

SOCIETY FOR CRITICAL EXCHANGE

Winter Theory Institute

February 2011 marked the Society for Critical Exchange's (SCE) second annual Winter Theory Institute. Held at the University of Houston-Victoria (UHV) this year's topic was "Neoliberalism's Cultural Work."

Over the course of four days, experts discussed topics ranging from neoliberalism's effect on literature to the policing of protests in depopulated urban areas.

Uppinder Mehan, Associate Director of SCE and Assistant Professor of English at UHV, and Sharon O'Dair, Professor of English and the University of Alabama, approached neoliberalism from a literary perspective. Mehan examined how contemporary science fiction authors imagine the neoliberal self in circumstances where there is no competition for resources. O'Dair argued against the "slighting" effect of neoliberalism on literature as a whole.

Paul Passavant, an Associate Professor of Political Science at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, described that as urban spaces lose residents to the suburbs, neoliberal states become actively hostile toward democratic demonstrations. In another discussion of urban spaces, Jennifer Wingard, an Assistant Professor of Rhetoric at the University of Houston, examined how the rhetoric of neoliberalism crippled the city of Houston, TX after Hurricane Ike.

Using Jacques Derrida's analogy of autoimmunity, Whitman College

Associate Professor, Zahi Zalloua warned that neoliberal American efforts to combat terrorism post-9/11 and protect its citizens has resulted in a disintegration of their legal rights.

Other contributors included SCE Executive Director, Jeffrey Di Leo, along with Jodi Dean, Andrew Baerg, Noah De Lissovoy, and Robert Marzec.

MLA Panels

During last January's Modern Language Association (MLA) conference in LA, the Society for Critical Exchange (SCE) arranged two panels.

The first, presided over by SCE Associate Director, Uppinder Mehan, focused on sustainable publishing and featured papers by Robert Marzec, Associate Editor at *Modern Fiction Studies* and Associate Professor of English at Purdue University, Brian Lennon, Associate Professor of English at Penn State University, and Jeffrey Di Leo, SCE Executive Director.

Marzec's paper, "Sustainable Publishing: The Dead-End of the Print/Digital Binary," and Lennon's, "New Stationary States," question whether digital publishing is "greener" than its traditional counterpart, print publishing.

The second SCE panel entitled "Public Intellectuals and the Question of Celebrity" featured Kerry Bystrom from the University of Connecticut, Even Gottlieb from Oregon State University, Sophia McClennen

from Penn State and Zahi Zalloua from Whitman College.

Bystrom's paper, "Millennial Humanitarians: Public Intellectuals, Celebrity Culture, and the Case of Darfur," addressed pitfalls and benefits of celebrity involvement in humanitarian aid, specifically, the genocide in Darfur. McClennen took a more light-hearted look at celebrity and activism in her essay "American According to Colbert: Satire as Public Pedagogy post 9/11." In "The Most Dangerous Philosopher in the West—To Himself: Slavoj Zizek and the Perils of Popularity," Gottlieb attempts to reconcile the complexity of Zizek's philosophical positions with his desire to reach a more mainstream audience. Zalloua also referenced Zizek extensively in his essay, "Badiou and Zizek, or the Return of the 'Universal Intellectual.'"

At next year's MLA conference in Seattle, SCE's panel, "Corporate Humanities," will be presided over by Zalloua and will feature Mehan, Di Leo, Donald Hedrick from Kansas State, and Karin Gosselink from Yale.

For copies of papers, visit societyfor-criticalexchange.org after 1 Dec.

Coming soon—An SCE book *Terror, Theory, and Humanities*—essays from the first Winter Theory Institute, "Terror.edu," edited and with an introduction by Jeffrey Di Leo and Uppinder Mehan.