Don’t Call it a Call Out: Literary Citizenship in the Digital Age

Info
- Date: Thursday, 5 March 2020
- Time: 12:10–1:25 p.m.
- Location: Room 006A, Henry B. González Convention Center
- RSVP: https://www.facebook.com/events/603138743803376

Type of Event
Artistic and Professional Stewardship

Event Description
This panel explores social media as a political space critical to writers today. Panelists will discuss digital citizenship; the fight for inclusivity, vulnerability, accountability, allyship, discourse, and understanding in writing and publishing; and the effects of that fight on personal and professional lives. The panel affirms the transformative nature of social media within the literary community.

Statement of Merit
Every few months, the literary community is rocked by another abuse of power and privilege in publishing that quakes across Facebook, Twitter, and other digital social platforms. Our panelists have engaged in ethical public criticism and brought conscience and accountability to the literary community. This panel is necessary to foster the rethinking of what is owed within communities, formations of kinship, ethical engagement, and how to discuss and reduce harm.

Schedule
- Accessibility statement
- Welcome guests to the panel/topic
- Silence cell phones, will take questions after
• Introduce panelists and moderator
• Pose questions with follow-ups as needed
• Take questions (10-15 mins)

Panelists

Su Hwang is the recipient of the inaugural Jerome Hill Fellowship in Literature, and is the author of the poetry collection Bodega. She teaches creative writing with the MN Prison Writing Workshop, and is the co-founder of Poetry Asylum with poet Sun Yung Shin. She currently lives in Minneapolis.

Michael Kleber-Diggs is a poet and essayist. His writing has appeared or is forthcoming in McSweeney’s, Poetry City, North Dakota Quarterly, Pollen Midwest, Paper Darts, Water~Stone Review, and a few anthologies. He enjoys collaboration with visual artists. Michael is a past Fellow with the Givens Foundation for African-America Literature, a past-winner of the Loft Mentor Series in Poetry, and the inaugural Poet Laureate of Anoka County libraries. His work has been supported by the Minnesota State Arts Board, the Jerome Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Gala Mukomolova is a poet and essayist. She received an MFA from the University of Michigan and is the author of Without Protection and One Above One Below. In 2016, Mukomolova received the 92nd Street Y Discovery/Boston Review Poetry Prize. She is an astrology writer.

Sun Yung Shin is the author of Unbearable Splendor; Rough, and Savage; and Skirt Full of Black. She co-directs Poetry Asylum in Minneapolis. The editor of A Good Time for the Truth: Race in Minnesota and Outsiders Within and author of Cooper's Lesson, she is widely published in multiple genres.

Moderator

Levis Keltner is the editor-in-chief at Newfound and author of the novel Goodnight. Their fiction, nonfiction, and poetry have appeared in Anomaly, Entropy Magazine, Be About It Zine, and Bull: Men's Fiction. Levis lives in St. Louis and on Instagram @leviskeltner.

Introduction

Don’t Call It a Call-Out: Literary Citizenship in the Digital Age
This panel explores social media as a political space critical to writers today. Our panelists will discuss digital citizenship; the fight for inclusivity, vulnerability, accountability, allyship, discourse, and understanding in writing and publishing; and the effects of that fight on our personal and professional lives. The panel affirms the transformative nature of social media within the literary community.

From white author Jeanine Cummins making seven figures for telling the story of an undocumented Mexican immigrant to large institutions such as AWP failing to provide access to people with disabilities, it seems every few weeks, the literary community is engaged in critique against another abuse of power and privilege across Twitter, Facebook, blogs, peer-to-peer messaging, and elsewhere. As I’m sure many of you here today have, our panelists have engaged in ethical public criticism and sought to bring conscience and accountability to the literary community.

Not everyone equates criticism with citizenship. Both inappropriately and intentionally, public criticism is often referred to as call-out, or cancel, culture. Call-out culture is popularly defined as, "a form of public shaming that aims to hold individuals and groups accountable by calling attention to behavior that is perceived to be problematic, usually on social media."

What isn’t defined here is who is typically engaged in the labor of calling out.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, if you Google “call-out culture,” there are no laudatory articles. The top returns are:

- **NYT**: “The Cruelty of Call Out Culture,” in which David Brooks makes the outrageous claim that, “… once you give random people the power to destroy lives without any process, you have taken a step toward the Rwandan genocide.”
- **Atlantic**: “The Destructiveness of Call-out Culture on Campus”
- **Medium’s top article**: “The Problem with Call-out Culture”

The status quo can’t recognize criticism as healthy. If acknowledged at all, criticism of systemic inequities is weaponized—deemed “liberal in-fighting” (“SJW”) and recast as a lack of unity or common sense or whatever adjective ignorance thrives on. Surprise, surprise—it reverses blame onto critics for creating division, for “causing trouble” in order to deflect from revising its practices.

When I hear the definition of call out culture, I hear underrepresented groups leveraging power to confront systemic inequities—a 21st century take on a union strike.

I believe people, predominantly white men, label call outs as “dangerous” or “inappropriate” because public criticism works, at least in that it threatens all they care about: saving face to
maintain dominance. Of course, they’d prefer talks in private where abuses can remain out of sight and perpetuated.

I believe many of what some label as call outs in the literary community over the last few years are essential, nuanced critiques of how under-represented writers are treated by over-represented writers or of abuses by a writer, editor, or publisher in a position of privilege and/or power.

Panelists, I am excited to hear from you about your points of view on our topic today.

Questions

1. Could you please take a moment to describe your relationships to social media for personal use and in relation to the literary community?

2. Is digital citizenship—being accessible, being part of the conversation—necessary of writers today?

3. Do “call outs” function as the conscience of the literary community? Or something else entirely?

4. In correspondence with poet Vanessa Angélica Villareal, she’s expressed that, “the sheer amount of labor POC have done around certain issues, such as the re-emergence of fascist themes in POETRY, plagiarism accusations against POC, whiteness rewarded in Latinx literature, etc. have caused estrangement, alienation, disproportionate unnecessary labor, hypervisibility, and harm.” Can anyone speak to the consequences of this labor and to the benefits reaped by those who remain silent?

5. What are some best practices for ethical engagement in how to discuss and reduce harm in the literary community? Any thoughts on the “call in”?

Stories

- NYT: “I’m a Black Feminist, I Think Call-Out Culture Is Toxic”
- Sundress: “Roundtable on Accountability, Part 1”
- NYT: “The Cruelty of Call Out Culture”
- Entropy: “It Is Always Your Problem”
- Natasha Tynes book deal dropped for racist photo and then she sues indie press for 13 mil
- Anders Carlson-Wee / The Nation poem
- Ailey O’Toole plagiarizes Rachel McKibbens
- Lisa Low / Claudia Cortese
- “Report from the Field: Behind the Scenes at AWP with members of The Disabled & Deaf Uprising”
- Best American Poets 2019
- Myriam Gurba’s American Dirt review: “Pendeja, You Ain’t Steinbeck: My Bronca with Fake-Ass Social Justice Literature”
- “In Defense of Call-out Culture”
- “Call-out Culture: Fighting oppression or furthering divides?”