



Bennett-Polonsky Humanities Labs

Fall 2022 Program Summary

Update and Impact: Summer and Fall 2022

Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee for the Bennett-Polonsky Humanities Labs oversees the program, monitors progress and selects new labs to receive funding. Committee members are Gigi Dopico, Interim Provost; Uni Chaudhuri, FAS Dean for the Humanities and Multi-Species H-Lab member; Lynne Kiorpes, Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Science; Stefanos Geroulanos, Professor of History and War H-Lab member; and Ulrich Baer, Director of the Center for the Humanities. Molly Rogers, Associate Director of the Center for the Humanities, supports the Advisory Committee and provides administrative support to the lab teams.

The Advisory Committee did not meet in the current reporting period, as all ten labs to be funded under the program have been selected and no further matters required discussion.

Looking Ahead

With the last of the ten labs planned for the program due to launch in January 2023, we are now gathering information on lab findings and outcomes. We are interested not only in recording tangible products, such as publications, but also in capturing the ways that lab activity has influenced faculty teaching and research. We are presently constructing a website to showcase the work of all ten labs for the NYU community and beyond. The website is expected to be launched by September 2023.

Reallocation of Funds

We are grateful for permission to reallocate unspent funds from the **Multi-Species** Lab to cover the cost of a website showcasing the work of all ten labs.

In the wake of Prof. Elizabeth Ellis' recent departure for Princeton, the **War** Lab has concluded its formal activities. **We now seek permission to evenly distribute the War Lab's remaining funds (\$9,921.85) to two labs that are no longer funded under the program, but which continue to be active: Digital Theory and Migrant Records (formerly Asylum).**

Please see Appendix 3 for details on reallocated funds.

Lab Activity

Overview

The Bennett-Polonsky Humanities Lab program is entering its fifth and final year. The 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 a more fulsome report provided subsequently. The theme/mission and membership of each lab is provided as Appendix 1, with financial reporting given as Appendices 2 and 3, and a graphic timeline provided as Appendix 4.

Brief Status Report

Digital Theory (fall 2018 launch): Although no longer funded by the program, the team continues to be active, meeting bi-weekly as well as holding monthly international meetings.

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

War (fall 2019 launch): Active this past semester on a no-cost extension, the team has decided to conclude activity and make any remaining funds available for reallocation.

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

Migrant Records (formerly Asylum) (fall 2020 launch): The lab is no longer funded under the program but meets regularly and is reflecting on and synthesizing work undertaken to-date in order to prepare for a number of public presentations.

Knowledge Alphabets (fall 2020 launch): The team hosted a small conference in fall 2022 and is developing a major international meeting to be held in Paris this spring.

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

Consent (fall 2022 launch): The Consent Lab had a successful semester conducting experimental research and looks forward to offering its course in spring 2023.

Books to Blockchain (spring 2023 launch)

Abolition Humanities (spring 2023 launch)

Meetings and Research

The newest H-Lab, **Consent**, began meeting in-person and virtually in summer 2022. Because of its singular purpose to investigate social dynamics, each session—while devoted to particular content (works of scholarship, art, journalism as well as improvisatory exercises)—is intended to draw out and deliberates on what occurs during the session: who is speaking, who is silent, who is interrupting or interrupted, who expresses a boundary and who wants to cross it. In this way, Consent Lab is a meta lab. Community agreements, trigger warnings, DEI rubrics, and what makes these necessary in the first place—these are the primary objects of inquiry and bases for experimentation. The fall semester was devoted to weekly, very much in-person meetings where a core group from Music, English, Tisch Drama, Gallatin, Performance Studies, and ITP conducted research in a variety of modes. The team reviewed and debated challenging material: texts, plays, and performances that feature consent across zones of social and institutional power relations. The team confronted a range of cultural production, from Yoko Ono's enigmatic, participatory opera AOS to Natalie Palamides's Netflix comedy special pushing boundaries of sexual consent in the audience, to Molière's iconic *Dom Juan*, to the controversial piece "You Had to Be There" by conceptual artist Vanessa Place, who directly tackles the still-happening circulation of rape jokes. These pieces were selected precisely because they could not be taken lightly. Vanessa Place herself was brought in as a guest to discuss her artistic process and reflections.



From their first gathering in May 2022, **Consent** Lab has principally been engaged with pedagogical concerns: not only whether they could teach this material in the current climate, but what that climate feels like, where its pressure points are, and how they sometimes shift. To this end, around 30 graduate students from FAS Music, ITP, and Public Humanities participated in different sessions of the lab throughout the fall, testing iterative exercises in movement and interaction and engaging in frank discussion about their experiences. The lab team has also benefitted from special guests who have provided feedback from their areas of expertise, especially in the areas of mediation, restorative justice, and wellness. These included NYU colleagues Monroe France (senior associate vice president for global engagement and inclusive leadership at the Office of Global Inclusion), Richeleen Dashield (DEI director of the Silver School of Social Work), and Zoe Ragouzeos (senior associate vice president of Mental Health and Sexual Misconduct Support and executive director of Counseling and Wellness Services). All guests' participation were crucial to the lab's preparation for its spring curriculum (see Teaching, below).

During the fall 2022 semester, the **Cross/Currents** Lab focused on finding ways to push their scholarship and knowledge out through existing initiatives and also new ones instigated by last year's collaborative work. The core members of the H-Lab have each brought their lab-based work into dialogue with communities of scholars at NYU; they have also sought to continue to engage students in the process of building out the ways they share this knowledge publicly. Their energies have focused on four main collaborations: a film series, a publication, a symposium, and two exhibition projects. Each of the projects (described below under Future Plans) involves one or more members of the Cross/Currents H-Lab and seeks to bring new faculty, students, and community members in dialogue with the research and pedagogies the team explored last year.

The **War** Lab has continued in a more fragmented fashion this year, collaborative work furrowing into individual projects. All three of the main graduate students involved in the lab carried out war-and-knowledge-related research this semester and received funds from the H-Lab to pursue this research. Alexander Langstaff is writing the first chapter of his dissertation on the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, studying opinion polls that the Nazis used in their attempt to understand the population and its political intentions. Anne Schult is working on the later chapters of her dissertation studying the social sciences that contributed to the making of the modern refugee: demography, social hygiene, and statistics. Her recent chapters concerned refugee movements forced by World War I and the Russian Revolution, especially in Germany and the new post-Habsburg states of Eastern Europe (including Czechoslovakia). She is now working on the Greek-Turkish population exchange of 1923 (caused by the end of Greek territorial ambitions in Asia Minor and the subsequent Treaty of Lausanne). Schult and Langstaff have continued their 30-years-wars project. Jonas Knatz (who is working on automation in post-war Germany and intellectual debates related to it) has completed his first chapter, on the reconstruction of the German economy as destroyed in World War Two. New member Emily Stewart Long has been researching and writing on soldiers' intertwined attitudes to war and poetry in the early stages of World War I, particularly through the concept of Gestalt, which she argues is not a scientific concept, as is it usually understood, but instead was largely established in the place war held for postwar aesthetics *and against* the sciences.



War Lab faculty member Liz Ellis pursued primary research in New Orleans, studying war, conflict, and Indigenous slavery in Louisiana. While many of the first enslaved Native people in colonial Louisiana were prisoners of war who had been trafficked by enemy Native nations, increasingly the colonial government used conflicts between the French settlers and local Native nations as a means to obtain Native captives for sale. Ellis's research traces the histories of these trafficked Native people and their descendants within systems of French and Spanish colonial bondage. Ellis has discussed (and indeed been instrumental in helping with) a different angle of Geroulanos' work, namely on Western ideologies of indigenous warfare in the 19th and later 20th centuries. In July, Ellis traveled to Sevilla, Spain, to present part of the research she conducted in the War Lab, on conflict and refugees in the early Native American Southeast, at the international Warfare, Environment, Social Inequality, and Pro-Sociability conference. Linked to Ellis's work is that of a new member, Madison Bastress, who works on Miami food sovereignty and Ohio River Valley history, which involved a long series of conflicts and wars with the United States. The work Bastress carried out helped her complete the research she needed for her prospectus and has helped her understand the assault on Miami fields and forests as part of a tactic of total war. Faculty member Geroulanos also spent late June and July in Paris to carry out research in the Military archives in Vincennes on the relationship between the Napoleonic code and the French army's occupation of German lands from 1805 to 1812. This was not originally part of the lab, but it has become a key point of relevance in Geroulanos' work to the War and Knowledge theme, as it concerns the place of law and occupation. In sum, the **War** Lab established a framework for valuable intellectual collaboration, which is ongoing.

Although no longer funded under the Bennett-Polonsky H-Lab program, The **Migrant Records** (formerly Asylum) Lab continued to meet through the summer and fall of 2022. One of the important findings of their investigation is that US immigration history has largely been written without considering the 90 million immigration files in the hands of the US government. The lab's project, now renamed "Migrants and the State: Unlocking the Potential of A-Files for the Histories of U.S. Immigration," has started to work directly with an archivist at the National Archives (NARA). They have requested a limited sample of A-files, which has given them further insight into what these A-files actually contain and how they might be able to make them searchable. With support from the NYU Humanities Center and the NYU Provost's Office, the lab team is continuing to request files to make their samples more representative. The team hired a graduate student assistant to help with outreach, and they also hired a student (who attended the lab's 2021 undergraduate course) to help with processing A-files as they receive them from NARA.

Also no longer funded under the program, the **Digital Theory** Lab continues work in both of its forms: local, bi-weekly in-person meetings, and the international group, which meets on Zoom roughly every 3 weeks to host talks and discuss work-in-progress. In the fall, the local meetings explored *connectionism*, the philosophy, neuroscience, and AI that led to neural networks; the team is also beginning to explore Large Language Models (LLMs), which have recently revolutionized Natural Language Processing. Additionally, **Digital Theory** has submitted a mega-grant to the NEH to support publishing an edition of founding documents of



the digital revolution. Called the "Digital Foundations Reader," this volume will be annotated for widespread use in research and teaching in the Humanities. They have also applied for mega-grant seed funding internal to NYU to study LLMs more intensively in the coming academic year, with the intent of obtaining funding to produce a first-in-class explainer/demo website that both provides access to and serves as an experimental research platform for and on LLMs.

Teaching

No labs offered courses during the fall 2022 semester.

The Consent Lab will open to undergraduate students in spring 2023, offering an experiential course of four faculty, 14 undergraduates and 5 new graduate students from CAS Music, Tisch Drama, ITP, and English.

Events

Cross/Currents collaborated with Sulo, the Philippine Studies Initiative at NYU, and the King Juan Carlos I of Spain Center on the Panawin film series. Two films were screened at public events in fall 2022: *In the Naval of the Sea* (1998), and *The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros* (2005). The series is intended to showcase new Philippine cinema that connects with curricular activities and programs on campus. The series has been a way to connect the Cross/Currents H-Lab's research and pedagogy to the broader NYC community. Two more films will be screened in spring 2023.

Knowledge Alphabets organized a colloquium held at NYU September 19th and 20th devoted to the work of French philosopher of science Gaston Bachelard. This included a public lecture at NYU's Maison Française titled "Anti-Bergson: Bachelard's "Surrationalist" Moment and The Poetics of Time," given by professor Élie During, an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Paris-West (Nanterre). The following day the lab hosted an open workshop with both Élie During and Eileen Rizo-Patron, which was an opportunity for a more open-ended discussion on the possibility of "a post-scientific mind," through an oblique re-appraisal of Bachelard's classic text, *The Formation of the Scientific Mind*. These events were well attended, both in-person and via webcast.

Future Plans

Concurrent with the **Consent** Lab's undergraduate course, offered spring 2023, the lab team will continue to undertake multi-modal investigations of different grammars of consent. Delving into curricula ranging from Hobbes's *Leviathan* to Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* to Pauline Oliveros's *Tuning Meditation*, Consent Lab will work towards a final summer 2023 performance that invites participation from the larger NYU community. They are currently seeking grants to further develop and scale the work of the Lab.

Lee Xie and Dantaé Elliot, graduate student members of the **Cross/Currents** team, are curating an exhibit on the work of Caribbean artist Nadia Huggins to be held at the King Juan Carlos I Center at NYU this spring. In conjunction with the exhibit, they are organizing a roundtable discussion on artistic currents in contemporary Caribbean art. The panel discussion



will give the lab team an opportunity to share knowledge from the Literary/Artistic Currents cluster of the lab's undergraduate course with the broader NYU community and public.

The **Cross/Currents** team is also involved with the organization of a year-long program of public events (virtual, in situ, and/or hybrid) around the 125th Anniversary of the Wars of 1898. These events, collectively organized with a cohort of NYU and international partner institutions, will take place in the spring and fall semesters of 2023. Details will be included in subsequent bi-annual reports. Additionally, **Cross/Currents** team member Laura Torres-Rodríguez is working closely with Professor Lourdes Dávila, editor of *Esferas*, a student-edited annual publication of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at NYU, to produce an issue focusing on the lab's work. This will be published in May 2023.

The **Migrant Records** Lab is currently finalizing an application for a \$150,000 NEH Digital Humanities Advancement Grant (level 2). In the wake of Ben Schmidt's departure from NYU last summer, the lab team has forged connections with library staff having data science expertise. This will strengthen the grant application considerably. The team is also in the process of hiring a data science graduate student. In November the team submitted a draft application to an NEH program officer for comment. Those comments proved to be invaluable. The lab team is now in an excellent position to present a strong application for an NEH DHAG grant in January.

Digital Theory will continue to explore *connectionism* through the spring, culminating in a debate between two of the major figures associated with the interpretation of connectionism (anthropologist Terrence Deacon and literary theorist N. Katherine Hayles) in late March. The lab team has obtained a Global Opportunity Grant to send the local Lab members to Prague for the second Digital Theory Summer School (following the pattern of the event held in London in 2019). This will be held in summer 2023.

Knowledge Alphabets is now organizing an event to be held in France in mid-June at the NYU-Paris site. Titled "Scaled (In)finity: The Ecological Turn after Latour," this event grows out of the lab's research in the areas of media technics and translation (the translation of scale most particularly). The topic also serves as an occasion to extend H-Lab concerns in a focused way, by looking at the impact of the late Bruno Latour on models of planetarity and the vocabulary of ecological scale.

Conclusion

The eight H-Labs active to-date have addressed an extraordinary range of interests and methods of investigation, and all—even in the face of novel challenges posed by the global pandemic—have broken new ground in knowledge production and pedagogy in the humanities. The impact of the labs' teaching, research and public engagement is beginning to be felt beyond the NYU community, and this is something we are actively documenting and will be promoting in the coming years.



APPENDIX 1

THEME / MISSION AND MEMBERSHIP OF ALL H-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 disciplinarity 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 Mervey, 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 Hassein, 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.
- 1. 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.
- 2. 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
Bita 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; Director of Digital Humanities
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

FORTHCOMING

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 larger systems.

Lab Team

R. Luke DuBois, Associate Professor and Director, Integrated Design and Media, Tandon
Peri Shamsai, Adjunct Associate Professor, Entertainment, Media and Technology, Stern
School of Business

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

Amy Whitaker, Assistant Professor, Visual Arts Administration, 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

Michelle Castañeda, Assistant Professor, Performance Studies, Tisch

Lenora Hanson, Assistant Professor, English, Faculty of Arts and Science

Prita Meier, Associate Professor, Art History and The Institute of Fine Arts, Faculty of Arts and Science