women/feminist studies and critical animal studies. These questions include how media reports on "gay penguins" at the zoo inscribe discourses on sexuality or monogamy, how discourses frame "gay marriage" through ascribing representations of bestiality to it, or what representational politics are involved when BBC names a panda as one of its top women of the year.

Cool Moms: An Ethnographic Take on Contemporary Grrrl Punk Politics

The panel continued with a shift away from the theoretical work of constituting academic disciplines to an exploration of identity politics in a Los Angeles based, DIY girl punk band Cool Moms. The presenter Shelina Brown, the drummer/guitarist for Cool Moms, discussed the formation and style of the band in the context of experimenting with new forms of musical expression and redefining the roles and power structures in traditional punk rock bands. Peppered throughout the presentation were clips of the band performing to show of the musical and performance style for those who may not have been able to identify “post punk, no-wave punk rock ... 4/4 rock drum patterns...trebly guitar... dissonant bass lines” without seeing and hearing the band perform.

Brown’s described the key features of the band that constituted its experimental style to display how the freedoms gained from experimentation had other, more negative side effects. When the band formed, the members decided to be experimental with the structure and musical style to curate a carefree, youthful character for the band. To accomplish this, they decided to each take up instruments that were not their primary instruments and share vocals instead of appointing a front person. These decisions opened up many musical possibilities for the band derived from simple instances like physically being in a different place while the band performs and rediscovering the excitement of learning to play a new instrument. However, “switching up instruments” is not as innocuous as it seems at first glance. In fact, Brown describes many interpersonal problems surrounding how to divvy up performance time for the bandmates that shared guitar and drum responsibilities.

Brown took the time to Pauline Oliveros’ ideas about active and receptive models of music making. Brown’s summation explains that in western rock bands, the guitarist and lead vocalist are often thought to be the active creative members of a band while the bassist and drummer are thought to be passive in the creative process. Also, because the drummer is often located in the back of the stage during a performance, they are then seen as the least important bandmate. Understanding this issue, as well as other gendered conceptions of how music should be created and performed helped Cool Moms retain the experimental, feminist, youthful character they were striving for all along.

(Digital) Revolution Girl Style Now!: Sub-Cultures, Social Media, Subjectivity and the Videos of Sadie Benning and Thirza Cuthand

In this talk presenter Alice Royer looks at how subcultures, particularly feminist artists, function in today’s digital society compared to the social networking from the riot grrrl subculture of the 1990’s. In particular she argues that even though today’s form of digital social networking could, in fact, bolster the sharing of multimedia work, there is an anemic and decentralized quality to digital subcultures when compared to the riot grrrl community.

To illustrate her point Royer takes the example of two video artists – Sadie Benning and Thirza Cuthand who both use similar cinematic techniques and autobiographical content to review how the various technologies that contribute to social networking affect their belonging to a specific community. Royer first looks at Benning’s career as a video artist in the 90s and how even though the riot grrrl aesthetic permeated

her work, she was always on the outskirts of that particular subculture. Royer attributes Benning's outsider status in the riot grrrl subculture to the medium of her work, in that the riot grrrl subculture used physical ways of distributing materials and Benning's video work was diminished in the subculture, not because her work didn't fully subscribe to the riot grrrl aesthetics or she herself wasn't directly involved with other riot grrrls, but because it was more difficult to distribute her work to a large number of people. On the other side of the spectrum, Thirza Cuthand's work is quite easy to distribute to large groups of people by way of Web 2.0 social networks. However, she is not situated within a specific community or subculture, and while she promotes herself and her work online she does not have a huge community of people who follow her filmmaking activities. Royer notes that a subculture or community like riot grrrl could help a younger generation of video artists take charge of the technology they use to create social change.

A New Kind of Pleasure: Feminist Storytelling in Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames*

In the final presentation of the panel, Jonquil Bailey argues that Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames* (1983), a feminist science fiction film, provides a new and unique way to portray women in film. Bailey focused her presentation on analyzing the film techniques that Borden uses throughout *Born in Flames* and how those cinematic techniques both afford the audience pleasure as well as providing enough detachment to give the audience room to critically assess the film's female characters. Bailey also argues that the film's narrative structure and the fact that there is no one central character provides the audience with the space to focus on the film's central theme: a feminist uprising and social movement within the film's universe.

The film itself follows various members of a feminist movement in New York City during a post-social-democratic revolution era where the Social Democrats push propaganda that denies sexism and discrimination against racial and sexual minorities. The feminist movement dubbed the Women's Army uses protests and media to shed light on the joblessness and the underrepresentation of women. Bailey argues that because the film refrains from focusing on one character to drive the story and instead moves through the narrative using multiple women in diverse situations, providing examples of women in physical demanding jobs, or of women exploring their sexuality, Borden strips the female body of naturalized meanings and creates a larger possibilities for female experience and expression within the film. Bailey also discusses how this decision to focus on many female characters rather than one gives the audience the opportunity to identify with, rather than one single woman, the category "woman."

Bailey also argues in her presentation that Borden's construction of the erotic gaze in this film breaks the power dynamic this technique usually produces by, rather than using the heterosexual man as the possessor of the gaze she lets the female characters both be subject to the gaze as well as possessors of it. Bailey claims that this new gaze, give the audience the chance to look in many different ways at the female body as well as look at the female body with new eyes. Bailey also makes it clear that though the film employs the erotic gaze, it does not do so in a way that reduces the female characters to only their sexuality.

Ultimately, Bailey concludes that the film creatively appropriates traditional film techniques to reinforce and emphasize women's agency, women's diversity and individuality, and creates a "unique and alternative way to view women in film."