The In-Between and the Unknown

October 12, 4:00
Student Building 150
Reception following

Anya Peterson Royce
“Isthmus Zapotec artists and their art: image, word, and sound”

Isthmus Zapotec artists and their art: image, word, and sound
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The in-between is a landscape of possibility and of transformation. It is a place that demands letting go of the known, of the comfort of the familiar, in order to let oneself be the transformation for others. Artists call this home.

Landscapes of the in-between demand that we implicate ourselves, bodies and all. It is not for everyone, this heading out into the unknown, led by one’s passion, to what writer Sue Monk Kidd calls the exquisite edge of courage (1996:106). Artists inhabit it, open themselves to interpreting their craft and culture, and offer this mediated culture to wider audiences. Their artful behavior is rooted fundamentally in sensual knowledge, making them peculiarly sensitive to the traditions and values of their own cultures. This sensitivity and their residence in unfamiliar territory, both rooted and rootless, allow them to remind their own communities of who they have been and can be. They also speak from and for their communities to those who do not know their traditions and histories.

I will explore the following questions in the context of the rich and continuous tradition of visual art, poetry, and music among the Isthmus Zapotec of Juchitán. What circumstances make it possible for artists to create out of their own traditions while departing from them? How do they navigate the in-between roles of interpreters and transformers? What conditions support acceptance of the artist as person, the work created by the artist, or both person and creation?

Working with image, word, and sound, I will offer examples of the ancient, the reworked, and the new, touching on the role of social media in creating and sustaining art.

Jane Goodman
“Before the Ruins: Waiting for the Bulldozer in Algeria”

Before the Ruins: Waiting for the Bulldozer in Algeria
Jane Goodman

This paper attempts to grapple with the ethnographic and theoretical challenges raised in the pre-emergent space that is constituted when people are waiting for a potentially devastating event to unfold. It is located in the street of a Mediterranean town in Algeria in June 2009. A disparate group of people had gathered in anticipation of the state-sponsored demolition of a seaside block that included several dozen homes, a revered local theater, and a fresh fish restaurant. The crowd came together in the street without a plan, and without knowing exactly what would transpire or when. The gathering was characterized primarily by people milling about, yet it seemed to hold out the potential for violence or for an encounter with some larger force that remained unnamed. Resisting the temptation to move quickly to what did in fact transpire, this paper instead lingers in the state of uncertainty, anticipatory dread and latent anger that characterized the mood on the street as people awaited the arrival of the bulldozers and backhoes. “The street” has become an actor in its own right in current literature on the Arab Spring and related uprisings. This paper takes “the street” as its subject, attempting to characterize it in terms of a pre-emergent structure of feeling that may (or may not) culminate in political action.