Panel Title: The Tasks of the Translator

Is the work of the translator fundamentally unsettling? This panel seeks to study the work of translators and translations that challenge our theoretical grounding, push against conventional roles, convey ambiguity, and otherwise trouble established epistemologies. By turning our attention to the work of translation itself, its figures, its production, its reproduction, and even reappropriation, we hope to better understand how this labor shaped life in the early Americas.

The translator and the work of translation makes possible contact, but also impedes it. As a figure of mediation—a body, a voice, or a pen that intervenes between mutually unintelligible interlocutors—the translator both makes possible the crossing of borders and at the same time draws our attention to cultural and linguistic division. The translator stands in the breach and but also on the bridge between addressee and respondent. How does attending to this varied, uncertain, and ambiguous labor, the tasks of translation itself, provide us with new and challenging ways to think about relation, empire, labor, community, and identity?

This panel builds on research that examines the varied labors of the translator to better understand her generative, sometimes suppressive, sometimes rebellious contribution in the creation, maintenance, or even dismantling of communities. The panel is interested in the metaphors, myths, images, descriptions and representations of the work done by translators and interpreters, both fictional and historical.

Topics might include: non-linguistic practices of translation; historical reprinting as translation; translation as preservation; translation in multilingual communities; indigenous translators; rebellious or resistant translation; secondary practices that exist alongside, intersect with, but are not equivalent to the work of translation; the afterlives of published translations; mistranslations; and emergent methodologies for studying the work of translation.