



# Bennett-Polonsky Humanities Labs

## Spring 2023 Program Summary

### Lab Activity

#### Overview

The Bennett-Polonsky Humanities Lab program has to date supported a tremendous variety of activity, with each lab employing diverse methodologies to explore their chosen theme, and producing equally varied outcomes. Following is a very brief summary of the status of each lab, with more details provided subsequently. The theme/mission and membership of each lab is provided as an appendix.

#### Brief Status Report

##### *Completed Labs*

**Multi-Species** (fall 2019 launch): Completed spring 2020.

**War** (fall 2019 launch): Completed fall 2022.

**Radical Ecologies** (spring 2020 launch): Completed summer 2021.

##### *Active Labs*

**Digital Theory** (fall 2018 launch): The lab team has been granted reallocated funds.

**Migrant Records (formerly Asylum)** (fall 2020 launch): The lab team has been granted reallocated funds.

**Knowledge Alphabets** (fall 2020 launch): The team is hosting a major international meeting to be held in Paris this June. They have been granted a no-cost extension through fall 2023.

**Cross/Currents** (fall 2021 launch): The lab team has received a no-cost extension through fall 2023 to provide time to develop and stage events with community partners.

**Consent** (fall 2022 launch): The Consent Lab taught its course in spring 2023. They have been granted a no-cost extension through fall 2023 to allow time to present their work to the NYU community.

**Books to Blockchain** (spring 2023 launch): The team will teach its undergraduate course in fall 2023.

**Abolition Humanities** (spring 2023 launch): The team will teach its undergraduate course in fall 2023.

#### Meetings and Research

The **Abolition Humanities** Lab convened in spring 2023, initially functioning like a reading group. The team went on to workshop ideas about offshoot projects for fall 2023. Meeting bi-weekly, they explored ways to think comparatively about how civic institutions, such as universities, relate to both liberation and dispossession. They focused on case studies in the USA (NYU), South Africa and Palestine, and several students researched related topics, such as artist collectives as networks of



care and healing. The team brain-stormed a geography and mapping project and began developing a website, which is expected to launch fall 2023. The team also hosted several visitors, including Candice Strongwater and Gauri Bahuguna from SITU, who shared their expertise regarding how SITU deploys digital and visual media to effect social justice. With Strongwater and Bahuguna the lab team workshopped ideas about how they might map surveillance and activism in and around NYU. Abolition Humanities also hosted Mpho Matsipa, who presented on her research and activism in South Africa and also her recent transcontinental project, African Mobilities (<https://africanmobilities.org/>).

**Books to Blockchain** was the second lab to launch in spring 2023. The lab team is examining digital assets as new forms of societal architecture, with a focus on questions of inequality and community memory. The team is asking how communities decide what to count and what to keep through the lens of data narratives that shape urban communities like NYC. During the spring semester, the lab studied the following topics: Blockchain Technology, Community Archive, Memory, Transactions, and The Arts. The lab team met weekly and hosted a number of guests, including: Amihai Ulman (Director at MediaOcean), John Kosner (president of Kosner Media, former ESPN), Eugene Li (blockchain entrepreneur), Vera Khovanskaya (UCLA graduate student), and Ingrid LaFluer (Afro Futurist and former Mayoral Candidate of Detroit).

Since 2022, **Asylum** has broadened the scope of its project from asylum to immigration history more generally; accordingly, they renamed the group “The **Migrant Records Lab**.” Spring 2023 activities were made possible by reallocated Humanities Lab funding; the team also secured a Seed Grant from the NYU Provost’s office. The original faculty participants continue to be affiliated (with the exception of Ben Schmidt, who has left NYU), with graduate students cycling in and out as time allows. Most of the original undergraduate Lab participants will have graduated in spring 2023, but there is now, due to our outreach efforts, a new generation of students interested in the project. In January 2023 the lab team submitted an application for an NEH Digital Advancement Grant (level 2). The decision will be announced in June 2023 and, if awarded, the grant period would start in September 2023.

During spring 2023 the **Migrant Records** team compiled a complete list of historical A-files to request from NARA. They refined their regional and historical focus for choosing A-files for the digital prototype they hope to build with NEH funding (Haiti, Vietnam, Central America, Mexico). They have developed a good working relationship with the archivist in the immigration section at NARA, Kansas City. Because NARA must screen all requested A-files for third party-privacy issues before releasing them, they first requested A-files that had already been screened, thus speeding up the process. They now have a significant number of “virgin file” requests pending and expect to have about 650 digitized files on hand by the start of the NEH granting period. This will allow the team to immediately begin work on the data processing and machine learning aspects of the projects should they receive NEH funding. They are also exploring other funding sources. Upon receiving A-files in the spring, an undergraduate researcher processed them by identifying and compiling document types (name of government forms, type of non-governmental document, foreign documents, etc.) and domains (health, finance, identity, etc.).

The **Digital Theory** Lab continues to study neural nets, shifting attention to large language models (LLM) and beginning work with members of the Center for Data Science at NYU to apply for larger grants in this area. The team obtained an NYU mega-seed grant to apply for NSF and NEH funding around GPT/LLM systems. In addition, they have applied for an NEH editions grant to create



a "digital foundations reader," which would reproduce early foundational digital documents with intensive annotations for use in the humanities.

### Teaching

In spring 2023, 12 undergraduate students from the departments of Music and English (both CAS); the Interactive Telecommunications Program (ITP) and Drama (both Tisch); and Gallatin participated in the 4-credit course *Consent Lab*. The course also welcomed 3 GSAS PhD students and 1 ITP master's student, who joined the 3-hour long weekly sessions. Prof. Yin of the **Consent** lab team also ran a concurrent research group at the ITP campus in Brooklyn of 6-8 graduate students who helped test and tweak exercises for the course. Over 14 weeks of practice-based exploration, guided scholarly inquiry, and rigorously supervised assignments, the group engaged in a one-of-a-kind—indeed, once-in-a-lifetime—deep dive into the lab's vexed and vexing topic. The results were transformative. "This is why I chose NYU," said one CAS member; "I came here hoping to do something like this." A graduate student reported, "Consent Lab made me a better person. I wish everyone could be in it." The course attracted multiple visitors, including University president designate, Linda Mills; CAS Dean Wendy Suzuki (who brought in her first-year class for a special session); NYU General Counsel Aisha Oliver-Staley; senior presidential fellow and dean emeritus of Wagner, Ellen Schall; associate vice president for global programs, William Pruitt; Core Curriculum director Martin Daughtry; various faculty from the Department of English, and external visitors from the University of Chicago.

**Abolition Humanities** and **Books to Blockchain** will each teach their undergraduate course in fall 2023. The undergraduate seminar *Abolition Lab* is fully enrolled, and two graduate students from the lab team will be teaching assistants for the course. *From Books to Blockchain: Quantification for Pattern Discovery* will be listed for enrollment for students from two schools: Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development, and Tandon School of Engineering.

The **Knowledge Alphabets** undergraduate course, first taught in spring 2021, was recently selected as a curricular elective for the new Translation Studies minor (approved and launched in fall 2022), housed in Comparative Literature and Liberal Studies.

### Events and Other Outcomes

**Abolition Humanities** collaborated with the Urban Democracy Lab on their Fighting for Social Justice Housing two-day event, in particular by co-sponsoring René Moya from the Debt Collective. This event was called "Defending Tenants Amid the US Housing Crisis" and was held on March 30. The event contributed to the lab team's work by developing a broader conversation about debt abolition and housing organizing.

Operating on a no-cost extension through fall 2023, the **Cross/Currents** team is presenting their scholarship and knowledge publicly through both new and existing initiatives. Working with communities of scholars at NYU and engaging students, the lab team contributed to a film series, a publication, and a symposium in the spring semester. The Panawin Film Series launched in the fall semester continued through the spring with three films: *Noli Me Tangere* (1961); *The Dance of the Two Left Feet* (2011); and *Batang West Side* (2001). All screenings were organized in collaboration with Sulo, the Philippine Studies Initiative at NYU, and the King Juan Carlos Center.



Faculty and students involved with the **Cross/Currents** H-Lab contributed to an issue of *Esferas*, the student-edited annual publication of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at NYU. The issue includes a dossier of materials on the idea of Cross/Currents, highlighting the themes of mobility, transmission, and transit. <https://wp.nyu.edu/esferas/2023/04/25/esferas-14-cross-currentscontra-corrientes/>

The **Cross/Currents** team's symposium *Poetic Currents: The Philippines and Beyond* was held April 12 at the King Juan Carlos Center. Readings featured Luis H. Francia, Vina Orden, Patrick Rosal, Renato Rosaldo, and Mary Louise Pratt. These reflected on varying perspectives on both the personal and the political in relation to the Philippines as both a physical entity and a hard-to-define concept. <https://wp.nyu.edu/spsi/events/upcoming-events/poetic-currents-the-philippines-and-beyond/>

The **Migrant Records** (formerly Asylum) lab team conducted a workshop for undergraduate students about how to access and interpret the government's immigration files as part of the Spanish Department's "Fridays on the Patio" series at the King Juan Carlos Center, which also included a presentation on a "mutual aid" initiative by community members. It attracted a considerable number of students from migration backgrounds as well as community members and provided invaluable feedback on the project's potential.

In March, the **Digital Theory** lab hosted an in-person conversation and double-header talk on the topic of artificial intelligence. Speakers were the literary scholar N. Katherine Hayles, and neuroscientist and anthropologist Terrence W. Deacon. These events may be viewed here <https://youtu.be/ynN84pPcqEM> and here <https://youtu.be/JhXALo0Ri7Y>.

### Future Plans

The **Abolition Humanities** team is planning a series of meetings to be held this summer with students who have enrolled in the fall 2023 undergraduate course. 20-25 students will conduct paid research on three different topics. Meeting weekly in groups, they will be mentored as they research surveillance, the relationship between university student populations and policing, and global systems of policing. In the fall, in addition to teaching, the lab team will continue to develop projects arising from the lab projects and on the documentation of their work. They hope to work with SITU on a project about NYU and to do a larger public event with Mpho Matsipa.

**Books to Blockchain** will offer a Summer Artistic Intensive for students in the greater NYC area. Participating students will be chosen via a micro-art competition curated by the H-Lab team, and they will join an ad-hoc reading group on technology and society. Lab team members will create a curatorial document based on the spring readings and the accepted submissions which will serve as field guides. An exhibit of the successful entries will be presented on the NYU campus.

The **Consent** team are actively thinking about how the work of the lab might intervene in the escalating global mental health crisis of young people and the public health epidemic of loneliness and isolation that are affecting all aspects of campus life. This summer they will gather a group of graduate students as well as Consent Lab alumni to plan a fall event for the university community.

The **Cross/Currents** lab team will continue to collaborate with colleagues at NYU to bring their findings to wider notice. Plans include events relating to on-campus exhibitions, student-led research projects, and a symposium, *In the Wake of Empires: Critical Reflections on 1898 and 1899 and Their Afterlives (Puerto Rico, Cuba, Guam and the Philippines)*.



**Knowledge Alphabets** lab will convene their capstone conference, *Scaled (In)Finitude: Problems of the Ecological Turn*, at NYU Paris on June 22-23.

The **Migrant Records** team will review the mass of A-files processed in the spring and consult with data scientists on how to best prepare the data set for machine learning.

With funding from reallocated lab funds and a Global Opportunity Grant, **Digital Theory** will host the lab's second *Digital Theory Summer School* on June 13-16, in Prague. The subject of the school will be GPT/LLM systems.

### Conclusion

With all ten labs now funded, it is possible to see the extraordinary range of interests and methods of investigation undertaken by the lab teams. They have all broken new ground in knowledge production and pedagogy in the humanities, and these innovations are beginning to be felt beyond the NYU community. We are seeing the benefits of the lab model in the classroom, and as several labs continue to deepen their engagement with their chosen topic, we look for ways to ensure this work can continue.



## APPENDIX: THEME, MISSION AND MEMBERSHIP OF ALL LABS

### Fall 2018 Launch

#### 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 disciplinary and engage emergent forms of the digital in real time.

#### Lab Team

David Bering-Porter, Assistant Professor of Culture and Media, The New School

Zach Coble, Head, Digital Scholarship Services, NYU Libraries

Lisa Gitelman, Professor, English, Arts and Science; Media Culture and Communications, Steinhardt

Tyler Harper, Doctoral Student, Comparative Literature, Arts and Science

Ryan Healy, Doctoral Student, English, Arts and Science

Sam Kellogg, Doctoral Student, Media Culture and Communications, Steinhardt

Joseph Lemelin, Research Fellow, NYU Center for Data Science

Benjamin Schluter, Doctoral Student, German, Arts and Science

Cliff Siskin, Professor, English, Arts and Science

Yuanjun Song (Claire), Doctoral Student, Comparative Literature, Arts and Science

Leif Weatherby, Associate Professor, German, Arts and Science

### Fall 2019 Launch

#### 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.

#### 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, Professor, 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, Graduate Student, Experimental Humanities  
Nick Silcox, Doctoral Student, English, Arts and Science  
Robert Slifkin, Professor of Fine Arts, Institute of Fine Arts, Arts and Science  
Marina Zurkow, Artist; Instructor, Interactive Telecommunications Program, Tisch

#### **The War Lab**

The War 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 engages 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.



### Lab Team

Madison Bastress, Doctoral Student, History, Arts and Science  
Stefanos Geroulanos, Professor, History, Arts and Science  
Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, Associate Professor, Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, Arts and Science  
Elizabeth Ellis, Assistant Professor, History, Arts and Science  
Lauren Kirk, Doctoral Student, Institute of French Studies / History, Arts and Science  
Jonas Knatz, Doctoral Student, History, Arts and Science  
Alexander Langstaff, Doctoral Student, History, Arts and Science  
Emily Stewart Long, Adjunct Instructor, History, Arts and Science  
Matyas Mervej, Doctoral Student, History, Arts and Science  
Marcela Prieto Rudolphy, Doctoral Student, NYU School of Law  
Anne Schult, Doctoral Student, History, Arts and Science  
Jennifer Trowbridge, Doctoral Student, Anthropology, Arts and Science

## **Spring 2020 Launch**

### **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 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 explores the following overlapping themes: designing collectivity (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).

### Lab Team

Maria Paz Almanera, Doctoral Student, Media, Culture and Communication, Steinhardt  
Tega Brain, Industry Assistant Professor, Technology, Culture and Society, Tandon  
Elaine Gan, Visiting Assistant Professor, XE: Experimental Humanities and Social Engagement, Graduate School of Arts and Science  
Nabil Haseein, Doctoral Student, Media, Culture and Communication, Steinhardt  
Elizabeth Henaff, Assistant Professor, Technology, Culture and Society, Tandon  
Karen Holmberg, Research Scientist and Co-Director of the WetLab, Gallatin



Meg Weissner, Doctoral Student, Media, Culture and Communication, Steinhardt  
Diana Zhu, Doctoral Student, Media, Culture and Communication, Steinhardt

## Fall 2020 Launch

### The Migrant Records Lab (formerly Asylum)

The Asylum Lab was conceived as 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.

The Asylum team has refashioned itself as The Migrant Records Lab and developed a new project description to reflect its findings of the last two years:

- Over ninety million migrant records are in the hands of the US immigration bureaucracy. Migrants, their families, and their advocates have to file a Freedom of Information Act request in order to retrieve the records. Some records—including those of deportees—are methodically destroyed according to record schedules; others are saved but their content is unclear. The transition to digital records has unsettled norms about what kinds of records are saved, and where.
- Migrant records are, like all government files, highly formulaic. They reproduce government criteria of admission and exclusion as well as questionable categories of (racial, ethnic, sexual, gender) identification. Yet, they are also exceptionally valuable. Immigration records are essential for any claims of relief. They contain—however much abbreviated—life stories, narratives of migration, and other materials that may be invaluable to families trying to piece together their transnational histories. They also open a rare window onto the operations of the administrative state. In fact, migrant records are the most detailed ground-level record of the story of migration in the US. Yet, to this date, immigration history is largely written without them.
- The Migrant Records Lab is an interdisciplinary digital public humanities project at NYU devoted to finding ways to give migrants, their transnational families, immigrants and

their advocates, and scholars across the humanities more power over information exclusively under the control of the state.

- Depending on the age and location of files, restrictions, accessibility, and needs for privacy protection vary. While, in the long term, we envision an integrated digital community archive that comprises recent files as well as historical files (with varying restrictions as to public access), the road map below sketches two related crowd-sourced pilot projects. They would model new methods of access to large, digitized collections including full-text optical character recognition, data visualization, and searching based on document images. This would make the files discoverable by social, political, geographical criteria or other terms that would make it possible for immigrant families, historians (including of countries outside the U.S.), and advocates to tell the full range of migrant stories.
- Community Archive pilot: we'd develop a webpage that would guide im/migrants and their families through the FOIA request process. At the same time, we would be building a community FOIA library (on the model of Muckrock); individuals and families could, if they so desired and on an entirely voluntary basis, safely store the files they receive, and thus preserve them for future generations. A central aspect of this work will involve determining how to create safeguards for the ethical and safe stewardship of these records.
- Historical files pilot: The immigration files of any individual born more than a 100 years ago are deposited at the National Archives; files for deceased persons are available through FOIA or in person at the NARA branch in Kansas City. These files are currently not reliably searchable except by individual names; digitized versions of the files, we have discovered, have not been deposited. Creating a digital repository of these files would make this invaluable historical source accessible, for the first time, to anyone (immigration historians, im/migrant families, and migrant advocates) who seeks to understand the history of im/migration and the often-fraught encounters between individuals and the administrative state.

#### Lab Team

Jason Ahlenius, Doctoral Student, Spanish and Portuguese, Arts and Science

Benjamin Berman-Gladstone, Doctoral Student, Hebrew and Judaic Studies, and History, Arts and Science

Bárbara Pérez Curiel, Doctoral Student, Spanish and Portuguese, Arts and Science

Sibylle Fischer, Associate Professor, Spanish, History, CLACS, Arts and Science

Bitá Mousavi, Doctoral Student, Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, Arts and Science

Ellen Noonan, Clinical Associate Professor, History; Director of the Archives and Public History Program, Arts and Science

Alexia Orengo-Green, History, Arts and Science

Laura Rojas, Doctoral Student, Spanish and Portuguese, Arts and Science

Benjamin Schmidt, Clinical Associate Professor, History, Arts and Science

Sarah Sklaw, Doctoral Student, History, Arts and Science

Bryan Zehngut-Willits, Doctoral Student, History, Arts and Science



### **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.

#### Lab Team

Emily Apter, Professor, French and Comparative Literature, and Chair, Comparative Literature

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

Jeanne Etelain, Doctoral Student, French, Arts and Science

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

Nicole Grimaldi, Doctoral Student, Comparative Literature, Arts and Science

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

Ivan Hofman, Doctoral Student, Comparative Literature, Arts and Science

David Kanbergs, Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, Arts and Science

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

Alexander Miller, Doctoral Student, Comparative Literature, Arts and Science

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

Caleb Salgado, Doctoral Student, French, Arts and Science

Pierre Schwarzer, Doctoral Student, French, Arts and Science

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

Yuanjun Song, Doctoral Student, Comparative Literature, Arts and Science

### **Fall 2021 Launch**

#### **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 movements, but also its broader reverberations. By connecting the words cross and currents, our main goal is to bring into dialogue environmental humanities and migration studies (with an emphasis on race, diaspora, and indigeneity). In our work together we hope to rehearse ways of bringing literary and artistic analyses to bear on issues of the environment and migration, and vice-versa. We 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, we 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. Our ultimate purpose is to decenter an anthropocentric and imperialistic understanding of global interconnection and exchange.

#### Lab Team

Dantaé Elliot, Doctoral Student, Spanish and Portuguese, Arts and Science  
Fan Fan, Doctoral Student, Lab coordinator, Spanish and Portuguese, Arts and Science  
Luis Francia, Adjunct Professor, Social and Cultural Analysis, Arts and Science  
Linda Luu, Doctoral Student, Social and Cultural Analysis, Arts and Science  
Jordana Mendelson, Associate Professor, Spanish and Portuguese; Director, King Juan Carlos I of Spain Center  
Michael Salgarolo, Doctoral Student, History, Arts and Science  
Laura Torres-Rodríguez, Associate Professor, Spanish and Portuguese, Arts and Science  
Emilie Tumale, Doctoral Student, Sociology of Education, Steinhardt  
Mariko Chin Whitenack, Doctoral Student, Social and Cultural Analysis, Arts and Science  
Lee Xie, Doctoral Student, Spanish and Portuguese, Arts and Science

## **Fall 2022 Launch**

### **Consent Lab**

The Consent H-Lab brings together arts practitioners and scholars from across disciplines and media at NYU (musicology, performance, visual arts, choreography, literature) to 1) take stock of the various grammars of consent operating on campus today, and 2) develop, test, and share experiential designs for social interaction within the university community. The work of the lab involves first orientating ourselves within NYU's multiple (cultural, legal, discursive) frameworks of consent and then putting our methodologies together to devise new structures for engagement, integration, and play. Through year-long discussion, workshops, and project-based collaboration among faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates, we assess and reimagine the current state of campus and, especially, of classroom dynamics. In short, the Consent Lab is an interdisciplinary, practice-based collaboration designed to explore the boundaries of yes, no, and everything in-between in order to open the conversation and comfort zone around intimacy, safety, and wellbeing within the campus community.

#### Lab Team

Brigid Cohen, Associate Professor, Department of Music, Arts and Science  
Nina Katchadourian, Clinical Professor, Gallatin  
Wendy Anne Lee, Associate Professor, English, Arts and Science  
Rosemary Quinn, Arts Professor, Drama, Tisch  
Yue Yin, Assistant Arts Professor, Tisch ITP



## **Spring 2023 Launch**

### **Books to Blockchain Lab**

The Books to Blockchain H-Lab investigates connections between early practices of organizing knowledge and newly invented ones, seeking a continuum from archives and catalogs to open data and digital ledgers, like blockchain. Our inquiry centers on enumeration and commensuration: ways of knowing by tabulation and comparison. We build on these connections to reimagine digital knowledge infrastructures centering art and humanities for interdisciplinary problem solving. Our collaboration navigates political and civic inclusion alongside economic property rights, and the resilience of humanistic and artistic value within these systems.

### Lab Team

Alicia Boyd, Postdoctoral Fellow, PRIISM, Steinhardt

Nicole Contaxis, Assistant Curator, Medical Library, School of Medicine

R. Luke DuBois, Associate Professor and Director, Integrated Design and Media, Tandon

Jennifer Hui, Graduate Student, IDM, Tandon

Davi Liang, Postdoctoral Fellow, PRIISM, Steinhardt

Angel Mai, Graduate Student, IDM, Tandon

Peri Shamsai, Adjunct Associate Professor, Entertainment, Media and Technology, Stern School of Business

Faisal Nazer, Undergraduate Student, Gallatin

Anne L. Washington, Assistant Professor, Applied Statistics, Social Science and Humanities, Steinhardt

### **Abolition Humanities Lab**

The main goal of the Abolition Humanities Lab is to explore how the humanities can advance liberation and emancipation. Our H-Lab seeks to create alternative ways for academic and non-academic communities to co-produce research questions and collective forms of transformational change. One of the more challenging and exciting aspects of this H-Lab involves the development of a Humanities-based pedagogy centered on struggles against state violence. Our focus is not on stable textual production, but on lived experience and its accumulation in spaces, objects, images, and architectures that enmesh New York University with histories of legal and state violence. This material-orientation means centering questions of the observational and experiential in both the past and the present, the human and the nonhuman.

### Lab Team

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