
Topics in A/P/A Studies:
CROSS-CURRENTS LAB: OCEAN AS MYTH AND METHOD

Spring Term 2022

SCA-UA 380.001

CROSS-LIST SPAN-UA 403.002

Fridays: 11am-1:45pm, 20 Cooper Sq, Rm 471

Spring Break: 3/14 - 3/20

Faculty:

Luis H. Francia lh4@nyu.edu

Laura Juliana Torres-Rodríguez ljt233@nyu.edu

Jordana Mendelson jordana.mendelson@nyu.edu

Course Assistants:

Lab A: Emilie S. Tumale est296@nyu.edu

Lab B: Mariko Whitenack mcw536@nyu.edu

Lab C: Lee Xie lx371@nyu.edu

Office Hours:

Wednesdays at 3-4pm EST [by zoom](#), or by appointment

Course Overview

Through an interdisciplinary approach to environmental humanities and migration, this course links transoceanic diasporic communities, with a focus on Caribbean and Transpacific Studies. With the ocean and its diverse currents serving as both principal metaphor and method, the course will utilize historical, literary, and artistic analyses, engage with guest speakers, and take field trips to water-related projects and diasporic communities in New York City. Participants are encouraged to bring their own special skills and passions (art, design, literature, technology, etc.) to the table to create innovative methodologies for writing on and conceptualizing migration in its manifold dimensions. While the lab draws from models across the sciences, social sciences, and the humanities, there is also an equally strong interest in how writers and artists engage with these ideas, and how the arts might serve as another equally valuable lens through which to consider the idea of the Ocean as myth and method.

The seminar is part of the Cross/Currents- Bennett-Polonsky Humanities Lab which is run by a collective of graduate students and faculty. Since our lab comprises faculty and graduate students from diverse geographical and methodological specialties, the course program

reflects the search for a shared approach and bibliography to examine our lab's theme of migration and its attendant material realities. Due to the experimental, collective, and multi-directional nature of the humanities lab, students are expected to actively participate and contribute their unique perspectives to the construction of the course.

The course will explore three main connotations of 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. So on both the human and non-human scales, we will look at questions of transit, passage, and diaspora, and how they relate to questions of migration and environmental justice.

Secondly, **transmission** allows us to approach currents not only as a metaphor but as a tool. It helps us to think about the material aspects of old and new communication technologies and modes of transportation across water. Understanding that entering into a conversation about media and transmission also brings us into experiences that are organic and multi-sensorial, we hope to explore elements of touch, smell, taste, sight, and sound as part of our seminar program.

Finally, we use the **flow** of water and air as points of reference from which to build new critical vocabularies and frameworks for knowledge production. An important methodological aspect of the course is to explore how the term Cross/Currents invites us to think through different perceptual movements, shifting our points of reference away from what Melody Jue describes as “terrestrial ways of knowing” to the flow of water and air environments. The words used to describe our actions within a current also bring about emotions, responses, and reactions: dive, submerge, drench, float, and surf. We consider these immersive connotations important for our research methodology and critical vocabularies.

Therefore, students will be exploring the following questions.

1. Does thinking about and through (salt)water as a medium, and about coastal environments as sites of knowledge production, require specific conceptual and methodological shifts?
2. Which technologies, vocabularies, or artistic mediums are necessary/can be utilized for representing, visualizing, or imagining fluid/water dynamics?

3. How do large-scale scientific and digital approaches to the study of the ocean and other bodies of water (lakes, rivers, swamps) as well as the atmosphere contrast with or complement indigenous or communitarian water-based ecological knowledge?
4. How does considering New York City (Lenapehoking) as a coastal and archipelagic environment change our perception of its history and our experience of it?
5. How do imperial and colonial histories connect different island and diasporic communities in the city spatially and historically? How are such histories in their various manifestations explored artistically, whether visually, theatrically, or via the written word?

Because of the experimental component of the seminar, students should keep in mind that the purpose is not to get answers from the team leaders but to navigate these open-ended questions and find their own.

Structure and Organization: Three Clusters

In addition to the assigned reading and visual materials, the class will feature guest presentations by speakers and practitioners whose work helps us rethink our key cross-currents themes: mobility, transmission, and flow, from different scales and disciplinary perspectives (ocean science, global indigenous studies, literary, visual and performing arts, food studies, etc.). Most of our invited collaborators' projects have a community-oriented dimension or are part of organizations that are already doing work connected to bodies of water, waterfront access, community stewardship of city land, or health and environmental justice issues in the city.

The course is organized around the three units that were first explored in the research Lab (literary and artistic currents, environmental currents, and migratory currents), each of which will engage students in experiential and innovative research while introducing them to discipline-specific tools, allowing them to introduce novel research methodologies and questions related to their specific interests but shared across creative platforms. Because the class will be divided into 3 groups of approximately 7 students each: Lab A, B, and C, each unit will finalize with a group report. Each group will have a course assistant as their leader and point person.

Assessment

I. Attendance (10%)

Students are expected to attend all classes in-person in line with ongoing University policies. If a student is unable to come to class due to Covid-related circumstances, they should contact CA Lee Xie (lx371@nyu.edu) for instructions on how to log onto class via Zoom. Unless the student is unwell, it is expected that they participate when joining class online. All students are allowed two unexcused absences during the semester for emergencies and special circumstances. Any additional unexcused absences will impact the student's final grade. Please be in touch at semester's start of the semester regarding any accommodations.

II. Participation (20%)

This course will take the form of a seminar or workshop, so it is expected that the class will be organized based on the active discussion of the assigned texts. Each student is expected and encouraged to take part in class discussions that help shape the tenor, direction, and emphasis of the course. The class can and should be used as a sounding board for various ideas and suggestions relevant to the lab's goals. We take a broad view of participation, not limited to opining, commenting, and asking questions in a constructive and respectful way but including as well the ability to work in a group and encourage the participation of others. All these will be factors in the evaluation of participation. To use a maritime metaphor, all hands are needed on deck.

III. Weekly Posts (20%)

Articles and/or films will be assigned in lieu of textbooks. All materials will be posted to the Cross/Currents Brightspace page through NYU Home. Each week, students will post a five to six-sentence comment on Brightspace Discussion Forums based on the readings, guest speakers, or field trips of that week. Some weeks the instructions of the Weekly Posts are specified. In those cases, the students should follow the prompt for the assignment and upload it to the discussion forum. Weekly posts are due by Thursday night before class. These Weekly Posts could form the bases of Group Reports.

IV. Group Reports (20%)

Each group will come up with a report/project based on the specific methodology or area of exploration at the end of each cluster (3). These reports may consist of a written narrative of 5 to 7 pages or of an alternative format (podcast, mini-exhibition, blog entries, playlist, mini digital archive, short story, poem, map, journalistic piece, activist action, etc.). If the group decides to choose an alternative format, please include a short essay (2 pages) framing the project. We will provide time in class for the groups to meet and discuss their projects with their lab coordinators.

V. Final project (30%)

There are four options for the final assignment.

1. **Final essay** (10 pages) – This essay could be about any of the materials or themes presented during the course or on a proposed or on an alternative resource relevant to the course topic and framework.
2. A **digital project** inspired by the readings and topics of the course.
3. Participation in a **public-facing project**, activist organization, or community initiative relevant to the course. In this case, the student should write a 10-page essay reflecting on their experience as it relates to the topics and methodologies of the course.
4. Writing and curating an entry for the **Manilla Galleon Memory Project** or any other project that we have explored during this course. That project will seek to gather literary, visual, and historic primary materials from the geographies impacted and connected by the long duree legacies of the Spanish and US Empires. The idea is to create a transnational and multinational corpus that different students and scholars across disciplines, areas of study, and languages can consult.

The final assignment should reflect each student's training, interests and expertise in content and format. Although the final project is individual, students could further develop one of the group report projects, and ask permission to present a collective final assignment.

Regardless of the option chosen, all students should write a two-page proposal with a bibliography of five titles by **March 25**.

Your Wellbeing

Moses Center for Students with Disabilities

The Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities functions to determine qualified disability status and to assist students in obtaining appropriate accommodations and services. Services provided are designed to encourage independence and self-advocacy, backed by a comprehensive system of support.

Email: mosescsd@nyu.edu. Phone: (212) 998-4980.

NYU Wellness Exchange

The Wellness Exchange is your key to accessing the University's extensive health and mental health resources designed to address your needs. You can call a private hotline (212-443-9999), available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, which will put you in touch with a

professional who can help to address day-to-day challenges as well as other health-related concerns. The hotline is also available if you just need to talk or want to call about a friend.

NYU Bias Response Hotline

The New York University Bias Response Line provides a mechanism through which members of our community can share or report experiences and concerns of bias, discrimination, or harassing behavior that may occur within our community. Email: bias.response@nyu.edu. Phone; (212) 998-2277.

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Course Schedule

INTRODUCTION

Week 1 | January 28

New York City: City of Islands and of Empire

Introductions; Syllabus Overview; Key Terms

- “Atlas 9. “Archipelagos” (Molly Roy and Lia Tjandra) pp. 76-79. Gaiutra Bahadur, “The Caribbean Far North” pp. 77-85
- “Atlas 24. “Mother Tongues and Queens The World’s Language Capital,” in Rebecca Solnit and Joshua Jelly-Schapiro *Nonstop Metropolis: A New York City Atlas*
- Joshua Jelly-Schapiro, *Names of New York*, Chapter 2, “The Names Before”
- Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler, *Manhatta* (1920): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuuZS2phD10>

Week 2 | February 4

City of Islands II: The Manila Galleons, the 1898 Spanish-American War & 1899 Philippine-American War

- [Yolanda Martínez San Miguel, “Colonial and Mexican Archipelagos: Reimagining Colonial Caribbean Studies” in *Archipelagic American Studies*](#)

Poetry:

- Read Rudyard Kipling’s poem “The White Man’s Burden” (1899) <https://www.americanyawp.com/reader/19-american-empire/rudyard-kipling-the-white-mans-burden-1899/>

- [Rick Barot, “The Galleons 2” to “The Galleon 6,” From The Galleons](#)
- Barbara Jane Reyes, “[Galleon Prayer](#),” From *Poeta en San Francisco*
- Pedro Pietri, El Manifiesto Notes on El Puerto Rican Embassy (digital project) <https://elpuertoricanembassy.msa-x.org/index.html>

View:

- Beatrice Glow Artist Talk on *Rhunhattan* [Tearoom] <https://beatriceglow.org/rhunhattan-tearoom>
- The Last Colony: A Brief History of Puerto Rico’s Status <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zz830ga1dUs>
- This Bloody, Blundering Business <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZYEZkp7W0w&t=15s>
- Optional: view Kidlat Tahimik’s *Perfumed Nightmare*, available on NYU Bobst Library’s audiovisual archive

CLUSTER 1: LITERARY / ARTISTIC CURRENTS

Methodology: *Visual arts*

Week 3 | February 11

Gallery visit: “Deborah Jack: 20 years”

The class will meet at the Pen+Brush gallery.

- “Mare Incognitum/Unknown Sea: Deborah Jack Interviewed by Jessica Lanay” <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/mare-incognitum-unknown-sea-deborah-jack-interviewed/>
- “On Water, Salt, Whales, and the Black Atlantics” A Conversation between Alexis Pauline Gumbs and Christina Sharpe”
- Grayson Chong, “Hurricanes and Headpieces: Storytelling from the Ruins and Remains in Caribbean History and Culture”

Week 4 | February 18

Submerged Perspectives: Gender and Memory in Caribbean Art

Class visit: Dantaé Garee Elliott

Read:

- Melody Jue, “Thinking through Seawater.” *Wild Blue Media*
- “Elizabeth Deloughrey, Tatiana Flores, ”Submerged Bodies The Tidalectics of Representability and the Sea in Caribbean Art,”

- Angelique V. Nixon, "Troubling Queer Caribbeanness: Embodiment, Gender, and Sexuality in Nadia Huggins's Visual Art"

View:

- Exhibition catalogue, selections: *everything is separated by water: Magdalena Campos-Pons*
- Nadia Huggins <https://nadiahuggins.com> (artist website)
- Ted Talk: Nadia Huggins, What's Beyond the Boundary of the Shoreline https://www.ted.com/talks/nadia_huggins_what_s_beyond_the_boundary_of_the_shoreline

Week 5 | February 25

The Caribbean Yet to Come: Puerto Rican Contemporary Visual Arts and Performance

Virtual visit: artist Sofía Gallisá Muriente and Arnaldo Rodríguez-Bagué

- José Anzagasty-Rodríguez, "[Colonial Waterscapes: The Water Issue in Puerto Rico](#)"
- Edouard Glissant, "[The Black Beach](#)," From *Poetics of Relation*
- Sofía Gallisá Muriente, "Foreign in a domestic sense" (artwork)

<https://vimeo.com/620898229>

password: fiads

Explore the artist work: <https://vimeo.com/user1347912>

CLUSTER 2: ENVIRONMENTAL CURRENTS

Methodologies: *Ocean Science, Digital simulation/visualization, Indigenous methodologies*

Week 6 | March 4

Ocean and Climate Models across Scales

Guest speaker: Andrew Ross, NYU Courant Center for Atmosphere Ocean Science

Recommended Resources for Andrew Ross Talk on Machine Learning Models and Climate Change

- [Overview of Climate Change Models](#), Climate.gov
- [Explanation of Turbulence](#), 3Blue1Brown on Youtube

- Bathsheba Demuth, *Floating Coast*: [Preface, Chapter 1](#) and [Chapter 2](#)

First Group Report due

Week 7 | March 11

Ocean, Media, and Nuclear Colonialism

Read:

- Nicole Starosielski, "Introduction: Against Flow" (1-21), *The Undersea Network: Sign, Storage, Transmission*
- Hi'ilei Hobart, "Atomic Histories and Elemental Futures across Indigenous Waters"
- Kevin Hamilton, "Tonga Eruption Was so Intense" <https://portside.org/2022-01-23/tonga-eruption-was-so-intense-it-caused-atmosphere-ring-bell>

View:

- "Kāne and Kanaloa are Coming: How Will We Receive Them? A Kanaka Talk (Take) on Climate Change." (<https://vimeo.com/330167089>)
- Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Aka Niviāna, "Rise" (video poem)

Spring Break | March 18

Week 8 | March 25

Grounding Indigenous Environmentalism with Canoes

Guest Speaker: Vicente Díaz, University of Minnesota

Watch:

- *Sacred Vessels* (documentary)

Read:

- Vicente Díaz, "No Island is an Island"
- Vicente Díaz, "Stepping in it: How to Smell the Fullness of Indigenous Stories"
- Vicente Díaz, "Digitalizing Canoes and Atolls"

Final Project Proposal due (new due date: 4/08)

CLUSTER 3: MIGRATORY CURRENTS

Methodologies: *Food studies, Creative writing*

Week 9 | April 1

Introduction to Asian American Foodways

Guest speaker: Michael Menor Salgarolo

- Zohra Saed, "Samsa on Sheepshead Bay: Tracing Uzbek Foodprints in Southern Brooklyn"
- Heather R. Lee, "Life Cooking for Others: The Work and Migration Experiences of a Chinese Restaurant Worker in New York City, 1920 - 1946"

Second Group Report due 4/2 at 11:59pm

CLUSTER 3: MIGRATORY CURRENTS

Methodologies: *Food studies, Creative writing*

Week 10 | April 8

Asian American Foodways

Guest speaker: Amy Besa

- Amy Besa, "[My Heirloom Rice Experience](#)"
- Elaine Gan, "[An Unintended Revolution | Miracle Rice and the Promise of Yield](#)"
- Dawn Mabalon, "[Champorado Dreams](#)" poem

Final Project Proposal due

Week 11 | April 15

Asian American Literary Currents

Guest speaker: writer Xu Xi

- Xu Xi, "When Your City Vanishes" & "Where the World Unwrapped"

Week 12 | April 22

Guest speaker: Claro de los Reyes

Third Group Report due

Week 13 | April 29

Course discussion; work on final projects

Week 14 | May 6

Presentation of Final Projects