Bennett-Polonsky Humanities Labs
Fall 2020 Program Summary

Digital Theory Lab

The Digital Theory Lab creates a space for cutting-edge, interdisciplinary humanities research and collaborative pedagogy that address the increasingly pervasive role digital technologies play in contemporary life. It is widely acknowledged that ubiquitous computing, artificial intelligence, and data-driven media are rapidly reshaping how people think and act in unprecedented ways. Traditional strengths of the humanities such as cultural analysis, interpretation, and critique would seem to make humanistic inquiry indispensable for understanding these shifts. However, the broad social and technical challenges posed by emerging technologies exceed the reach of individual disciplines and expertise, calling for new, collective research methods. The Digital Theory Lab responds to these challenges by placing humanistic inquiry in an experimental, project-based setting and facilitating encounters not only among humanities disciplines but between the humanities and technical sciences. By gathering students (undergraduate and graduate), faculty, visiting scholars, and engineering practitioners in pursuit of novel questions and research approaches, it seeks to cultivate competent digital citizens equally fit for understanding digital technologies and parsing their meaning-making roles in our society. Through shared research projects, intensive seminars, informed popular writings, and public events, the Lab offers an opportunity for the humanities to move beyond limited models of disciplinarity and engage emergent forms of the digital in real time.

Fall 2020

The Digital Theory H-Lab team is grateful to have continued access to the remaining funds from the Lab's initial year. This has allowed the Lab to continue building on the experimental work it started during the pilot 2018–2019 academic year. During the Fall 2020 semester, these funds provided the opportunity for the Lab to offer honoraria to guest researchers whom the Lab invited to present at Lab meetings, and allowed for the Lab to hire an assistant to begin web-design maintenance in preparation for the official launch of the Lab's public-facing website. The Lab's initial efforts are now yielding results in the form of publication of Lab-incubated research as well as the design of a project proposal to be submitted as an application for large-scale grants to the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

The Digital Theory Lab's activities during the Fall 2020 semester have been structured around its semi-monthly Lab meetings. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Lab has been convening its meetings online via Zoom. This has made it possible for the Lab to strengthen both its international reach and institutional collaborations. Participation in Lab meetings now has grown beyond the Lab's core NYU community members to include international researchers located at King's College, London, NYU Prague, and Southern Denmark University as well as at domestic institutions including MIT, Cornell University, and Michigan State University.

Fall 2020's Lab meetings consisted of invited presentations from scholars working on innovative research, communal support of Lab members' own research through feedback sessions on works-in-progress, and a symposium on artificial intelligence, creativity, and art at the Serpentine Gallery, London. Invited speakers presented work that took approaches drawn from the arts and humanities to examine Big Data, Deep Learning artificial intelligence, and data visualization. This semester's speakers were Jonathan Zong, an artist and a researcher at MIT's Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory (CSAIL); Colin Koopman, a philosopher at the University of Oregon; and Beatrice Fazi, a media theorist at the University of Sussex. Additionally, Lab members Clifford Siskin, Emma Rae Norton, and Sam Kellogg each presented original

scholarship, all of which grew out of collaborative Lab discussion in past semesters. In October, Lab member Leif Weatherby participated in an event at the Serpentine Gallery called "Aesthetics of the New AI," co-sponsored by the Digital Theory Lab and Serpentine's Creative AI Lab, which asked what aspects of recent advances in machine learning can contribute to an art-making practice. This event was broadcast live via Zoom as a webinar. Other speakers included Mercedes Bunz, Murad Khan, Nora Khan, and Joanna Zylinska.

As of the close of the fall 2020 semester, the Lab has started to see the publication of research that developed out of the Lab's explorations in past semesters. Sam Kellogg has written an essay on the history of metaphors of "mountain climbing" used in machine learning discourse that has been accepted for publication and is forthcoming in the journal *Culture Machine*. Leif Weatherby will be publishing an essay on German thinker Hans Blumenberg's engagement with early artificial intelligence in the journal *New German Critique*. Clifford Siskin is preparing an essay on artificial intelligence in the history of knowledge that expands Lab discussions; he previously presented this research in a Spring of 2020 workshop at the University of Cambridge's Leverhulme Center. And, international Lab member Richard Muller of NYU Prague has included research related to Spring 2020's Lab discussions in his recently published book (in Czech) *Za Obrysy Média: Literatura a medialita* (Karolinum, 2020).

Lab members David Bering-Porter, Zach Coble, Lisa Gitelman, Joseph Lemelin, and Leif Weatherby have written a project proposal that provides an opportunity for faculty at NYU to collaborate with the NYU Libraries, and with an emerging code and liberal arts program at The New School. The project is called *The Library as Artificial Intelligence* and it applies fundamental questions from disciplinary practices across the humanities to an experimental context. The proposed project combines AI techniques and library cataloging protocols to learn about the data structures that shape and enable contemporary humanistic research practices. The project focuses on building an Artificial Library Machine Intelligence (ALMI) that invents new MARC catalog records by making its own decisions about how to represent and organize library content, producing a machine-generated catalog. The guiding hypothesis is that ALMI might prove to be unusual and alienating for anyone familiar with ubiquitous catalog norms, revealing unseen assumptions and biases that underlie existing cataloging and deep learning AI techniques alike. The Lab has submitted the proposal to the ACLS as part of a grant application and intends to submit the proposal as a grant application to the NEH before the start of the Spring 2021 semester.

The Digital Theory Lab continues not only to flourish but also to expand, now entering its sixth semester of existence. The Lab is currently planning its activities for the Spring 2021 semester. Planned activities include a roster of invited speakers to Lab meetings, workshops for graduate student dissertation proposals, and a co-sponsored workshop with researchers at Oxford University on approaches to artificial intelligence from the perspective of critical theory, philosophy, and hermeneutics.

Digital Theory Lab Team
David Bering-Porter, New School
Zach Coble, Head, Digital Scholarship Services, NYU Libraries
Lisa Gitelman, English, Arts and Science; Media Culture and Communications, Steinhardt
Tyler Harper, Doctoral Student, Department of Comparative Literature, Arts and Science
Ryan Healy, Doctoral Student, Department of English, Arts and Science
Sam Kellogg, Doctoral Student, Media Culture and Communications, Steinhardt
Joseph Lemelin, NYU Center for Data Science
Benjamin Schluter, Doctoral Student, Department of German, Arts and Science
Cliff Siskin, Department of English, Arts and Science
Yuanjun Song (Claire), Doctoral Student, Department of Comparative Literature, Arts and Science
Leif Weatherby, Department of German, Arts and Science

The War Lab

The War H-Lab explores the ways in which major human sciences—psychology, psychoanalysis, cybernetics, anthropology, etc.—were crucially transformed by the shifting conceptions and practices of warfare between 1910-1955. It focuses on WWI, interwar France, Germany and Britain, WWII, anti-colonial revolutions taking place during this period, and the beginning of the Cold War. The lab will engage recent historiographical and methodological innovations (the advent of a new international history, indigenous studies and Native American history, intellectual, legal and economic history), and disciplines that have been largely absent from historiographical or social-science-oriented approaches to war—including literature and aesthetics—and their attention to representation, memory, and trauma. By re-framing the overall picture around a war/knowledge axis, the lab will ask: How did major human sciences transform as a result of their entanglement with concepts of war and conflict between 1910 and 1955? And: In what ways might attempts at a new periodization and a more comprehensive understanding of conceptions of war and its role in social and political transformation open up a new field of inquiry? In addition to exploring historically how war has been coupled with knowledge, the War H-Lab will take a rapid-response approach to current events, offering intellectual engagements far broader in scope than would be possible for any one individual to provide.

Fall 2020

Over the course of the past semester the different groups that make up the War and Knowledge lab have continued to meet digitally and pursue our projects. Unfortunately, the ongoing coronavirus-related restrictions on archival-research activity have hampered the ability of the lab to pursue its goals. Thus whereas some of our grad student participants are abroad (in Germany and Switzerland), their research paths are for now very limited. We expect this situation to improve in the spring; at present we are also reconceptualizing the work on the post-WWII obsession with indigenous warfare, which we intend as a co-authored essay in a peer reviewed journal.

One of our members (Professor Alys George) has departed the university, and another PhD student (Ms. Lauren Kirk) has joined the project and is collaborating with Anne Schult and Stefanos Geroulanos. We are all looking forward to completing the above-mentioned essay; plans for a special journal issue on "30-year wars" continue, if somewhat delayed; and we are planning a conference on War, Sovereignty, and Borders, which will take place once we are all able to invite visiting speakers again.

For the forthcoming spring semester, several members of the lab have received small research grants in order to pursue their archival research in Switzerland, Germany, France, and the United States. We expect that this research is going to be very conducive to the collaborative projects: Jonas Knatz's and Professor Liz Ellis's for the project on the 20th-century Western treatments of indigenous warfare; Anne Schult's for the "30-year wars" project; Lauren Kirk's for the import of military techniques into domestic policy in the later 19th century (together with Anne Schult and Professor Geroulanos). Professors Ben-Dor Benite, Ellis, and Geroulanos hope to stage the aforementioned conference in September-October, and are grateful for the funder's patience with our delays, given the way the pandemic scattered our lab members, moved our work online, and often paused the archival visits essential to the completion and presentation of the Lab's work. We wish to conclude by expressing our immense gratitude for the funds that make this work possible.

War Lab Team

Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, Department of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, Arts and Science
Elizabeth Ellis, Department of History, Arts and Science
Stefanos Geroulanos , Department of History, Arts and Science
Lauren Kirk, Doctoral Student, Institute of French Studies / Department of History, Arts and Science
Jonas Knatz, Doctoral Student, Department of History, Arts and Science
Alexander Langstaff, Doctoral Student, Department of History, Arts and Science
Matyas Mervey, Doctoral Student, Department of History, Arts and Science

Marcela Prieto Rudolphy, Doctoral Student, NYU School of Law
Anne Schult, Doctoral Student, Department of History, Arts and Science
Jennifer Trowbridge, Doctoral Student, Department of Anthropology, Arts and Science

The Multi-Species Lab

The unfolding climate crisis poses a fundamental challenge to the humanities because of the questions it raises about human agency, power, and the relationship of humans to—and in—the world we inhabit. We are confronted by the paradox that while human activities have physical world-altering effects, the scale of these effects puts them beyond human control: although we ourselves have changed the planet in frightening ways, we find ourselves increasingly helpless in the face of those changes. This paradox—the fact that the "Anthropocene" names the age of maximum human influence *and* maximum human vulnerability—forces us to reconsider our fundamental assumptions about the historical trajectories our species has been pursuing, along with the concepts of agency, freedom, and responsibility that underlie them. It forces us to question and redraft the prevailing definition of "the human"—the foundational concept of the Humanities—and of the boundaries, inclusions, and exclusions through which that definition has been framed.

The Multi-Species H-Lab proposes to identify strategies and develop practices of reading, writing, living, self-care, earth-care, and community engagement that open up the focus, usually centered on the human, to understand life—including human life—as a plural and enmeshed phenomenon. The Lab is conceived as an experimentally oriented contribution to the rapidly emerging field of Environmental Humanities, with intellectual foundations drawn from such fields as animal studies, environmental philosophy, science studies, and ecocriticism. The Lab also recognizes the veritable explosion of artistic engagement whereby artists, art collectives, curators and other practitioners are addressing the social and emotional complexities of our physically changing world.

Fall 2020

The Multi-Species Lab was unable to operate in the fall 2020 semester; however, plans are in place to hold a culminating event in spring 2021. We look forward to reporting on this event in our next interim report.

Multi-Species Lab Team

Yanoula Athanassakis, Associate Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, Director of NYU's Environmental Humanities Initiative, Departments of English and Environmental Studies
Una Chaudhuri, Departments of English and Environmental Studies, Arts and Science; Department of Drama, Tisch School of the Arts; Director, Center for Experimental Humanities
Grace Anne Marotta, master's student, Experimental Humanities
Nick Silcox, Doctoral Student, Department of English
Robert Slifkin, Institute of Fine Arts
Marina Zurkow, Artist; Instructor, Tisch Interactive Telecommunications Program

The Radical Ecologies (Rad) Lab

Increasingly, our relationships with "natural" phenomena are being mediated by algorithms, screens, and machines: consider, for example, remote sensing of geological activity, or modeling of atmospheric climate change. As new computational methods (e.g., machine learning and artificial intelligence) promise to further improve the fidelity of systems sciences, which assume that more data equals better knowledge, we contend that these methods simultaneously reproduce colonial systems of dispossession and extermination, as well as structure significant blind-spots rendering invisible the radical ecologies surrounding us today.

The Radical Ecologies H-Lab aims to question connections and collisions between power and ecology by incorporating materials, experimental methods, and field-based techniques into human-centered modes of

social and cultural analysis. The Rad Lab will address what we call "radical ecologies," namely, collective forms of life that question how we understand stability, indeterminacy and risk; toxicity and temporality; geo-sociality and science fiction; and multi-scalar holobionts (assemblages of different species into ecological units) and infrastructures.

The Rad Lab will explore the following overlapping themes: designing indeterminacy (as a way to contend with rapid environmental change and increasing unpredictability); temporality (recognizing the simultaneous existence of differing time scales and also emerging novel temporalities); power (as manifested through engineering and science); multi-species relations (ecologies as models for collaborative survival); and toxic animacies (coexistence and collaboration in the context of environmental disturbance).

Fall 2020
During the Fall 2020 semester RadLab activities included teaching an experimental undergraduate class, 'Radical Ecologies', in addition to supporting ongoing research activities of lab members.

The co-leaders developed a new curriculum for the Radical Ecologies class that combined methods from the environmental humanities with practicums on digital techniques for capturing data from environments. The class consisted of three modules, each focused on a different topic and techniques: *Geological Force, Senses of Control, and Natural Phenomena* (led by Karen Holmberg), *Multiscale Relationships Across Species* (led by Elizabeth Henaff), and *Making Sense of Water* (led by Tega Brain). A total of ten guest speakers contributed to the modules. The course included two graduate students, one funded by RadLab, who helped run workshops with students during the three modules on photogrammetry, DNA sequencing, and mapping. The undergraduates produced an end-of-the-semester digital showcase for the work they created in their final projects, which will be launched soon. The class self-organized into three committees to produce the showcase (design, project management, and editorial) with the support from the two TAs and the co-leaders.

As a result of the guidance and material presented in the curriculum, several of the Fall 2020 Radical Ecologies students have initiated independent research activities that build upon their work in the class. These include:

- A student-run magazine, Symbiont (https://www.symbiontmag.com), was launched this semester by three undergraduate students in the class through inspiration from the class subject matter and discussions. The online magazine will produce a special issue to highlight their peers' work generated in the class.
- One student participated in a paid embedded internship during the Fall 2020 semester with City Hall Park that was tethered to the class and that has provided her invaluable landscape architecture experience.
- Three of our students will be continuing art-science projects they began in the Radical Ecologies class in a new research initiative, the Gallatin WetLab, in Spring 2021, co-led by Karen Holmberg.
- Another student applied for funding through the Horn Family Fund for Environmental Research to pursue independent research in Elizabeth Henaff's metagenomics lab at Tandon in Spring 2021.

Regarding the lab's ongoing research, the pandemic prevented fieldwork, hands-on experience, and on-site in-person interviews during the Fall 2020 semester. The team instead focused on historical research, working with remote guest speakers, and preliminary video/audio recordings to outline narratives and methodologies for studying a specific 'radical ecology,' that is the intersection of natural-sociopolitical histories and local-transcontinental ecologies that define present-day Kissena Park in Queens. Kissena Park is the site where former Parsons Nursery was located; in the mid-19th century, the nursery imported trees that carried a pathogenic fungus that wiped out billions of American chestnut trees, altering East Coast landscapes. Studying this shift through a multidisciplinary lens offers a perspective on climate change that is thus far underexplored. These studies will continue as an Experimental Humanities (XE) graduate course titled "Experimental Media for Radical

Ecologies," open to all students in the spring 2021 semester. We have also interviewed and are preparing to hire a graduate assistant for the course through XE, with funds provided by RadLab budget.

We are currently developing the course reading list and Spring 2021 syllabus. We are also starting to build a website to hold class fieldnotes, course materials, and recordings. Research and work in Spring 2021 will culminate with three public-facing engagements: a non-fiction film, a journal article, and an accessible course website.

Radical Ecologies Lab Team
Maria Paz Almanera, Doctoral Student, Media, Culture and Communication
Tega Brain, Department of Technology, Culture and Society, Tandon School of Engineering
Elaine Gan, Department of XE: Experimental Humanities and Social Engagement, Graduate School of Arts and Science
Nabil Hassein, Doctoral Student, Media, Culture and Communication
Elizabeth Henaff, Department of Technology, Culture and Society, Tandon School of Engineering
Karen Holmberg, Gallatin School of Individualized Study
Meg Weissner, Doctoral Student, Media, Culture and Communication
Diana Zhu, Doctoral Student, Media, Culture and Communication

Asylum Lab

The Asylum Lab is an intervention in the increasingly anomic and confusing landscape surrounding im/migration and asylum in the U.S. Extensive reporting by some U.S. media, human rights advocacy groups, and activist groups have revealed a humanitarian disaster of extraordinary proportions, much of it hidden from the public eye behind the walls of detention centers across the U.S., in encampments on the southern side of the U.S.-Mexico border, and increasingly, in towns across Central America. But while journalists and advocates have done an admirable job reporting on the facts on the ground, very little (if any) work has been done regarding how records are being kept of the crisis that is unfolding before our eyes. In fact, it became clear that traditional mechanisms of government accountability and transparency are no longer reliable, in part due to government agencies' failure to comply, in part due to the shifting of record keeping from paper files to digital record-keeping.

An additional blind spot in public awareness concerns the issue of scale. Journalists tend to work with narratives and focus on individual stories. Of course they report on numbers, but conventional statistics tend to work with column graphs and dots. Making the connection between a column or a dot, and the story of a human being stuck on the migration routes or caught in the asylum system, remains extremely difficult. Public history and digital humanities have an important role to play in producing ways of representing the anomic landscape of U.S. immigration and asylum in ways that are emotionally and aesthetically responsive to the nature and severity of the crisis. At the core of the Asylum Lab's work, then, is the question of public history and memory: given media representation (or lack thereof) and opaque government records, how will this story be remembered and understood? To make a meaningful intervention in public understanding of the asylum crisis, how can we balance powerful narratives of individual experience with an interrogation of much larger systemic and historical conditions?

Fall 2020
Throughout the Fall semester, the Asylum Lab convened once a week on Zoom. In addition, the Lab faculty leaders met on a weekly basis for planning purposes. In order to mitigate the adverse effects of not being able to create a live Lab environment (a matter of considerable regret to all of us), we used Google Docs for records of our discussions, and planning and editing purposes. We used a Slack platform with various channels for sharing links, bibliographic references, and ideas. All Lab members had access to these shared platforms and

documents and contributed to creating a lasting and valuable record of our conversations and investigations. In addition, we brought in a number of guest speakers over Zoom to share their expertise with the Lab participants.

Asylum Lab participants brought to the table very diverse expertise and experience. Several participants had first-hand experience as migrant advocates. Others contributed deep knowledge in public history, digital humanities, U.S. immigration history, and Mexican and Central American history. Some were trained in reading the archive, others in reading narrative. The result was a truly exhilarating exploration, which we hope will support a larger grant application going forward.

The Lab welcomed the following visitors:

● Shannon O'Neill (Head curator, NYU Tamiment Archive) on the political and ethical considerations of community and human rights archiving;
● Alec Ferretti (Reclaim the Records) on Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) filings and National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) record keeping;
● Alex Gil and Moacir P. de Sá Pereira (Digital Scholarship Librarian and Research Data Librarian, respectively, Columbia University Libraries) on their data visualization project *Torn Apart/Separados* (http://xpmethod.columbia.edu/torn-apart/volume/1/);
● Elizabeth Kennedy (Social scientist, activist, former Human Rights Watch researcher) on her research into murders of migrants and asylum seekers returned to Honduras;
● Audra Passinault (Staff attorney, Asylum and Immigration Law Clinic, DePaul University) on changes to asylum law and procedure under the Trump administration and what is likely to change under the Biden administration.

Our discussions, readings, and investigations centered on the type and nature of the records being created by the asylum crisis (by government agencies, advocacy groups, and migrants themselves); the ideological, political, and historical contexts for understanding U.S. discourses about immigration and asylum; and digital models for archiving human rights materials and making documentation legible to public audiences. A deep dive into the U.S. Department of Justice database of immigration court proceedings (released monthly and made available by Syracuse University's TRAC database) made painfully clear the stark contrast between individual experiences of asylum seekers, who have to shape their life stories to conform to the bureaucratic and legal imperatives, and the way the records are represented in the immigration system. We examined this database's hundreds of fields to determine what events it was tracking, what historical questions might usefully be posed to it, and how its data could be effectively visualized. Going forward, we are exploring ways that creative visualization and design could make these contrasts intuitively legible to a public that does not understand the intricacies of immigration courts, nor the complexities of governmental digital databases.

Our specific inquiry into TRAC's records of asylum proceedings also opened up broader questions as to how humanities scholars can begin to understand and use the increasing number of federal records being kept not in folders full of paper but in large and complex databases. In conversations with Juliana Freire (Professor of Computer Science and specialist in data visualization at Tandon) we began to develop a plan to use technology from her lab to analyse and break down the information contained in this archive using tools her lab has developed to work with other similar datasets. We intend to develop this project through 2021.

In the Spring 2021, Profs. Fischer, Noonan, and Schmidt will be co-teaching an undergraduate class titled "Asylum in Crisis," hosted by the Department of History, cross-listed with Spanish & Portuguese and CLACS. The undergraduate seminar will offer NYU students essential historical and cultural background to the history of immigration and asylum in the U.S. as well as an opportunity to delve into the functioning of immigration courts, the operations of government agencies, and the complexities of government record-keeping.

In light of the pandemic, we decided to postpone any public events until in-person meetings are possible again. It is hard to overstate the profound exhaustion students and faculty have been experiencing since moving to remote instruction in mid-March. It seemed foolhardy to hope that faculty and students would sign up for additional hours on Zoom for teach-ins or talks, regardless of how urgent the topic. This decision obviously had budget implications (see below). We respectfully request that we be granted permission to carry over any unused funds to next year, when hopefully we will have returned to in-person meetings.

Our work this fall made it clear how the urgency of the crisis and the unpredictability of Trump administration policies rendered the archivists, advocates, and attorneys who are working in migration and asylum unable to connect and strategize about larger issues of ongoing documentation. In the Fall of 2021 we are planning to organize a one-day conference on the subject of our Lab. This public event will bring together archivists, activists, attorneys and interested scholars from across the humanities to take stock of how the Trump years exacerbated the asylum crisis, analyse the projected changes/continuities in the policies of the Biden administration (some of those already informally leaked to the media), and assess and strategize around the ongoing records needs as they pertain to the needs of migrants, activists, and scholars. In addition to a substantial conference budget (speaker travel, accommodation, etc.) we will need to hire a graduate student assistant for planning and logistics over the summer.

The Lab plans to continue to convene at regular intervals over the Spring semester to develop and refine plans for a public history/digital humanities intervention in the areas of record keeping and documentary support to human rights advocates and asylum applicants. Over the Spring semester we aim to develop a large grant application based on the work we have done in 2020-21. We anticipate the need for research assistance well into the summer, and most likely during the Fall of 2021.

Asylum Lab Team
Jason Ahlenius, Doctoral Student, Spanish & Portuguese (research assistant for the Lab)
Sibylle Fischer, Associate Professor, Spanish, History, CLACS
Ellen Noonan, Clinical Associate Professor, History; Director of the Archives and Public History Program
Alexia Orengo-Green, Doctoral Student, History
Bárbara Pérez Curiel, Doctoral Student, Spanish & Portuguese
Laura Rojas, Doctoral Student, Spanish & Portuguese
Benjamin Schmidt, Clinical Associate Professor, History; Director of Digital Humanities
Sarah Sklaw, Doctoral Student, History
Bryan Zehngut-Willits, Doctoral Student, History

Knowledge Alphabets Lab
The Knowledge Alphabets H-Lab focuses on the problem of translation in natural and digital languages. We aim to redefine translation theory today in the light of new developments in artificial intelligence (AI), machine translation, bio-translation, aesthetic practices and forms of knowledge production that are translation-based, or that define translation in a particular way as epistemology, transference, methodology, and mode of interpretive cognition. We hope to achieve a better understanding of how translation works in AI, deep learning and predictive processing by focusing on the unit of translatability. We will investigate what a knowledge alphabet is today and how it is related (or not) to its particular medium, whether vowel, letter, script, alphanumeric cipher, algorithm, bitmap, pixel, meme, RNA molecule, semantic or syntactic linguistic function, trans-literative icon, acoustic value, or meme. In broadest terms, the H-Lab aims to define a professional growth-field at the disciplinary juncture of literature and media studies, humanities and computational sciences.

Fall 2020

In the fall of 2020 the fifteen H-Lab participants met bi-weekly focusing on key texts in one of the five clusters that act as anchoring points for the H-Lab: Semiotics and Structural Linguistics; Aesthetics & Art Practice; Natural Languages; Artificial Languages; Units, Elements & Numbers; Anti-Alphabets & Non-Alphabets. Supplementary "spin-off" groups met in the off weeks for close readings of the texts and demonstrations including two sessions devoted to the work of Jacques Lacan and cybernetics. Subsequent "spin off" meetings considered Gottlob Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic: A Logico-mathematical Enquiry into the Concept of Number*; Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's The Monadology; and a demonstration of an algorithm for Kurt Gödel's incompleteness theorem. The latter half of the fall semester included visits from Lisa Gitelman from the English and Media, Culture, and Communication Departments at NYU; and Juliette Kennedy from the Department of Mathematics and Statistics, University of Helsinki.

The spring 2021 semester will continue with meetings grounded in the work of a particular visiting scholar. Beginning in February the list of visitors scheduled to join the H-Lab includes: Nick Montfort from the Department of Comparative Media Studies/Writing, MIT; John Durham Peters from the Departments of English and Film & Media Studies, Yale University; Louise Amoore from the Department of Geography, Durham University; Zakir Paul from the Department of Comparative Literature, NYU; Allison Parrish from Tisch School of the Arts, NYU; and Mark Sanders from the Departments of Comparative Literature and English, NYU.

In spring 2021, two of the convening professors, Apter and Galloway, will co-teach an interdisciplinary undergraduate course titled "Translating Knowledge Alphabets Across Media" using curriculum developed through the H-Lab. Lab participants Nicole Grimaldi and Nabil Hassein will work as Teaching Assistants for the course.

The H-Lab will also work in the spring on a possible exhibition, co-curated by professor Katchadourian, with curatorial input from participant Amanda Parmer.

Knowledge Alphabets Lab Team

Emily Apter, Silver Professor of French and Comparative Literature, and Chair, Department of Comparative Literature

Aaron Doughty, Doctoral Student, Department of Media, Culture and Communication, Steinhardt

Jeanne Etelain, Doctoral Student, Department of French

Alexander Galloway, Professor of Media, Department Culture and Communication, Steinhardt

Nicole Grimaldi, Doctoral Student, Department of Comparative Literature

Nabil Hassein, Doctoral Student, Department of Media, Culture and Communication, Steinhardt

Ivan Hofman, Doctoral Student, Department of Comparative Literature

David Kanbergs, Doctoral Student, Department of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies

Nina Katchadourian, Artist and Clinical Associate Professor, Gallatin

Sam Kellogg, Doctoral Student, Department of Media, Culture and Communication, Steinhardt

Alexander Miller, Doctoral Student, Department of Comparative Literature

Amanda Parmer, Doctoral Student, Department of Media, Culture and Communication, Steinhardt

Caleb Salgado, Doctoral Student, Department of French

Pierre Schwarzer, Doctoral Student, Department of French

Yuanjun Song, Doctoral Student, Department of Comparative Literature

Meg Wiessner, Doctoral Student, Department of Media, Culture and Communication, Steinhardt

Future Bennett-Polonsky Humanities Labs

The following H-Lab will launch in the fall 2021 semester:

Cross/Currents Lab

The Cross/Currents H-Lab takes the word *currents* as its inspiration, as both a metaphor and a tool, enveloping not only its main definition in relation to water or its movement, but also its broader reverberations. By connecting the words *cross* and *currents*, the Lab's main goal is to bring into dialogue environmental humanities and migration studies (with an emphasis on race, diaspora, and indigeneity). The Lab team hopes to rehearse ways of bringing literary and artistic analysis to bear on issues of the environment and migration, and vice-versa. They have outlined three main trajectories around the notion of Cross/Currents: mobility, transmission, and flow. Firstly, mobility considers how water has been a conduit for migration—the movement of people and non-human elements—with its historic and contemporary iterations defined by violence and trauma. Secondly, transmission engages recent scholarship in media studies, the history of science, and the history of technology. It pushes us to think about the material aspects of technologies, and to consider newer models of communication like undersea cable systems or transoceanic internet traffic. Finally, the team will use the flow of water and air as points of reference from which to build new critical vocabularies and frameworks for knowledge production beyond traditional conceptualizations of human agency. The Cross/Currents Lab's ultimate purpose is to decenter an anthropocentric and imperialistic understanding of global interconnection and exchange.

Cross/Currents Lab Team
Erica Feild, Doctoral Student, Spanish and Portuguese
Luis Francia, Adjunct Professor, Social and Cultural Analysis
Jordana Mendelson, Associate Professor, Spanish & Portuguese; Director, King Juan Carlos I of Spain Center
Laura Torres-Rodríguez, Associate Professor, Spanish & Portuguese
Michael Salgarolo, Doctoral Student, History
Dean Itsuji Saranillo, Associate Professor, Social and Cultural Analysis; Director of Undergraduate Studies
Emilie Tumale, Doctoral Student, Sociology of Education, Steinhardt
Mariko Chin Whitenack, Doctoral Student, American Studies, Social and Cultural Analysis
Lee Xie, Doctoral Student, Spanish and Portuguese, GSAS