

ALEXEI YURCHAK

(University of California, Berkeley)

December 3, 2018, 7:00pm
Cornerstone Screening Room

“OBJECT NUMBER ONE: BODIES OF LENIN IN THE LAB OF THE FUTURE”

The Soviet communist project was organized around the figure of “Leninism” -- the discursive and material construct that consisted of Lenin’s texts and quotes, images and sculptures, and Lenin’s physical body in the Mausoleum. As the center of sovereignty power, “Leninism” was constant and eternal; it was the only physical body and body of texts that could not be questioned or transcended within the Soviet political discourse. In fact, however, to remain “the same” Leninism was continuously changed and reinvented throughout the Soviet history. Leninist texts were misquoted and censored, Leninist images were invented and retouched, Lenin’s physical body was re-sculpted and re-embalmed. The biochemical science that maintained and transformed Lenin’s body was at the center of this ongoing political reconstruction. What does “Leninism” feel like from the perspective of this science with its biological labs, chemical tests, and anatomical procedures? How do the political, the artistic, and the biological intersect in this unique project? What does this perspective tell us about the iconoclastic movements directed at Lenin’s images today?

AUDRA SIMPSON

(Columbia University)

April 26, 2019, 4:00pm
Cornerstone Screening Room

“SAVAGE STATES: SETTLER GOVERNANCE IN AN AGE OF SORROW”

In what world do we imagine the past to be settled in light of its refusal to perish and allow things to start over anew? What are the conditions that make for this imagining, this fantasy or rather, demand of a new start point? In this piece I consider the world of settler colonialism, which demands this newness, and a world in which Native people and their claims to territory are whittled to the status of claimant or subject in time with the fantasy of their disappearance and containment away from a modern and critical present. This fantasy of a world without Indians or Indians whittled into claimants extends itself to a mode of governance that is beyond institutional and ideological but is in this study, deeply affective. In this piece I examine how the Canadian practice of settler governance has adjusted itself in line with global trends and rights paradigms away from overt violence to what are seen as softer and kinder, caring modes of governing but governing, violently still and yet, with a language of care, upon on still stolen land. This talk asks not only in what world we imagine time to stop, but takes up the ways in which those that survived the time stoppage stand in critical relationship to dispossession and settler governance apprehend, analyze and act upon this project of affective governance. Here an oral and textual history of the notion of “reconciliation” is constructed and analyzed with recourse to Indigenous criticism of this affective project of repair.

BANU BARGU

(University of California, San Diego)

September 9, 2019, 7:00pm
Cornerstone Screening Room

“DYING-IN: POLITICS OF LIFE, THEATERS OF DEATH”

One of the novel forms of nonviolent resistance to emerge since the 1980s, and which has gained an increased visibility in the last few years, is a form of action called the “die-in.” In these protest actions, activists have placed themselves in public sites and lain on the ground, feigning dead bodies. Most frequently staged in the United States, these actions have been deployed to resist different forms of violence. Most prominently, they have been performed by Black Lives Matter activists, who oppose police violence that targets black and brown bodies in violation of fundamental constitutional rights. Less well known is the deployment of the die-in as a form of protest by anti-war protesters in opposition to the increasing use of drones, or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in warfare and counterinsurgency operations. By performing die-ins, groups such as the Hancock 38 and other peace activists have been publicizing their opposition to the use of drones as part of targeted killings that violate international humanitarian law. In this paper, I focus on the die-in as a novel form of corporeal and nonviolent resistance to violence based on the dramatic performance of death. Relying on a biopolitical approach informed by and in critical conversation with Foucault, Mbembe, and Agamben, I interrogate its recent deployments by Black Lives Matter and peace activists and draw out the theoretical connections between them, by focusing on the conditions that make such a form of protest possible and meaningful. I analyze the political intervention of this form of action, especially by way of its theatricality, relying on the perspective of materialist aesthetics built on the work of Althusser. I argue that through an analysis of the political deployment of an embodied theatricality within a biopolitical problematic, the die-in enables us to become cognizant of both the ongoing nature of sovereign violence, in its domestic and global manifestations, and the pitfalls of an ideology of humanism/humanitarianism that attends to and expresses the contradictions of the current regime of power.

MIMI T. NGUYEN

(University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign)

February 24, 2020, 7:00pm
Cornerstone Screening Room

“THE PROMISE OF BEAUTY”

The historical present is often perceived through the presence or absence of beauty, as I argue in *The Promise of Beauty*. My talk analyzes affective and aesthetic responses to scarcity, precarity, and uncertainty, drawn from the crises of war and colonial and capital dispossession, in order to understand the promise of beauty as a world-building engagement. From the state seizure of indigenous lands for the preservation of “natural” beauty, to the staging of a beauty pageant for landmine survivors, I consider distinct personal, social, and political projects that unfold through disputes about the beauty we deserve – which is to say, the life worth living. In doing so, I hope to show how and why the promise of beauty is so usable across a spectrum of political claims, whether imperial or insurgent, and how do these claims delineate what forms of life are valuable, and for whom.

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This lecture series is organized around the theme of encounters. We invite speakers whose work spans disciplinary boundaries and generates productive encounters between them. At the same time, we recognize that encounters are not merely academic conversations but also ways of being engaged in and by the world. By definition, an encounter does not leave the self intact, but pushes the self outside of its comfort zones. In our politically bewildering times, an openness to the encounter can incite new ways of thinking and being together.

Past Speakers Include:

LISA WEDEEN

(University of Chicago)

March 1, 2018 7:00pm,
Richard F. Celeste Theatre

“ON UNCERTAINTY: FAKE NEWS, POST-TRUTH, AND THE QUESTION OF JUDGMENT IN SYRIA”

JODI DEAN

(Hobart and William Smith Colleges)

September 27, 2018, 7:00PM
Cornerstone Screening Room

“FROM ALLIES TO COMRADES”

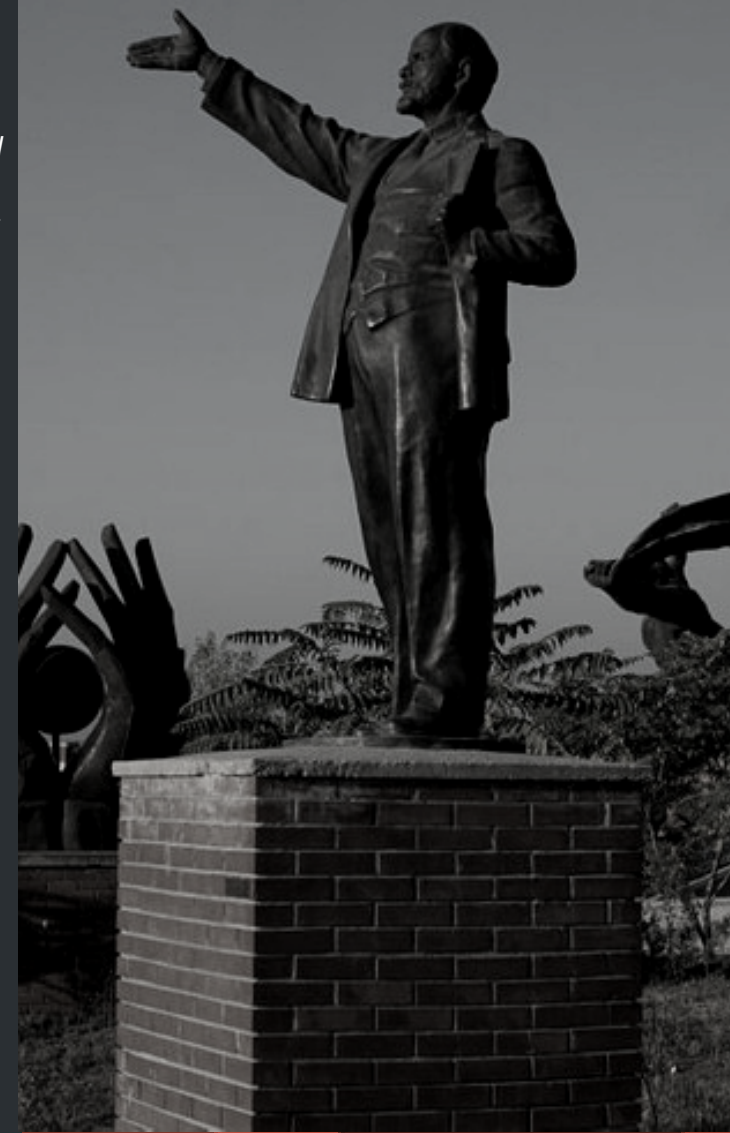
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