

**Title:** “Transpacific Precarities: Poetics and Possibilities for New Critical Practices”

**Speaker:** Guy Beauregard, National Taiwan University

**Abstract:** This paper proposes to address the conference theme of “intercultural adaptation, globalization, and risk” by conjoining two key terms: *transpacific* (see, e.g., Suzuki 2014; Hoskins and Nguyen 2014) and *precarity*. To bring the latter term into our conversation, I will draw upon some key scholarship including the work of Butler (2004; 2009), who has helpfully distinguished between the “more or less existential conception” of precariousness (that is, a condition of vulnerability which all human beings share, although not in the same way) and the “more specifically political” nature of precarity, which Butler uses to refer to a “politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death.” My paper will build upon this distinction to discuss what I call *poetics of precarity* as they have been developed in two Asian diasporic texts: Souvankham Thammavongsa’s *Found* (2007), which uncovers a path from Laos to a refugee camp in Thailand to Canada, a path made legible through a scrapbook kept by Thammavongsa’s father, a material object that was, in Thammavongsa’s account, thrown out but eventually “found”; and Rita Wong’s *forage* (2007), which cuts between various sites—including South China and “Aboriginal Columbia” (that is, the province of British Columbia, renamed)—to track not only the movements of people across borders but also the impact of toxic waste shipped from North America to Guiyu in Guangdong, reputedly the largest e-waste site in the world. These two collections of poetry were published by small presses and, due to their limited circulation, I will not expect the generalist conference participants at FJU to be familiar with them. I will instead present these texts to argue that their inventive poetics could help us to ask questions about the adequacy of our various critical practices as we try to engage with the “transpacific precarities” these texts represent.

**Keywords:** transpacific, precarity, poetics, Souvankham Thammavongsa, Rita Wong

### Works Cited

Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso, 2004. Print.

---. *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* London: Verso, 2009. Print.

Hoskins, Janet, and Viet Thanh Nguyen, eds. *Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field*. Honolulu: U of Hawai‘i P, 2014. Print.

Suzuki, Erin. “Transpacific.” *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature*. Ed. Rachel C. Lee. London: Routledge, 2014. 352-64. Print.

Thammavongsa, Souvankham. *Found*. Toronto: Pedlar, 2007. Print.

Wong, Rita. *forage*. Gibsons Landing, BC: Nightwood, 2007. Print.