

Francine Masiello, Berkeley Book Chats, September 26, 2018

Timothy Hampton: Welcome to Berkeley Book Chats. I'm Timothy Hampton, director of the Townsend Center for the Humanities. Berkeley Book Chats showcase a Berkeley faculty member engaged in a public conversation about a recently completed work. This popular series highlights the richness of Berkeley's academic community.

Today's conversation features Francine Masiello of the Comparative Literature and Spanish and Portuguese Departments discussing her book *The Senses of Democracy: Perception, Politics and Culture in Latin America*.

She is joined by Tom McEnaney of the Departments of Comparative Literature and Spanish and Portuguese.

Tom McEnaney: I'm going to introduce Francine once again and then we'll get to the main event, which is listening to what she has to say about this marvelous book. Francine Masiello is Sidney and Margaret Ancker distinguished Professor Emerita in the Humanities here at UC Berkeley, where she taught for, she told me, 39 and a half years in the departments of Comparative Literature and Spanish and Portuguese and has had a tremendous effect on the field of Latin American studies, the Humanities here at Berkeley, and on countless numbers of students. She is the author of numerous books and also an uncountable number, at least for me, of articles in both Spanish and English.

Tom McEnaney: She has also long been recognized as a legendary and almost mythically dedicated and innovative teacher, mentor, and scholar. Alongside and in conversation with a cohort that included Sylvia Malloy, Jean Franco, Josefina Ludmer, Mary Louise Pratt, and former Berkeley Professor Glenn Kirkpatrick, among others, Francine Masiello helped invent the contemporary field of Latin American literary study, and that's no exaggeration. She did so through the introduction of new theoretical models from new historicism to post-colonialism and feminism, and the discovery of new canon-changing materials—this is really a kind of heroic effort and really central to a lot of her work, especially the discovery of texts from women writers and forgotten material culture in the Archives of Buenos Aires and throughout the southern cone. This intensive archival research has changed the way that we read and the kinds of materials that we do read. And then finally, she's also responsible for the creation of new and incisive close readings of everyone from the heroes of the avant-garde to 19th century hybrid texts from politicians and essayists and writers, to today's contemporary aesthetic experiments in painting, sound, work, and performance art.

Tom McEnaney: The book that we're here to celebrate today somehow includes all of these—all of these capabilities, all of these materials, all of these histories ranging from the 19th century to the present, and a brilliant display of literary tradition and political commitment that also sets out the marvelous map of a passionate reader's mind. And it really is a passionate examination of the importance and relevance of literature today. And I hope that's something that we'll have time to talk about.

Tom McEnaney: *The Senses of Democracy: Perception, Politics and Culture in Latin America* demonstrates in often beautiful prose and rigorous argument how a cultural history of the senses and what Francine called “sense work” pervades the politics and aesthetics and especially the literature of the last 150 years in the Americas, both South and North. Its reach is truly stunning as it moves in detail from the different uptake of French Enlightenment political theories of sensation by Thomas Jefferson in the United States and about Rivadavia and Argentina to new theories of sentimentalism and the sentimental novel in Cuba, Argentina, Peru, and the United States.

Tom McEnaney: And then, on through everyone from Neruda, to Joyce, to Huidobro, to Proust, across the avant-gardes before concluding with two chapters that bring together literature and artworks to reflect on the experience and legacy of torture during the different dictatorships in the southern cone and Argentina and Chile. Also, the effects of neoliberalism, neoliberal economy, and the artistic responses and the political responses to the present day. Okay. I could go on and on, obviously for more time but, I want to turn the conversation over to the person we’re all here to hear from. So please join me in welcoming Professor Francine Masiello.

Francine Masiello: Thank you so much to Tom and to the people at the Townsend Center—Tim, Rebecca, and Colleen for organizing this and for introducing a new prize which is the Book Chat Mug—and so all of you should know, especially the younger scholars, if you write a book, you get a mug. So, I’m very happy with that. Thank you, Tom, for this introduction. I guess I should talk about the ways in which I came to this project and to this book and I gather that I’m supposed to be brief because Tim will intervene.

Francine Masiello: There has been a big discussion in Anglo American and European studies about the senses, right? Latin America has been excluded from that conversation largely. Latin Americanists hadn’t taken up the topic necessarily, and I wanted to see how we could construct a history of the senses to anchor this discussion in a historical project and a comparative project and to see the way, in particular, the way in which sense work—I coined the phrase, I liked it. Do you like it?

Tom McEnaney: I love it.

Francine Masiello: I think you should coin a phrase when you write a book. Anyway, I invented this idea of how sense work came to seep into nationalist discourses and then also how people resisted it. So, this is sort of the groundwork for this. My questions were, “What is the role of the senses in democratic process and especially in the late 20th century in Latin America? What’s the role of the senses in military dictatorships and resistance?” And, it’s something we all know without having to get into this—to produce information, these miserable military dictatorships turned to torture. They made the body speak, and in order to make that body speak, those bodies, as we all know from Elaine Scarry decades ago, they had to work on the body in pain, right?

Francine Masiello: They had to reconfigure the senses in order to produce information. Of course, there was resistance to that by artists and literary figures and, of course, the protest people who said, “No, this is not gonna work that way.” And of course, the question comes from that: what happens when the state relies upon sensory data to organize a discourse? And it’s not always the same—this depends on nation, political situation, historical moment, right? There’s a big discussion in the world of sense studies that says the senses locate us in the now, in the present moment. You eradicate history and you don’t think about the future. That’s true up to a point, but the senses, when we talk about bodies and in particular

sensory responses, were also anchoring ourselves in a very specific situation with a cultural context to go with it.

Francine Masiello: People say that we're in the age not of homo sapiens but of homo bacteria, and that's stuck in my head. And I thought it was an interesting way to move to that. That's one thing that moved me toward this project—thinking of how we move, mobilize ourselves in this sensual world, and in some cases wind up as zombies. I think it's not strange that in this moment where there's so much attention to sensory material to the affects, we're also in the age of zombies, right? Zombies in television, theater, in this and that. On the one hand, there's this anthropological exodus is that Hardt and Negri always spoke about, and on the other hand there's a tremendous emphasis on the corporeal. So, these things were pushing me back and forth and in general terms, not to mention this wonderful anchor of Marx in the 1844 manuscripts where he says the history of world is the history of the body, the history of labor is the history of the body. That stayed with me; it still stays with me a lot.

Francine Masiello: So, I just want to show you three images. One, this is cover of the book, which you can say, "What the hell is that?" This, the artist is Damien Schopf, a Chilean multimedia artist who went to Bolivia, to the north of Chile and Bolivia, where they have these wonderful pagan festivals in which the local populations come in disguise. It's kind of carnival.

Francine Masiello: But, what was interesting about this particular photograph—and this was an enormous screen, the real image is probably six feet by three feet, whatever—is that Damien took this photograph in a garbage dump in Bolivia. I don't know if he dressed his figures, but I think these figures put this together, in costumes made in China, in Japan, right? So, these guys are disguising themselves and what they disguise themselves are in outfits made elsewhere. So there's a whole conversation about globalization and how culture circulates but, with textures. These are things you want to touch and feel and bring close to you, and yet of course these are fabricated elsewhere. And, of course the figures, who were most likely indigenous, and their outfits are situated in the garbage dump, which is a whole conversation about the recycling of imported materials in Latin America.

Francine Masiello: Anyway, I like that image but, I want to bring up sort of the contemporary moment. And I'm just taken by two images in particular. This is by a former Berkeley computer science major who went on to become an artist. Ian Chang, was very concerned with the question of sentience. How do we feel? What are the limits to feeling? What you see here, and this was an exhibit at PS1 in New York, is that there are no humans. These are machines that are feeling or feeling for us through prostheses—there are iPhones and some kind of liquid giving off electric shocks. So, machines are kind of responding to each other.

Francine Masiello: Now you could say, of course humans constructed this, right? So they're not really autonomous but, this raises questions in a post human world about how we're organizing the sensory. But, now here's a sort of a humanized version of this. This is a photograph of Raul Zurita, Chile's national poet, arguably one of the great names in Latin American poetry today, and this is a biennial in India where Zurita was very concerned with an event that we all read about several years ago of a five-year-old Syrian boy who was crossing the Mediterranean and he drowned and his mother drowned and his father was on the shores, I think in Italy, thinking about the arrival of the cadaver of his son. Zurita wrote a poem, wrote several poems, but to access these poems, which are on the far wall, the spectators had to walk through the water. Zurita was very clear about this. He said, "I want people to have the experience of being in the water in which the Syrian child died."

Francine Masiello: Now, we can have a conversation and say, "This is stagey. This is too manipulated as a topic." But, I think it gives you different extremes of the human engagement around the sensorial and Ian Chang's question of the post-human engagements of things, so I started there. Anyway, I started this manuscript. I was interested in images like this and in literary texts of our contemporary moment and I went back. I said not so long ago, I think we're always rewriting the same book. Well, I was working for many years in the 19th century and then went back into the 19th century to see how this question of the sensorial came into Latin America. A phrase that any Latin Americanist knows is, "civilization versus barbarism". Barbarism is the world of the senses and civilization is the world of logic and reason. How did this filter into Latin America and not the United States? And then, I found something I spent, I had the occasion to give some talks at the University of Virginia and really what I was doing there is floating around the rare books room.

Francine Masiello: I found out something that was so tremendous that I keep repeating it. I repeat it still in my sleep. Jefferson was in Paris, as you know, in 1785, I could be off on the date, and there he meets the sensualist philosophers among them Destutt de Tracy, who was kind of an operator and just wanted to be known in the Americas, and he said to Jefferson, "Take my stuff back to America, get it translated, and see what you can do with it." And it was all discussion of the senses inheriting the mind with Condillac.

Francine Masiello: But, Destutt de Tracy had his project and Jefferson, good man that he was, was trying to install the sensualist philosophers on the first reading lists of the University of Virginia. And of course Jefferson died, but the philosophers at UVA said, "No way. This is not about the senses. We are philosophers of sincerity." They were following the Scottish school. "We don't want this." And they expunged it and they trashed it. I had occasion at UVA not only to read Jefferson's comments on the translation of Destutt de Tracy but, to see the course lectures in 1826 in philosophy, and they hated this material from France. Never seen—so this is kind of a founding, original moment.

Francine Masiello: In Argentina, a liberal leader of state who was actually president for one year Rivadavia was also in Paris in the 1780's and he also met Destutt de Tracy and Destutt de Tracy also did this number on Rivadavia and said, "Take this back to Argentina and put my work in circulation." And, he did that, and when the University of Buenos Aires opened in 1821, the philosophers put this on the course outlines. And I read the course notes which are in our library—thank god for the library and they're celebrating Condillac, sensualist philosopher: "You have to feel before you think; our access to the world is through the senses."

Francine Masiello: And who were the students in this class? The founding fathers of Argentine State: Sarmiento, Echeverría—these are big names. If you're not a Latin Americanist, that doesn't mean anything, but these were the founding fathers of the whole Argentine project, and they went forward.

Francine Masiello: This whole conversation started in this prep school which was anti-scholasticism and they bring these sensualist philosophies in to challenge scholasticism, and these become philosophies of State. This was an Argentinean newspaper from 1801 and the opening line was, "To heck with scholasticism. It's ruining us. We have to modernize. Let's look at other forms of French philosophy," and this is what sticks. It sticks through the 19th century, how we see, how we feel, the discourses of State which very often become diatribes against this man. Juan Manuel de Rosas who was a killing machine basically—Rosas was blood and Rosas was savagery—and the answer was, "We have to challenge this in another

way." This was *la barbarie*—"Let's challenge and open up the conversation a different way."

Masiello: And, sensuality became central to the official discussions of State, and how we see and how we hear. Sarmiento becomes president of Argentina in 1868. Until then, he's writing essays and travel literature and telling people how they have to feel, and he has a line in one of his travel books, "I saw, I heard, I acted." Okay. What he never told us, by the way, is that Sarmiento was very hard of hearing—he here he is with a hearing trumpet—and I found it extraordinary because he has so much about the sounds of the nation and how we have to learn to hear the nation, and he couldn't hear a damn thing. That was sort of important.

Francine Masiello: Anyway, I started there. This was my point of departure to say, "Let's see if this discussion of sensuality has roots that are not ... It's very hard to talk about something unique to Latin America. Everything is moving around today." You probably saw this online, there's a new book in English translation at Duke University press by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, and he says, "Latin America is the place of the sensory. North America is the place of reason." No, no, we're not going to do that. Okay. We're gonna make this more complicated, and I hope that this book complicates the argument, which is why I brought a lot of material, not an excessive amount, but I did bring in materials from the US tradition. Later, as we get into the 20th century, Joyce is in there because Joyce is in dialogue with certain Argentine authors.

Francine Masiello: Most of this book is about Argentina and Chile. I took forays into Cuba a little bit, into Brazil but, I'm an Argentinist. This is what I do. I can't erase that from myself. I was really interested in how the senses take form and culture, what they tell us about cultural progress, and later, in our contemporary moment, what they tell us about consumer desires in the 19th century, what they tell us about war, how technology comes in. If you, and I know people like Jonathan Crary have done amazing work around technology in the 19th century but, Crary winds up giving precedence to the world of the optic.

Francine Masiello: There are other things that are going on, and technology is also helping us to see, not only see better but, to hear better, to taste in different ways. And, I was tracking this around in different Latin American texts. I'll give you a quick example. Under the realm of Juan Manuel de Rosas, the man who was surrounded by skulls, there was a very efficient and elaborate spy system and people were always listening, listening, listening, spying. And, interestingly enough, many of the great 19th century masterpieces are about listening—listening to music.

Francine Masiello: Juana Manuela Gorriti—who is one of the great, almost campy, Latin American feminists of the 19th—Gorriti is listening to the opera. She is listening to Hernani, about intrigues and spies to resolve things on land at home in Argentina. Listening—different ways of listening. But that's not the case in Peru where food is important because there is a crisis, a split between the rich and the poor over who gets to eat what and that always become the taste of food becomes central to Clorinda Matto de Turner. Anyway, enough of the 19th century, which is always my great passion. I'm gonna skip ahead with my image.

Tom McEnaney: Can I jump in and just ask you one question?

Francine Masiello: Please.

Tom McEnaney: I just want to go back to before you jumped ahead to this image from Zurita.

- Francine Masiello: Okay. Go ahead.
- Tom McEnaney: One of the things that you've already talked about in certain ways, but is part of the trajectory of the book is that it begins, as you said, first with this kind of political history of the senses and then the importance of literature in terms of managing how we hear in the case of Sarmiento, in the case of how we experience spectacle and I guess Echeverria, et cetera. And you bring this forward but, when you get to the middle half of the 20th century, and definitely until the late 20th century, early 21st century, we move increasingly away from literature. Literature comes back. It doesn't go away. So, two questions out of that.
- Tom McEnaney: One is, why do you turn to other materials like this or why does Zurita, for instance, turn to the experience of walking through the water in order to go read the poems or another one of his famous pieces writing on the desert itself, on the Atacama desert, writing his poem there, writing poems in the skies over New York, et cetera? What does literature—again, it doesn't fall out—but, why do we need these other ways to experience and sense in that late 20th century moment?
- Tom McEnaney: And then what happens to literature? You have this line in the last chapter of the book and you're talking about post-humanism and that kind of stuff. Some things that you've shown us here and you say, "Not unexpectedly literary texts might have the last word on these modern dilemmas." And, for me within the book, it's not unexpected but, within culture, it's totally unexpected because many people would say, "That's not where we'd go. We'd go towards all of these other artistic experiments." So, can you talk a little bit about that relationship?
- Francine Masiello: Thank you for pushing me in that direction. Yes, what you observed is absolutely right. I did fan out—I considered the visual arts in this discussion. There is some material and performance. Not much on film, but different installation pieces. For me literature has the last word because this is the site where experience gets represented and the magic—which all of us in this room know very well—the magic of literature is that from words which are just black scratches on the white page, we can create sensory responses, characters, life, figures whom we love. Now, you create bodies out of that.
- Francine Masiello: And that seemed to me that literature continues to offer us this venue and those of you who know me know that I am part of that cohort that's very important in the humanities in Berkeley that believes that literature counts, and literature can speak to us in ways that perhaps other endeavors cannot. So, I ended this book with a discussion of Diamela Eltit's penultimate novel *Fuerzas especiales*, which is a great vindication of creativity in the posthuman world. And for those of you who don't know Diamela, who is coming in next month to Berkeley—
- Tom McEnaney: October 11th, she'll be here.
- Francine Masiello: I encourage you to go hear her. Diamela is one of the great avant-garde novelists in Latin America who somehow captures, before anyone can speak about these things in full sentences, the signs of the times. Many have considered her the author who responds most cogently to neoliberalism. In any case, Diamela supplied answers for me that it is creativity that one can produce in the signs of all of this dehumanization.
- Francine Masiello: And it can produce bodies and sensorial responses and, I guess to answer you in a short sentence, I needed to be there. It was what spoke to me most cogently, although I want to just show. I apologize, I'm skipping ahead here and skipping

through the 19th century, these were 1920s ads from newspapers, which are all about technology. But I wanted to go to certain artworks which don't resolve the problem entirely. This artist Liliana Maresca came up during the dictatorship in Argentina and the line was, "You're not gonna torture me. I'll torture myself."

Francine Masiello: This was the response to that. Or, here's an example of a Chilean artist Catalina Parra. She's the daughter of Nicanor Parra, who brought up the tale of Imbunche, which is suturing. It's a tale in native folklore in Chile of the devil coming and suturing all the orifices and the sensory access, the lines of access that people can have. And this became a great metaphor for the Chilean dictatorship. Pinochet wouldn't let us feel. We had no head, no nose, no mouth and so forth.

Francine Masiello: Here's another example of what the visual artists say. This is Adriana Varejão. Adriana Varejão is a Brazilian artist, and you can see she works on wood surface with tiles. These are the tiles that belong to the colonial enterprise and the fortunes. And, what is behind the tiles? Flesh, human labor. And she wanted to make us acutely aware of this. So, to go back to Tom's question, why should literaturists seal the deal and not visual arts? I could've done that but, I was very impressed upon what literature demands. And, that's it demands another work with the imagination, and that is not to make less of the visual arts.

Francine Masiello: Guillermo Nuñez is a Chilean visual artists who was tortured by Pinochet's police, and to this day he's still painting the experience of torture which he can't reach. And you can see everything is with strung out bodies. This is superimposing the Chilean experience on the camps and experience in the camps in Germany. But I needed to give the verbal register the final line on this. It was, I mean, maybe it was wrong. Maybe I shouldn't have. No, I don't think it was wrong. I insist on it.

Tom McEnaney: Let me just jump in because the Townsend authorities would like us to open up the conversation and so if there are questions we can start with those questions. If there are no questions, I can ask you another question but, this is really the moment to open up to all of you and let you ask any questions you might have about what Francine has said so far about the book, about the artworks we've looked at et cetera.

Speaker 1: Francine, I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit more about the labor of interpretation because you said that the Zurita photograph wasn't as powerful as a literary representation. You wanted to give the final word to the word, as it were. But, that image is also an interpretation and presumably having to walk through the water that's in that photograph is also a representation of the ocean, right? So, what's the difference between this as a representation that requires a labor of interpretation and the literary texts that requires a labor of interpretation?

Francine Masiello: That's a good question, but I think we can answer them and talk about the operations of the literary. I'm not making light of Zurita, who is a poet, by the way. Poet first. This is just an installation, secondarily. Zurita wants us to struggle to get to the poems which are on the back wall of this warehouse? So, I guess he would complicate the question of interpretation by saying that interpretation also requires us to struggle to get to the word and maybe that's what the literary does. We are struggling with it in different ways.

Francine Masiello: They are physical ways, to be certain. But, we have to make those passes, those steps in a style that's distinct from seeing the visual work. I don't know if I'm answering you. I think it's something that maybe we should spend more time on.

But, I do think that the literary experience requires more steps in the interpretive process and to feel—and we've all had this experience—we've all had this amazing auratic experience in looking at artwork on the wall, but we've also had this experience in literary texts. "Oh, my gosh!" "Wow!" "I got it." We all know that the aesthetic high that that produces. Let's say that.

Tom McEnaney: Just a quick follow up on that, you talk about this history of sensualist philosophy and how it plays out across all these different contexts and one of the things that you come back to again and again is that there is this insistence in those philosophies about sensation happens and then we think that that's the encounter. And, you link that up then to a whole turn of the last say 20 or even 30 years with affect theory, with object-oriented ontology, with new materialism, with thing theory. All of these different ways to think about materialism and you don't adopt any of them, you kind of come up to them and you say, "They have their point, but that's not what I'm doing."

Tom McEnaney: And, so why, just to follow up on Vicky's question, if the interest is in some ways thinking about sensation as a pathway to collectivity, thinking about sensation as a way to register, obviously, these histories of political violence and to respond to those histories of political violence. We sense first and then we think why does this literature, is it able to short circuit that process in some ways or what again, just to come back to literature, what is it doing *visa vi* those other pictures and things?

Francine Masiello: Maybe they're the reverse. We read first and then we produce sensation and when we produce sensation we can also respond with—I hate the word "empathy," I don't want to get into that—but we have other forms of identification with that. So, I think that maybe we read, we think, and we feel. Literature is constantly playing with those circuits of experience that are there. I mean, the artwork is too. All of you in this room who are readers of Kant stand in front of the work of art and think about the aura, the auratic moment, right? Well, okay, we can do that with the work of art. But, the literary work requires different movement and temporalities, space. And, it requires a different kind of puzzle-solving to get to the sensual.

Speaker 2: Great book Francine. I already told you this but, when you gave me the book, I went directly to chapter three and tried to devour it as soon as I can. You talk about disparities and the 20s and it fascinated me that you didn't actually approach the issue of gender in this idea of senses and all these. Spirit is always put woman as the medium and they are the bodies and they are feeling things. And there are men around analyzing. And, this brings me back to your idea of Thomas Jefferson and the artist in mind. Yeah. But, what you think about, I mean women were the bodies in the 20's with these disparities and Huidobro, with all these very skinny women feeling things and the guys are analyzing and trying to verbalize this?

Francine Masiello: Okay. Maybe I should explain one thing about this chapter three that I'm attached to, as well as Fabian. Chapter three was what happens in 1920's with a new hyper modernity which we labeled in the art world *avant-garde*, but maybe not. What happens in modernity with new technologies, which can be cinema, telephone, all these things? Speed, distance—people come into us because of the telephone. We're closer to each other. It's a sonic technology but, things ... There's a tremendous disturbance of the given order of things and what I claim I make this claim through Joyce and an Argentine writer named Roberto Arlt who was picking up Joyce here and there. And, the poets; the great poets of the 1920's like Neruda and Vallejo, these are the poets who believe in tactility, who write

about it, bringing things closer, talking about fabrics, thinking of Neruda's shoes, and bringing things in close because modernity separates us and keeps us apart.

Francine Masiello: The culmination, just to get to Fabian's question very directly, is that for many artists and writers bringing things in close was never sufficient enough and they turn to the supernatural. They turn to seances. There were students of Blavatsky. No one knows this better than Fabian. They're trying to bring in things close through spiritualism. Maybe they can connect through spiritualism but, how are they connecting? Through electrical shocks, Ouija boards, the sensorial that leads to that. Where are women in all of this? Very often we were the medium for this contact.

Francine Masiello: In a good number of literary texts, the women are murdered. I'm thinking of Roberto Arlt as a case in point. But, there's a way to capture these new sensorial expressions, bring our bodies closer, and then we see that's why we're always losing the game. It's running away and very radical artists in these years are turning toward alternative what I'd call pseudoscience but seems to do the trick. It does the trick for resolving this problem. Let's say that, whether they really connect with the dead is another story, but it resolves some kind of problem. I don't know Fabian ... I don't know if I answered your question.

Speaker 2: It's a fresh approach, instead of going with this very classic idea of where women are but, you went beyond that. I mean, that's what I found remarkable. I'm not giving you any candy but, really, that you see it more like an end, like a whole structure instead of ... us, we grew up, we use this powerful feminist scene, about where the woman, where is the voice of the woman, you transcend that. And that's why I found it fascinating.

Francine Masiello: Thank you. I'm glad that happened. By the way, I should say for those of you who are not Latin Americanist, the 1920s is a real problem for us because these poets, Neruda, Vallejo, all wrote manifestos and so when we study these writers, when we teach these writers, we give out the manifesto and then we say, "Here, read according to this proposal." And, we get stuck time and time again. So the discussion of the 1920s in Latin America, it's kind of paralyzed now, do you think? I don't know.

Tom McEnaney: No, I mean, I think what Fabian is pointing out is that it's not paralyzed that you're putting it into new perspectives and others are as well. And I mean, part of what's happening in that chapter is also, as you point out, linking it up to both the particularities of these avant-garde movements in their moments and in their original context. But also, if you talk about someone like Huidobro or Neruda—these are people who traveling all over the world, they're also drawing from the position of avant-gardes but, rethinking the relationship between literature and media technologies, as you pointed out, and what the medium is, the medium as the kind of séance, spiritualist idea of the medium and at the same time that you have the technological medium. You show how those things are intersecting I think and what the consequences are for literature and how literature is used to think through them. So, I don't think it's paralyzed at all. I think you're there at the push forward.

Francine Masiello: Well, okay. I inquire about the ways in which we study this. Thank you.

Speaker 3: Thank you, for a very interesting talk and discussion. I'm a scholar of late 18th, early, 19th century French melodrama, particularly novelistic melodrama, and I'm very interested in what kind of effects are generated through the consumption of this text, primarily through silent reading. But, my question has

to do with how literary texts printed texts are consumed. Now obviously plays are delivered orally and visually. Novels are often read in the silence and privacy of the reader but, then in more working-class situations are read aloud to the less literate members of the community and so on and so forth.

Speaker 3: My question gets back to the question of the literary per se, which is something I'm very much invested in. Also I've been reading and appreciating the last 15 years the works and writings of Brian Masumi and so on who had been working on affect theory and their examples tend to privilege the visual, the oral and the tactile and why? Because, that's something that bypasses thought. It's so immediate. It's so direct that thought can't quite intervene.

Speaker 3: It's always there but, it comes a little bit after the fact, after the first experience of sense, the sensory experience and so there seems to be somewhat an unstated argument for those modes of experience versus the printed one, particularly one that's not orally delivered or visually delivered as a mode of consumption. So I was just wondering if you could say a little more about that distinction—how it's not just literature, but of course it's literature consumed in a particular way. Maybe quietly, silently over printed text.

Francine Masiello: Thank you for that question. This is important, and also coincides with a big discussion we're having right now about how we read. Do we read on the surface? What's the importance of description? I have a feeling Cathy Gallagher is going to speak to the group about that next week with her new book. But, how does description awaken the sensory? What are these fields? How are these fields placed in competition? The living body that touches, hears, feels versus the body reflected in print. And, there were different ways of moving between the sensorial and thought, either or the act of reading. I thought you were going to bring up another point which has to do with the temporalities of these presentations, especially since so many melodramas were printed and serialized. So you had to wait a week for the next chapter. And, there was a whole structure of temporality, different temporalities that we're structured by the newspaper. We had a wonderful graduate student in Spanish and Portuguese who made the case against the idea that temporality is something that we learned through novels. "No, temporality is something that we learn through newspapers. Through waiting. Waiting for the next paper to show up."

Francine Masiello: I mean, we could say war temporalities are now governed by MSNBC or CNN and you know, what will happen in the Supreme Court, but you know, we are being managed in a certain way by the ALMANAC. All these 19th century devices which organize our lives and organize our times. And, also create an anxiety which is probably affective. And, at the same time, we long to touch what's out there or hear it. I mean, they're interesting questions that come on that front. I don't know if I answered you.

Speaker 3: I think, what's going on in part is in the writings of people like Brian Masumi it's like questioning of almost the sensorious nature of thought. And so, by placing it somewhat related, it's related to the experience; the aesthetic experience. It comes somewhat late. That's a kind of timeline after. What they're trying to do is highlight what thought can and can't do. It's limits but, also what it can do. But, it's also an after the fact position in terms of the experience.

Francine Masiello: And, if we were working in the contemporary moment, we would see the interesting return of strategies of synesthesia in art installations. And, it looks at me and we all think of synesthesia in Nabokov. But, there's a return to these crossed sensations. Elon Musk is trying to discover new sensory appetites that

can be sold, can be marketed—new senses, and you can find this online. He's recruiting neuroscientists to develop new senses.

Francine Masiello: I know that strays a bit from your observation but, we are in a moment when there almost seems to be a demand for these crossovers for something that hasn't been experienced before. And, the 19th century is certainly a purveyor of those new sensations, especially by the late 19th and the amusement park and cinema. The Coney Islands of the world but, which are not melodramas necessarily but, melodrama is certainly there to awaken you. We didn't have a conversation today probably it's just as well to talk about Benjamin and shock, right? And the response to shock among these 1920s artists and how do you control it?. Keeping shock in a distance, cushioning ourselves with thoughts so that we don't feel, so that we not be absorbed by the shocks. And, I'm sure that must come up with your discussions in melodrama.

Tom McEnaney: I just wanna read very briefly one sentence from the book that is in some ways a response to this which you say, "While Romanticism with this belief in change require that sensory alertness be the tipping point toward new unlearned experience, women writers of the same generation also showed the links between perceptions and thought from there and not yet set into words an inkling of political expression began to find its form. Central response ran far ahead of reasoning and verbal expression. Through it, women became not only better writers but, also better readers of dimensions of the social."

Tom McEnaney: I think that is a sophisticated response to that temporality that someone like Masumi goes after in hopes of responding to what he sees as the kind of dead end in some ways of the linguistic turn. But, at the same time, what's remarkable and reading your book as well in which you do mention an argument like Masumi's it's that this is the argument that already the sensualist philosophers are making in the 18th century and that now is back. It's back and the question is why is it back? Right?

Francine Masiello: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tom McEnaney: And where has it been? And you trace that whole history of the senses to show us where these ideas come from and how they've migrated and moved throughout these different contexts. Do we have another minute? I know that Nathaniel had a question.

Speaker 4: It was just a follow-up on what you were actually just saying now about muscular related, just because I remember last time you spoke, you spoke a little bit about advertising and how ... I wonder if there's sort of a ... You did research in newspapers and you were looking at how technologies during the 20's or present newspapers but, today how you would respond to the neoliberal moment and how sort of we are either being co-opted or not through the media in terms of our relationship to the sensorium and stay a little bit about that. It's in my mind I think.

Francine Masiello: Well, we're in the shock moment. Aren't we? Let us see how we can be shocked tonight. When we go home to look at the news. Let us look at the world of advertising and the glitz and there is that shock element that anchors us almost in the now, and without a memory of what happened before and no sense of a future. So yeah, I mean, the advertising world is certainly contributing to that.

Tom McEnaney: I think on that note. Okay. So, go buy the book. There's much more there.

Francine Masiello: Steal it!

Timothy Hampton: We hope you enjoyed this Berkeley Book Chat, and we encourage you to join us in person or via podcast for future programs in the series.