



Collaborative Public Workshop

April 9-10, 2021

**Cogut Institute
for the Humanities**

The **Collaborative Public Workshop** concludes the capstone seminar of the Doctoral Certificate in Collaborative Humanities. The Project Development Workshop (HMAN 2500) was taught this Spring 2021 by Amanda Anderson, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Humanities and English and Director of the Cogut Institute for the Humanities, and Tamara Chin, Associate Professor of Comparative Literature and East Asian Studies.

Participants developed and workshopped a paper over the course of the semester while performing a number of collateral academic roles: they nominated and introduced a text to the seminar that was formative for their scholarly development; they served as first questioners for papers workshopped by others; and they interviewed one of their peers and prepared an introduction to their work. By providing training and preparation for roles that are crucial to the practice and fabric of academic life, yet are seldom the object of formal study and reflection, the course reimagines the conditions and extends the limits of an interdisciplinary and collaborative research space.

The **Doctoral Certificate in Collaborative Humanities** promotes cross-disciplinary work oriented toward the most challenging questions facing humanities research today. Collaboration is built through research practices dedicated to thinking together across disciplines and geographical locations. Participants pursue these forms of inquiry through teaching models and student practices that experiment with group presentations, collaborative online discussions, co-authored seminar papers, and other forms of intellectual partnership.

Collaborative Public Workshop

Friday, April 9

10:00 am – 11:30 am Panel 1

Moderated by **Amanda Anderson**

Katherine Contess, *The Gadgetized Body: Media and Technologies of Exercise*

Jake Sokolov-Gonzalez, *Essential Tremors*

Commentaries by **Macarena Gómez-Barris** and **Faiz Ahmed**

Discussion

11:45 am – 1:45 pm Panel 2

Moderated by **Tamara Chin**

Regina Pieck, *Built on Water: Vibration and Debris in (Post)-Apocalyptic Mexico City*

Andressa Maia, *Black Female Protagonism in Torto Arado: Ancestrality, Water, and Land Rights in Brazil's Semiarid Northeast*

Commentaries by **Macarena Gómez-Barris** and **Marc Redfield**

Discussion

2:00 pm – 3:30 pm Panel 3

Moderated by **Amanda Anderson**

Alessandro Moghrabi, *The Ironic Real: Irony, Materiality, and History in Paul de Man*

Baoli Yang, *Carriages and Writings Spread Over a Myriad of Miles: Emperor Xuanzong and the Dynamics of Sinoscript Empire*

Commentaries by **Veena Das** and **Marc Redfield**

Discussion

Saturday, April 10

10:00 am – 12:15 pm Panel 4

Moderated by **Tamara Chin**

Nomaan Hasan, *Striving for Justice: Reflections from a Sufi Shrine in Northern India*

Katyayni Seth, *Ethnographic Practice and our Interlocuters' Grief*

Kareem Estefan, *Permission to Fabulate: Archival Absence and Reparative Fabulation*

Commentaries by **Veena Das** and **Faiz Ahmed**

Discussion

1:00 pm – 2:30 pm Panel 5

Moderated by **Amanda Anderson**

Thomas Dai, *Writing 'INFINITYLOOPS': Sericultural Transmigrations in W.G. Sebald and Jen Bervin*

Pablo a Marca, *Virtual Magic: A Posthumanist Reading of Fairy Tales*

Commentaries by **Macarena Gómez-Barris** and **Marc Redfield**

Discussion

Workshop Participants



Pablo a Marca

Pablo a Marca is a graduate student in Italian Studies from Switzerland at Brown University. He has a B.A. and an M.A. in Italian and English from the University of Zurich and a Certificate in The Posthuman Glossary from Utrecht University, where he studied under the supervision of Rosi Braidotti. He has teaching experience at both Brown University and the University of Zurich. And he is a writer and a musician. His main academic interest revolves around fairy tales and the posthuman. This interest emerged during his studies in Utrecht, where he realized that there is a gap in the literature on posthumanism because the figure of the child is never addressed. He seeks to fill this gap with his work. He is also an excellent baker. (*Composed by Regina Pieck*)

Virtual Magic: A Posthumanist Reading of Fairy Tales

Fairy tales are difficult to define: formal and functionalist approaches are limited to specific areas, time periods, or trends. The most common characteristic of fairy tales is that they necessarily imply magic. The term, however, is highly ambiguous, as it differs from the way magic is portrayed in the text and how it is conceived of outside of it. This chapter proposes to reinterpret magic by using Gilles Deleuze's concept of the *virtual*, making the texts full of virtual potential for change. The virtual is also useful for thinking about posthumanism because it allows one to study reality not from the way it is experienced, but for the virtual potential it contains. In this view, reality is always already becoming something different. Uniting the two views, fairy tales become texts to think about reality from a posthumanist perspective, paving the way for a relational ethics that promotes connections between all entities.



Katherine Contess

Katherine Contess is a Ph.D. student at Brown University in the Department of Modern Culture and Media. She has been working on the gadgetization of bodies in contemporary fitness technologies, thinking about the ways that physical interfacing integrates bodies in media ecologies by tethering them to exercise machines. She received the Archambault Teaching Award from the Brown Division of Pre-College Programs in 2019 for excellence in teaching. (*Composed by Alessandro Moghrabi*)

The Gadgetized Body: Media and Technologies of Exercise

Since 2017, a plethora of new exercise devices *cum* media platforms have hit the market, including the Mirror and the Peloton Bike, which promise to simulate the reality of a workout class. They enable users to stream live classes at home, performing every movement in step with an instructor's mediated image and dictated instructions. Users understand these technologies as new ways of taking health and fitness into their own hands, supporting the Foucauldian idea that exercise and its attendant technologies buoy the formation of the autonomous subject. In this paper, I offer a second explanation for what is occurring, involving the whole media system in which the body is a part. In looking for an alternative way of imagining a connection between these new technologies of mediated exercise that is not the disciplinary mode of subject formation, I offer an ontology of the gadget and the gadgetized body.



Thomas Dai

Thomas Dai is a third-year doctoral candidate in the Department of American Studies. With a background in biology, his current research sits at the intersection of queer studies and the environmental humanities. His current project tries to develop a concept of “entomological aesthetics” by looking at how insects populate contemporary literature and visual culture. Adopting a methodology that takes inspiration from queer, critical race, and Asian American studies, he conceives insects as queer entities that allow one to move through and beyond anthropocentrism and to develop a new materialist ontology where language and matter are conjoined and characterized by metaphorical and metamorphic changes. The style of his writing is performative, fusing academic conventions with personal narrative, allowing him not only to communicate his ideas, but also the affects that motivate and infuse his research. (*Composed by Pablo a Marca*)

Writing ‘INFINITYLOOPS’:

Sericultural Transmigrations in W.G. Sebald and Jen Bervin

This paper considers the metaphoric, metamorphizing presence of the domestic silkworm *Bombyx mori* in several works of contemporary literature and theory. I argue that these texts index three distinct modes of transmigration performed by the silkworm—the spatial, the spiritual, and the biological. This essay emphasizes transmigration’s embodied, biological registers in order to read the silkworm as both metaphor and metamorph, an organism whose metamorphosis comprises a non-anthropocentric, transindividual mode of expression that resonates with what the queer theorist Eve Sedgwick calls “so not writing.” In conversation with queer and trans theory, I postulate in this essay a silky connectivity between the metamorphic transmigrations of the silkworm and recent materialist accounts of trans embodiment, offering the silkworm not as an animal analog for trans experiences, but as a *trans*-migratory figure whose own complicated process of change undoes conventionally drawn lines between the material and the cultural as well as the natural and the synthetic.



Kareem Estefan

Kareem Estefan is a Ph.D. candidate in Modern Culture and Media at Brown University. His dissertation, “Witnessing as Worldbuilding: Imagining Repair and Decolonization in Palestinian Visual Culture,” engages poetic and relational modes of bearing witness in contemporary art, film, and digital media projects from occupied Palestine and its diaspora, critiquing dominant human rights discourse and its correlated documentary aesthetics to propose a speculative and reparative path toward decolonization. Kareem Estefan is co-editor of *Assuming Boycott: Resistance, Agency, and Cultural Production* (OR Books, 2017), an anthology of essays on artists’ activism, cultural boycotts, (self-)censorship, and transnational solidarity in the arts. His writing on contemporary art has been published in magazines and journals such as *4 Columns*, *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *BOMB*, *Frieze*, *Ibraaz*, the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, *The New Inquiry*, and *Third Text*, among others. (Composed by Katyayni Seth)

Permission to Fabulate: Archival Absence and Reparative Fabulation

After Israel’s 1982 invasion of Lebanon, the most significant Palestinian film archive was lost, either to bombing or seizure by Israeli forces. While some of the dozens of documentaries it contained have been found in Israeli military archives, and many have been reconstructed from reels sent around the world, most remain inaccessible to Palestinians. In this paper, I examine Azza El-Hassan’s 2004 film *Kings and Extras: Digging for a Palestinian Image*, which follows the director in her search for the archive. Infused with folkloric and fabulous qualities, El-Hassan’s journey becomes a quest for Palestinian freedom dreams—for images and stories of what could have been and what might still be. Engaging decolonial feminist critiques of positivist historiography, I propose “reparative fabulation” as an act of the radical narrative imagination that animates unrealized political potentialities glimpsed in the gaps endemic to archives subjected to colonial violations.



Nomaan Hasan

Nomaan Hasan is a doctoral student in the Department of Anthropology. His current work centers on the epistemological recuperation of the non-rational as performed in the context of anthropological scholarship on ritual. Through ethnographic work at a Sufi shrine in north India, Hasan studies the practices of healing that residents engage in, attempting to account for moments of uncertainty, inefficacy, and failure. Prior to Brown, Hasan obtained a B.A. in Political Science and an M.A. in Sociology from the University of Delhi. (*Composed by Kareem Estefan*)

Striving for Justice: Reflections from a Sufi Shrine in Northern India

Based on fieldwork at the shrine of a Sufi saint located in northern India, this paper asks why pilgrims take recourse to the shrine in the pursuit of legal redress. I appraise current responses to this question in the anthropological literature, demonstrating that they are based on bald contrasts with secular courts that cannot be sustained upon closer examination. In particular, I argue that they greatly exaggerate the transparency and efficiency that can be attributed to ritual life. I conclude by locating a possible answer in the transformation of the time of waiting that this process affords, through the conversion of the process of seeking justice into a project of spiritual self-cultivation.



Andressa Maia

Andressa Maia is a second-year doctoral student in the Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies. Her primary research interests lie in contemporary Brazilian literature and ecocriticism and representations of the natural environment in contemporary cultural artifacts. She is particularly interested in how literature can reflect the interplay between memory, human, and environmental rights, as well as draw attention to the dynamics of power underpinning these relationships. Before coming to Brown, she earned an M.A. in Brazilian Literature at the University of New Mexico in Fall 2019. Her research focused on how Brazilian contemporary literature plays a key role in the (re)construction of sites of memory through narratives that defy the silence that official discourse (state, educational, public) imposed about the violation of human rights during the Brazilian dictatorship. (*Composed by Nomaan Hasan*)

Black Female Protagonism in Torto Arado:

Ancestrality, Water, and Land Rights in Brazil's Semi-arid Northeast

This paper aims to investigate how the interplay between land, human, and environmental rights in contemporary Brazilian literature reflects, as well as draws attention to the power dynamics underpinning these relationships. Using Itamar Vieira Junior's *Torto Arado* as an example, I intend to demonstrate not only how the imaginative realm can offer a counterdiscourse to the current persistent and unsolved dilemmas originating from Brazil's colonial past, but also how it reveals female-led local communities' actions within and against oppressive systems enrooted in colonialism. I argue that cultural productions can transform, and are already transforming, how we understand the relation between humans, non-humans, and the environment. I suggest that the novel offers the possibility of an intertwined symbolic and historical recognition of land ownership, concomitant to the recuperation of caatinga biome, which is ultimately mediated by female-led grassroots movements.



Alessandro Moghrabi

Working at the intersection of continental philosophy and comparative literature, Alessandro Moghrabi has a gift for rendering complex arguments with generosity and care for his reader. Currently a Ph.D. candidate at Brown University, Moghrabi's recent work deeply considers questions of irony, stupidity, and surprise. Focusing on 20th-century Italian literature suffused with wit, Moghrabi's writing is humorous and illustrative, often turning the same critical eye he applies to his texts onto his own work. (*Composed by Jacob Sokolov-Gonzalez*)

The Ironic Real: Irony, Materiality, and History in Paul de Man

This paper will attempt to critique Paul de Man's tropological theory of irony by showing that, within de Man's own framework, irony ends up implicitly functioning as passage to and a placeholder for an experience of material reality. By inflecting the theorization of irony as trope of disruption and interruption in "The Concept of Irony" towards de Man's discourse on aesthetic philosophy and materiality in "Phenomenality and Materialism in Kant," I argue that, even though the word scarcely occurs, irony as discursive disruption underpins de Man's theory of materiality and thus his theory of politics and history as well insofar as they are stipulated to be narratives of material events.



Regina Pieck

Regina Pieck is a fourth-year doctoral student in the Department of Hispanic Studies. She holds a B.A. in Law from the Mexico Autonomous Institute of Technology and graduate degrees from Harvard University and Boston College. Previously, she worked in the government of Mexico. She focuses on 20th- and 21st-century Latin American fiction, poetry, and the visual arts. Her primary research interests include new materialism, ecocriticism, and feminism in Mexico and the broader Latinx world. She is currently working on her dissertation titled “Textures of the Underground: Women’s Subterranean Poetics in Greater Mexico,” which investigates how non-human agencies interact with human societies in contemporary Mexico and the Latinx world. *(Composed by Baoli Yang)*

Built on Water: Vibration and Debris in (Post)-Apocalyptic Mexico City

In this paper I aim to discuss literary discourse in contemporary Mexican literature in the context of what Karen Barad calls the “intra-action” between the (under)ground, the movement of tectonic plates, and the remaining debris. I will analyze two contemporary narratives that use the figure of the earthquake and its apocalyptic qualities to reveal the connections between nonhuman matter and human culture. I will examine these themes in two contemporary pieces of creative nonfiction: Carmen Boulosa’s essay “Cuando me volví mortal” (2010) and Jazmina Barrera’s essay “Linea nigra” (2020). These texts show how contemporary literary discourse by women about earthquakes reverberates and builds on the feminist movement that was catalyzed as an after-effect of the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City, blending the binary division between the human and the nonhuman.



Katyayni Seth

Katyayni Seth is a third-year doctoral student in the Department of Anthropology at Brown University. She received an M.Sc. from the Harvard School of Public Health and a B.A. from Colby College. Prior to coming to Brown, she worked for the World Bank Group where she managed and supported quantitative and qualitative research projects on health and social protection programs in India. Her dissertation research focuses on the care of children who suffer from seizures in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, a place that has one of the highest child mortality and morbidity rates in the world. Because she is interested in family-clinician relations, she works with both the families of the children as well as the medical professionals involved in their treatment. (*Composed by Katherine Contess*)

Ethnographic Practice and our Interlocutors' Grief

This paper is about the beginnings of anthropological fieldwork. It starts with an ethnographic narrative and goes on to engage with the writings of Lisa Stevenson, Renato Rosaldo, and Nancy Scheper-Hughes. It tries to understand how relations of care develop and how ethnographers understand the grief of their interlocutors. As such, it is a reflection on the feel of relations that emerge during fieldwork.



Jacob Sokolov-Gonzalez

Jacob Sokolov-Gonzalez is a second year Ph.D. student in Music at Brown University. He is a musician and educator from New York City whose practice is based equally in free improvisation and tedious technical labor. He's been teaching creative music in the NYC public schools since 2013. He has a long list of performances played in the last seven years and a couple of songs released in the last five years. He produces pop and dance music under the name BABL. His work is eclectic, instigating, and provocative. Through the interplay of vibrance, colors, image, and sound, he produces a variety of music, providing the reflection and technique involved in his creative process in his academic pieces. (*Composed by Andressa Maia*)

Essential Tremors

This paper is a companion piece to a multi-media performance titled *Essential Tremors*. The paper and *Essential Tremors* are formed out of shared research, language, and intention. Together, they form *the work*. The work shirks disciplinary boundaries, as vibrations do, cutting across visual, sonic, material, and intellectual fields to trace the knotted vectors of influence that flow into and out of a single *vibrational nexus*. Specifically, a phone call between my father and his father on September 11th, 1973. While we enter the nexus with the vehicle of a personal narrative, ultimately the work is a loop—a loop imbricated in copper. By mapping the intermodal force of copper as it affects the narrative, the scope of the work expands to gesture towards the embedded extractive realities of digital life, the material legacy of colonial neoliberalism, and the potential of vibration as an interpretive instrument of history.



Baoli Yang

Baoli Yang is a fourth-year Ph.D. student in the Department of Comparative Literature at Brown, where she primarily focuses on medieval Sinoscript culture, manuscript studies, and Silk Road studies. She is also incorporating state-of-art developments in digital humanities into her research, hoping to illuminate the effects of distant reading and discover larger patterns of medieval literary phenomena. She previously studied at Beijing Normal University and Dartmouth College. A multilingual and interdisciplinary scholar, she has received fellowships from the Watson Institute's China Initiative as well as the Harvard-Yenching Institute to support her research. She is currently working on her dissertation "Literary Strata of Imperial Borders: Sinoscript Culture and its Encounters in the 7th Century." (*Composed by Thomas Dai*)

Carriages and Writings Spread Over a Myriad of Miles: Emperor Xuanzong and the Dynamics of Sinoscript Empire

This paper introduces the notion of Sinoscript, as the cultural practice of composing in the Chinese writing system, and shows how Sinoscript texts created variegated sites for aggression, negotiation, and contestation of medieval imperialism in the expansionist Tang dynasty (618-907). After delineating a brief history of political imperialization promoted by three Tang emperors, I focus on the reception and appropriation of Emperor Xuanzong's literary personas in the peripheral areas of the Tang empire and beyond its territories. The depoliticization and repoliticization of Sinoscript texts related to Emperor Xuanzong in northwest China and Japan suggest a deflected cultural imperialism with compromised dominating awe, while the abrasive criticism of the emperor's imperialist ambitions in the Nanzhao Kingdom and Turkic communities demonstrates how Sinoscript evoked alternative political governance countering Sinocentric intent. I maintain that the dissemination of Sinoscript texts fostered multiple literary governances that rendered self-illumination and self-validation.

Commentators and Moderators



Faiz Ahmed is Joukowsky Family Distinguished Associate Professor of Modern Middle Eastern History and Associate Professor of History at Brown University. He is a historian of the late Ottoman Empire, Afghanistan, and modern Middle East, with a parallel interest in diasporic communities connected to these regions. From the Khyber Pass to the Suez Canal, Ahmed's core research and teaching engage questions of human mobility, travel, and migration; students, scholars, and networks of learning; and the intersections of constitutionalism, citizenship, and diplomacy. His first book, *Afghanistan Rising: Islamic Law and Statecraft between the Ottoman and British Empires* (Harvard University Press, 2017), received the American Historical Association's John F. Richards Prize in 2018 and is currently being translated into Turkish, Persian, and Pashto. Ahmed's current research explores historical ties and engagements of the Ottoman Empire in the Americas, with a focus on social, economic, and legal connections to the United States and Canada during the long 19th century.



Amanda Anderson is Director of the Cogut Institute for the Humanities and Andrew W. Mellon Professor of English and Humanities at Brown University. Her research focuses on 19th- and 20th-century literature and culture, addressing broad questions of intellectual history, disciplinary formation, and the relations among literature, moral life, and politics. Her books include *Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies* (University of Chicago Press, TRIOS series, 2019; with Rita Felski and Toril Moi), *Psyche and Ethos: Moral Life after Psychology* (Oxford University Press, 2018), *Bleak Liberalism* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), *The Way We Argue: A Study in the Cultures of Theory* (Princeton University Press, 2006), *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton University Press, 2001), and *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (Cornell University Press, 1993). She is co-editor of *George Eliot: A Companion* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013) and *Disciplinary at the Fin de Siècle* (Princeton University Press, 2002).



Tamara Chin works on comparative approaches to the ancient world and to historical narrative, with a focus on early Chinese texts, the Afro-Eurasian Silk Road, and the modern politics of antiquity. Her first book *Savage Exchange: Han Imperialism, Chinese Literary Style, and the Economic Imagination* (Harvard University Press, 2014; pbk 2020) received the American Comparative Literature Association Harry Levin Prize. She is currently completing a monograph entitled *The Silk Road Idea*. She is Associate Professor of Comparative Literature and of East Asian Studies at Brown University.



Veena Das is Krieger-Eisenhower Professor of Anthropology at Johns Hopkins University. Among her recent publications are *Critical Events: An Anthropological Investigation of Contemporary India* (Oxford University Press, 1997, 2017), *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (University of California Press, 2007), *Affliction: Health Disease Poverty* (Fordham University Press, 2015), and *Textures of the Ordinary: Doing Anthropology After Wittgenstein* (Fordham University Press, 2020). She is an elected fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and Corresponding Fellow of British Academy and has been honored to receive honorary doctorates from the University of Chicago, Edinburgh University, University of Bern, and Durham University, U.K.



Macarena Gómez-Barris is a scholar and writer who works at the intersections of the environmental humanities, the visual arts, race and gender/sex politics, and decolonial theory and praxis. She is the author of four books, *Where Memory Dwells: Culture and State Violence in Chile* (University of California Press, 2009), *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Duke University Press, 2017), *Beyond the Pink Tide: Art and Political Undercurrents in the Américas* (University of California Press, 2009, 2018), and *Towards a Sociology of a Trace* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010, with Herman Gray). She is completing a new book on the colonial Anthropocene, *At the Sea's Edge: Liquidity Beyond Colonial Extinction* (forthcoming at Duke University Press, 2022). She is Founding Director of the Global South Center (globalsouthcenter.org) and Chairperson of the Department of Social Science and Cultural Studies at Pratt Institute, Brooklyn.



Marc Redfield is Professor of Comparative Literature, Professor of German Studies, Professor of English, and Chair of Comparative Literature at Brown University. He studied at Yale and Cornell, and taught at the Université de Genève and Claremont Graduate University before coming to Brown. He is the author of *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman* (1996, winner of the MLA First Book Prize in 1997), *The Politics of Aesthetics: Nationalism, Gender, Romanticism* (Stanford University Press, 2003), *The Rhetoric of Terror: Reflections on 9/11 and the War on Terror* (Fordham University Press, 2009), *Theory at Yale: The Strange Case of Deconstruction in America* (Fordham University Press, 2016), and *Shibboleth: Judges, Derrida, Celan* (Fordham University Press, 2020). He has edited *Legacies of Paul de Man* (Fordham University Press, 2007) and co-edited *High Anxieties: Cultural Studies in Addiction* (University of California Press, 2002), and *Points of Departure: Samuel Weber Between Spectrality and Reading* (Northwestern University Press, 2016). Redfield has served as the guest editor of special issues of *Diacritics*, *Romantic Praxis*, and *The Wordsworth Circle*.

The **Cogut Institute for the Humanities** at Brown University advances collaborative research and curricular innovation in the humanities and across the university. Our annual fellowship program brings together faculty, postdoctoral, graduate, and undergraduate fellows to explore work-in-progress in a dynamic workshop setting. In addition to offering the Doctoral Certificate in Collaborative Humanities, we provide cutting-edge research seminars for undergraduate students. A rich array of programming—conferences, lecture series, and colloquia—enhances the Institute’s core research and curricular mission, creating a lively space of inquiry and dialogue that draws in faculty, students, and members of the larger Providence community.

