THE INSTITUTE FOR COMPARATIVE MODERNITIES

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EVENTS SCHEDULE

All events are free and open to the public. If you need accommodations to participate in any of these events, please contact ab449@cornell.edu as soon as possible.

ICM Fall 2016

Lecture Series

SOULEYMANE BACHIR DIAGNE
Professor, French; Philosophy, Columbia University

On African Philosophy
Monday, August 29, 4:45 p.m., Lewis Auditorium, Goldwin Smith Hall

SEMINAR
The Ink of the Scholars: Reflections on Philosophy in Africa
Tuesday, August 30, 10:00 a.m., Toboggan Lodge, 38 Forest Home Drive

Co-sponsored by the Department of Romance Studies and Sage School of Philosophy

MICHAEL DENNING
William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of American Studies, Yale University

‘A Noisy Heaven and a Syncopated Earth’: The Transcolonial Reverberations of Vernacular Phonograph Music
Wednesday, November 9, 4:45 p.m., Kaufmann Auditorium, Goldwin Smith Hall

SEMINAR
The Accumulation of Labor: Rethinking Work and its Representations
Thursday, November 10, 10:00 a.m., Toboggan Lodge, 38 Forest Home Drive

Co-sponsored by the Africana Studies & Research Center, Comparative Muslim Societies Program, Department of English, Department of Government, Department of Near Eastern Studies, and Department of Performing and Media Arts

NEW CONVERSATIONS

STACEY LANGWICK
Associate Professor, Anthropology, Cornell University

A Politics of Habitability: Plants, Healing, and Sovereignty in a Toxic World
Tuesday, April 11, 4:45 p.m., Toboggan Lodge, 38 Forest Home Drive

Film Series

Film Screenings and Q&A with JIHAN EL-TAHRI
Filmmaker and Author

Nasser (97 min.)
Tuesday, October 18, 4:30 p.m., Africana Studies and Research Center, Multipurpose Room, 310 Triphammer Road

Sadat (57 min.)
Wednesday, October 19, 4:30 p.m., Africana Studies and Research Center, Multipurpose Room, 310 Triphammer Road

Co-sponsored by the Comparative Muslim Societies Program and the Department of Performing and Media Arts

ICM Spring 2017

Lecture Series

AZIZ RANA
Professor, Cornell Law School

The Rise of the Constitution
Thursday, February 2, 4:45 p.m., Kaufmann Auditorium, Goldwin Smith Hall

Co-sponsored by the Clarke Center for International & Comparative Legal Studies, the Department of Government, and the Department of History

Film Series

Film Screenings and Discussion with WARUNI ANURUDDHIKA
Director

Children of Cemetery Dwellers (28 min.)
Monday, May 8, 5:00 p.m., Toboggan Lodge, 38 Forest Home Drive
In recent years, concerns about forms of human trafficking in the neoliberal global economy have led to the emergence of a movement that defines itself as "anti-slavery." While consciously identifying itself with historic abolitionist movements against the Nineteenth Century enslavement of Africans in the Atlantic world, Baptist’s lecture argued that modern ‘anti-slavery’ movements have not drawn the lessons of abolitionists’ failure to reconstruct the racial economy of the Western world.

**Speaker Biography**

Professor Edward E. Baptist’s research focuses on the history of the Nineteenth Century United States, and in particular on the history of the enslavement of African Americans in the South. The expansion of slavery in the United States between the writing of the Constitution in 1787 and the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 had enormous consequences for all Americans. Indeed, the expansion shaped many elements of the modern world that we now live in, both inside and outside the borders of the United States. His most recent book, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (Basic Books, 2014) chronicles the experience of the slave trades and forced migrations that drove expansion, the systems of labor that emerged, and the economic and political and cultural consequences for women and men and children. Professor Baptist earned his B.S.F.S. from Georgetown University and his Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania.
ERIC TAGLIACOZZO
How the Spice Trade Made the World Modern
Monday, February 29, 2016

The quest for spices brought the world together in ways that we only recognize now. Though spices have been in circulation since Antiquity, it really was from the “Contact Age” (circa 1500 CE) forward that they began to play an absolutely vital role in connecting the world’s scattered societies. Prior to that, the Mediterranean Basin and India were thinly connected by spices; further to the east, India and Southeast Asia were too, as were Southeast Asia and China further east from that. Han Dynasty princes were found buried with cloves in their mouths two thousand years ago, despite the fact that cloves solely grew in Indonesia then, over five thousand kilometers away. Venice built an empire on the control of spices from Asia, and Istanbul did the same once the age of the Venetians ended. Dr. Tagliacozzo’s lecture looked at these histories as an engine for global connection. It was, after all, spices that Columbus was looking for when he “found” the New World instead, so we are, in some sense, the result of his quest for the former, as we sit here in the latter. The barks and seeds of Asia ended up launching the beginnings of the imperial age, when European state-making projects under the guise of “East India Companies” eventually carved up much of the known world. Tagliacozzo traced this process and taught lecture attendees a little bit about the spices themselves along the way. Although we take the pepper, seasonings, and salt on our dinner tables for granted, Tagliacozzo reminded viewers that we shouldn’t. What could be more prosaic? Those and other spices are one reason we all gathered together, talking in the New World about voyages in the Old World long ago.

Speaker Biography
Eric Tagliacozzo is Professor of History at Cornell University. He is the author of Secret Trades, Porous Borders: Smuggling and States along a Southeast Asian Frontier (Yale, 2005) which won the Harry Benda Prize from the Association of Asian Studies, and more recently of The Longest Journey: Southeast Asians and the Pilgrimage to Mecca (Oxford, 2013). He is also the editor or co-editor of a number of other books, on the global Hajj; on trans-nationalism in Asia as seen through time-periods and place; on Burmese lives under a coercive regime; on the state of the field of Indonesian Studies and Indonesian sources more generally; on Chinese trade down to Southeast Asia, and Southeast Asian contacts west to the Middle East; and finally on the relationship between history and anthropology as disciplines. He is the Director of the Comparative Muslim Societies Program (CMS), as well as Cornell’s Modern Indonesia Project (CMIP), and serves as editor of the journal INDONESIA.

HALA HALIM
Internationalist and Surrealist Inflections in Edwar al-Kharrat’s Resistant Literary Modernity
Tuesday, March 8, 2016, 4:45 p.m.

Although criticism of Arabic literature has increasingly interrogated the Nahda (Al-Nahda) thesis, whereby the Arab world awoke into modernity at the hands of the West and undertook a literary revival by dint of translation and borrowing genres from Europe, much work remains to foreground challenges to that narrative. Halim’s presentation addressed the Egyptian novelist, poet, and critic Edwar al-Kharrat (1926–2015) as an Arab literary modernist resistant to Eurocentrism. Taking
stock of both al-Kharrat’s literary and critical texts, Halim treated the critically overlooked importance of the internationalist and Surrealist aspects of al-Kharrat’s oeuvre.

**Seminar**

**On Translations of Edwar al-Kharrat’s Fiction into English**

**Wednesday, March 9, 2016**

The fiction of Edwar al-Kharrat (1926–2015) poses a set of challenges to any translator, not least because it draws on several genres and deploys an array of linguistic registers. Drawing on Translation Studies, this seminar considered various aspects of published English translations of Edwar al-Kharrat’s fiction, with attention to translators’ prefatory notes and translational strategies. Knowledge of Arabic not necessary for participating in the seminar.

**Speaker Biography**

Hala Halim is an associate professor of comparative literature and Middle Eastern studies at New York University. Her book *Alexandrian Cosmopolitanism: An Archive* (Fordham University Press, 2013) received an Honorable Mention for the Harry Levin Prize for First Book from the American Comparative Literature Association. She has translated two novels from Arabic: Mohamed El-Bisatie’s *Clamor of the Lake* (2009)—which received an Egyptian State Incentive Award in literature for translation and was selected as runner up for the first London-based Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation—and Mahmoud Al-Wardani’s *Heads Ripe for Plucking* (2008). Her current projects include editing Bernard de Zogheb’s unpublished libretti and a study that develops her previous work on the Egyptian novelist and critic Edwar al-Kharrat.
to its status as a global phenomenon and influence not only on European perspectives on race relations, but also on African art and architecture, and the pernicious effects of neocolonialism. While the fashioning of négritude and controversies surrounding the term were prominent issues in the Twentieth Century, Diawara emphasizes its continuing relevance in the Twenty-First century.

One point that sparked a lively discussion during the panel afterwards concerned the cultural/ideological divide between the Francophone and Anglophone colonial projects. More precisely, Diawara’s film highlighted how British colonialists were unconcerned with creating Black Englishmen, primarily because they thought it to be an impossible task. The French, on the other hand, wanted to create an extension of France overseas using a politics of “la mission civilatrice” as well as mimicry. In many ways, as explored in the film’s first section, the French colonizing strategy acted as an “appel,” or call to action, to reclaim the values of experiences and acts, not rhetoric, leading the way for the emergence of négritude. The film replayed Soyinka’s famous postulation in regard to négritude: “A tiger does not proclaim his ‘tigritude,’ he pounces.” Though Soyinka was a staunch critic of négritude at the outset, he later revised his position in *The Burden of Memory, The Muse of Forgiveness* (1999), all the while noting how necessary it was to separate Senghor’s biography from négritude’s ideas in order to properly understand them. For Senghor, and eventually Soyinka, the lived experience of being black leads to creation of an ideology based on a shared experience of alienation experienced by people of African descent on the continent, in the French Caribbean, as well as the United States.

Despite Soyinka’s call to dismiss or underplay négritude’s biographical origins, one segment of the film, entitled “Kingdom of Childhood,” explored Senghor’s biography in great detail, retracing the origins of négritude from the initial meeting of Senghor, Martinican poet Aimé Césaire, and French Guianan politician Léon Damas in 1930s Paris, to their introduction to Harlem Renaissance writers such as Langston Hughes and Claude McKay through the Nardal sisters (Paulrette, Jane and Andrée), to the patronage of Senegalese intellectual Alioune Diop, founder of *Présence Africaine*. The list of influential literary figures affiliated with the latter, a pan-African literary quarterly (which now includes a publishing house and bookstore), includes Jean-Paul Sartre, André Gide, Richard Wright, Michel Leiris, and of course the founding trio (Senghor, Césaire, Damas) of négritude. An important theme established in this segment was négritude’s universal humanism vis-a-vis the realm of artistic expression. Senghor positions négritude as a Twentieth Century humanism that contributes to European culture and “universal civilization” primarily through the aesthetic realm of “l’art Nègre.” By universal, he means that each civilization contributes to global civilization by making their specific contributions. African art, for instance, is said to have broken the wall of realism for many European modernists including Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, and Paul Gauguin—so much so that Picasso is sometimes considered as a négritude painter gesturing toward the universal quality of African humanism.

Surrealism in African art, however, differs from its manifestation in European art in that Africans, according to Soyinka, prefer to live art and do not treat it as a detached or static aesthetic form. In other words, African art is characterized by both integration and wholeness.

After the screening of the film, Diawara prompted discussion by posing a few pertinent questions, including the relevance of négritude today and the usefulness of recuperating the concept. Natalie Melas, member of the ICM Executive Board and Comparative Literature faculty at Cornell, inquired why Diawara had chosen to pair Senghor with Soyinka. The director’s response was that Soyinka, as an Anglophone, furthered the négritude question in ways that the Francophone context did not initially allow for. Melas responded by highlighting the French revolutionary tradition of universal emancipation and France’s commitment to the universal project. Melas stated, “French colonialists took universalism very seriously. The Anglophone lens misses this crucial point.”
She also cited Gary Wilder’s work on négritude (see: Wilder, The French Imperial Nation-State: Négritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars [2005]) as being especially useful, particularly his assertion that “Nègre est français.”

On another note, Olúfémi Táíwò, professor of Africana Studies at Cornell, critiqued the concept of humanism as “bourgeois,” noting Aimé Césaire’s devout Marxism as counterbalance to Senghor’s universalisme. Táíwò posed the question “Does humanism require us to ignore history?” while clearly gesturing toward the history of colonialism. Additionally, the role of religious intolerance in Africa reverberated throughout the discussion on négritude’s current relevance. Within the film, Soyinka repeatedly asserted that African religions are non-aggressive, as opposed to Islam, and used examples of honor killings and the hijab to support this position. Salah Hassan, ICM Director and the moderator of the panel discussion, expressed concern over the representation of Islam put forth by Soyinka in the Diawara’s documentary and pointed out that extremity of his examples. Táíwò posited that Soyinka was likely drawing a distinction between “L’Islam Noir,” viewed as more tolerant, and fundamentalist Islamist groups like Boko Haram. In conclusion, Diawara’s visual/textual intervention raised a number of questions that we should keep in mind regarding négritude: Is human nature static or atavistic at its core? Is multiculturalism reversible? Perhaps Diawara’s project can help cast aside some common misconceptions of négritude (e.g. négritude as form of self-enclosure) and reposition négritude as being open to the contributions of all civilizations.

—Marshall Smith
Africana Studies and Research Center, Graduate Student

Speaker Biography

2015/2016 WORKSHOP IN REVIEW

Jacques Derrida: A Figure of African Thought
Organized by Professor Grant Farred, Africana Studies & Research Center
Saturday, April 23, 2016
Hoyt Fuller Room, Africana Studies & Research Center
310 Triphammer Road

READINGS


2015/2016
NEW CONVERSATIONS IN REVIEW

SAIDA HODŽIĆ
Against Sovereign Violence: Feminist Activism and Law in Ghana
Thursday, December 3, 2015

This talk drew from Saida Hodžić’s forthcoming book, The Twilight of Cutting: African Activism and Life after NGOS (2016). Hodžić’s ethnographic research analyzes the shifting place of African activists and NGOs in international campaigns against cutting, the practices of making and using medical and cultural knowledge as techniques of intervention, NGO’s involvement in law-making and enforcement, and rural women’s reconfigurations of affect and meaning of cutting. Contrary to modernist assumptions about knowledge and social engineering, NGO interventions were successful because of their contingent and performative character as well as the NGOs’ misreadings of cultural forms and practices. Hodžić’s talk demonstrated that the larger effects of NGO governmentality included the reconfigurations of meaning, sovereignty, and global governance, and the emergence of popular critiques of precarity and legal violence.

Speaker Biography
Saida Hodžić is an Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Cornell University. Her research examines the productive tension between feminist activism and governmentality, focusing on mutual entanglements between Ghana and the global North. Her recent publications include “Feminist Bastards: Toward a Post-Humanist Critique of NGOization,” in Theorizing NGOs: States, Feminisms, and Neoliberalism (2014) and “Ascertaining Deadly Harms: Aesthetics and Politics of Global Evidence” in Cultural Anthropology (2013).
In collaboration with the Institute for Comparative Modernities (ICM) at Cornell University and the Visual Cultures Program at the American University in Cairo (AUC), Sharjah Art Foundation organized an international conference entitled “The Egyptian Surrealists in Global Perspective” from November 26–28, 2015.

Focusing on the history and the evolution of the Egyptian Surrealist group and their relationship with their Western and international counterparts, this project documented one of the most interesting chapters of modernism in the late 1930s up to the early 1960s, highlighting the multifaceted aspects of modernity and its global interconnectedness in the 20th century.

The conference was followed by a travelling exhibition entitled *When Arts Become Liberty: The Egyptian Surrealists* (1938–1965), inaugurated at the Palace of Arts in Cairo, Egypt in September 2016, and followed by an exhibition at the National Museum of Modern Art in Seoul, South Korea in July 2017. A two-volume publication will follow the conference with the first serving as companion and documentation of the exhibition and the second as a record of the proceedings of the conference in addition to documents and other archival material.

The Conference and Curatorial Team include:

Hoor Al Qasimi (Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE)
Salah M. Hassan (Cornell University, USA)
Bahia Shehab (American University in Cairo, Egypt)
Ehab Ellabban (Ofok Gallery, Cairo, Egypt)
Nagla Samir (American University in Cairo, Egypt)
The Egyptian Surrealist movement declared itself at a distinct historic moment, not only in the history of Egypt but that of the whole world, at a time when the totalitarian regimes of Stalinism in the Soviet Union, Nazism in Germany, Fascism in Italy and Authoritarian military in Japan were growing stronger. As these regimes were escalating aggressions against their people and leading the world to the brink of a second world war, they were also imposing an increasing number of restrictions on the artistic and literary freedoms. Before the end of the Art and Liberty Group’s first year of establishment, World War II had already started. Egyptian Surrealism continued until the mid-Sixties, despite the Art and Liberty’s slow fade from popular consciousness, both locally and internationally. Although Surrealism in Egypt remained relatively confined within a circle of creative writers and conceptual artists, it formed a crucial part of Egypt’s intellectual and cultural movements from the late thirties until the mid-Sixties. The Surrealist movement was undoubtedly associated with political progressive movements of that era and was a form of interaction between thinkers in Egypt and the intellectual streams of the world beyond.
and celebration of the Art and Liberty Group. The book was followed by an exhibition of the same name at the Egyptian Center for International Cultural Cooperation in 1987, which serves as the only showcase of collected works and documents by the Egyptian Surrealist pioneers to date.

This presentation will also discuss the publication of Gharib's book *The Impossible Migration from the Milky Way to Paris* (1999), as well as the late Anwar Kamel's article titled 'But they Made the Future' in the September issue of *Sabah El kher* magazine (1986) where he referred to a "a new dispersed movement" instigated by Gharib's book. Gharib identifies Bachir El-Sebaie and Hisham Geshta as leaders of this movement, both having written on Egyptian Surrealism, and worked to re-publish the Surrealist journal *Al Tatawur* with the support of the Cultural Development Fund.

**Discussant**
Sa’d M. Hassan, Director, Institute for Comparative Modernities (ICM), Cornell University

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**FRIDAY | 27 NOVEMBER 2015**

**9:00–11:00 AM**

**MINING THE ARCHIVES: EGYPTIAN SURREALISM IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Moderator: Nagla Samir, Associate Professor, Visual Cultures Program, Art Department, American University in Cairo, Curator and Artist, Egypt

**Patrick Kane**

*Instructor, History and Liberal Studies, Sharjah Higher Colleges of Technology, Sharjah, UAE*

**Egyptian Surrealism and Modern Egyptian History**

This paper discusses the Egyptian Surrealist writing and art within the context of Egyptian political and social history from the 1930s to the 1960s. How and why did the Egyptian Surrealist artists and writers choose to situate their art and develop a critical philosophy of art and society? Kane suggests that a closer examination of the crises within Egyptian society of the 1930s to 1940s, specifically the conflicts between the state and its ties to large landowners and the peasantry, forced Egyptian intellectuals to reposition themselves and their art. The Egyptian Surrealists were among the first to realize their role as new intellectuals whose rise as common art teachers in rural areas and in new institutions forced them to question the power of the state and its claims over art and society.

A review of the writings of Ramses Younan and the artwork and projects of his contemporaries allows us to compare the role and meaning of this movement within Egyptian history. From here, the presentation draws comparisons with works in history, literary criticism and art history to appreciate the place and development of a critical philosophy for art and society. The invention of a new vocabulary and method for the arts in the writing and practice of Ramses Younan will be discussed and compared to his contemporaries in Mexico and Italy. This paper also considers the ongoing and renewed interest in the Egyptian Surrealists by discussing the problems of Younan's later career and writing and its relevance for today.

**Hisham Geshta**

*Literary and Art Critic, Editor, Al Kitabah Al Ukhra, Cairo, Egypt*

**Reading Al Tatawur Retrospectively: The Surrealist Publications and their Relevance for Our Times**

This presentation will reflect on the author’s experience of republishing *Al Tatawur*, the historic journal of the Egyptian Surrealists, which started in 1940 and published seven issues before it was banned. *Al Kitaba Al Ukhra* also included other historical essays and manifestoes and archival material related to the Egyptian Surrealist movement in the mid-1990s and beyond.

Geshta will provide an analysis of *Al Tatawur’s* content and a critical assessment of its role on Egyptian modernist movements of the 1940s onwards. He will also assess the impact of *Al Kitaba Al Ukhra* within the revival of interest in the art and literature of the Egyptian Surrealists in contemporary Egypt. This paper also aims to emphasize Anwar Kamel’s role in engaging with the new and emerging literary generations in Egypt. He believed there to be a strong tie between the values of the Art and Liberty Group and the next generation. Anwar
Kamel called upon the younger generation to re-print Al Tatawur, which they succeeded in doing after a lengthy struggle.

**Discussant**

Amina Diab, Art Historian, Doctoral Candidate, Department of History of Art, University of York, UK

11:00–11:45 AM

**KEY PRESENTATION III**

Moderator: Adel Elsiwi, Artist, Art Critic and Translator, Cairo, Egypt

**Bachir El-Sibaei**

Poet, Historian and Translator, Cairo, Egypt

**Georges Henein: A Model of an Egyptian Surrealist**

Following a long exclusion from the history of Egyptian contemporary culture, George Henein (1914 – 1973) has once again become the focus of the literary avant-garde in Egypt during the past four decades. His previous exclusion was a result of considering Henein as an essentially Francophone writer, disregarding to the impact of the Egyptian Francophone as integral and an active part on the history of Egyptian culture since the late 19th century. This paper presents George Henein’s contributions in the context of Egyptian cosmopolitanism and cultural history, quoting from his texts in long excerpts.

**Discussant**

Hala Halim, Associate Professor, Comparative Literature, New York University, USA

12:00–2:00 PM

**THINKING COMPARATIVELY: OTHER SURREALISMS/GLOBAL EXPRESSIONS (PART I)**

Moderator: Malek Khouri, Professor, Film Studies, Department of the Arts, American University in Cairo, Egypt

**Clare Davies**

Art Historian, Assistant Curator, The Metropolitan Museum, New York, USA

“Orient, Lovely Bird of Prey and Innocence”: Egyptian Surrealism in the Orient/Occident Debate

This paper situates the Art and Liberty group [Jamaʿat al-Fann wa-l-Hurriya] in the context of the ‘Orient/Occident’ debate that prevailed in both French and Egyptian intellectual circles of the interwar period. The paper argues that the latter played a critical role in shaping the reception of movements such as Futurism and Surrealism in Egypt, as well as the development of artistic practices associated with the group.

**Didier Monciaud**

Associate Research Fellow, GREMAMO (Groupe de recherche sur le Maghreb et le Moyen Orient), University Diderot Paris VI, Paris, France

**The Political Agenda of the Egyptian Surrealists: Issues on Radical Outlook and Anti-Stalinist Marxism of a Cosmopolitan Network in a Colonial Context**

From the late 1930s until the mid-1940s, a small and dynamic Surrealist current emerged on the cultural scene in Egypt around the Art and Liberty Group, whose network offered a rich artistic experience and was also active in the political arena. This paper tackles the political identity of this group and discusses its connections with radical leftist politics. This dimension remains a rather neglected issue, especially for authors interested mostly in the artistic and/or Francophone dimensions. The Surrealist current in Egypt was part of a larger process of political radicalization of Francophone-educated youth from the cosmopolitan milieu; it developed a critical and radical agenda shaped by an anti-Stalinist Marxism (and rather complicated links with Trotskyism) situated between elitism and vanguardism. The paper will examine how such a small group dealt with international issues, national and regional politics such as Palestine and Sudan, and how it put forward ‘non-nationalist’ and critical answers to social and national questions as well as international politics of the period.

**Monique Bellan**

Researcher, Contemporary Art and Theatre, The Orient-Institut Beirut, Lebanon

**Defying Reality: Surrealism in Cairo and Beirut**

Operating as a revolutionary network with the aim of liberating the mind, as well as society from its constraints, Surrealism developed between the two world wars articulating a need for freedom. As such, the concern had a universal dimension and appealed to an emerging international avant-garde who had been questioning aesthetic as well as moral and political realities. The political dimension went hand in hand with the aesthetic. It entailed the resistance against and emancipation from the established order as well as the
dissolution of form, which can be interpreted as a threat or as liberation, depending on the standpoint. Local institutional, structural, and social, context also played an important role in the established of Surrealist groups and sympathies. The reasons behind the Surrealist formation of a group in Egypt, the lack thereof in a Lebanon, for instance, are manifold. These include the absence of a Lebanese art academy and the prevalence of landscape painting in Lebanon, as well as the ideal of harmonic composition in the Beaux-Arts tradition. This paper aims to shed light on the relationship between Lebanese artists, writers and intellectuals towards Surrealism and their Egyptian colleagues, and to investigate the issues they were most concerned with. This investigation is embedded in a closer look at the discussions concerning the clash between the avant-garde, their attempts to transgress and dissolve frontiers and conventions, and the more conservative intellectual and artistic milieux. The paper will also explore the ways in which Surrealist exchanges took place, how Surrealist ideas were applied or transformed depending on the context, and identify some key protagonists in Lebanon.

Discussant
Alexandra Seggerman, Five College Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in Islamic Art, Smith College and Hampshire Colleges, USA

3:30–5:30 PM

THINKING COMPARATIVELY:
OTHER SURREALISMS/GLOBAL EXPRESSIONS (PART II)

Moderator: Monique Bellan, Researcher, Contemporary Art and Theatre, The Orient-Institut Beirut, Lebanon

Terri Geis
Curator of Academic Programs at the Pomona College Museum of Art in Los Angeles, California

‘This is the House of the Sphinx’: Leonora Carrington and Edward James in Mexico

In 1957, Andre Breton published the text L’Art magique, which included responses to a questionnaire that he had sent to many colleagues, including British Surrealist Leonora Carrington. In her responses, the Mexico-based Carrington reflected that an artist could be a contemporary magician or explorer on “a strange magic ocean,” seeking “salvation” for the “diseased planet,” and the sphinx, the magical creature capable of guiding this effort. For Carrington and her colleagues, the sphinx was useful as both a symbol and a physical trace of the ancient world, the wider ruins and fragments through which they sought to undermine restrictive post-World War II cultural and political norms. With a view towards both Egyptian and Pre-Columbian archaeological sites and cultures, Carrington, James and others pursued an esoteric, imaginative world in direct contradiction with nationalist dialogues that dominated Mexico. Avoiding state-led appropriations of ancient civilizations, these artists instead drew upon international Surrealism’s (and specifically Breton’s) increasing interest in the eclectic tracts and initiation rites of secret societies, including Masonic and Rosicrucian groups. For the Surrealists in Mexico, this interest was filtered through James’ earlier experiences in Los Angeles with the practices, fanciful architectural constructions, and artworks of utopian colonies and esoteric sects, as well as the imaginative (and controversial) possibilities of the legendary lost lands of Atlantis, Lemuria and Mu. This presentation will examine the strategic and at times humorous adoption and melding of Egyptian, Mayan and other ancient cultural sources as a political means of undermining restrictions of identity within a perceived ‘diseased planet.’ The discussion will specifically investigate the intersections between Surrealism in Mexico and emerging counterculture groups and strategies of altered consciousness of the 1960s.

Gerard Aching
Professor of Africana and Romance Studies, Director of the Africana Studies and Research Center, Cornell University

In Legitimate Defense: Surrealism, Communism, and Their Discontents in France

This presentation examines two documents that carry the same name of Légitime Défense [Legitimate Defense]. Both texts are declarative and programmatic, in keeping with the manifestoes that the avant-garde produced in the period in which they were written. André Breton wrote the first of these in Paris in 1926 in order to distance the Surrealist’s proposed revolution from that of the French Communist Party. In 1932, a group of Martinican students in France, including René Ménil and Étienne Lero, wrote the second document, calling for adherence to the goals of international communism. The presentation describes and interrogates the reasons why Surrealism and Communism were considered incompatible for the Surrealist movement in the metropolis at this time and yet complimentary for particular artists and intellectuals from the French Caribbean colonies.

Manthia Diawara
Distinguished Professor, Film and Comparative Literature, New York University, USA

Between Surrealism and the Marvelous Realism: Caribbean Dialogues
The paper will discuss the concept of “Marvelous Realism” as pioneered first by the Cuban writer and influential thinker Alejo Carpentier and how he applied it to Latin American literature, and the Haitian revolutionary thinker and novelist Jacques Stephan Alexis’ translation of the same concept in the Haitian context, especially in his seminal article “The Marvelous Realism of the Haitians” in Presence Africaine’s proceedings of the 1956 Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Paris. The paper adds an interesting comparative perspective on Surrealism and how it is debated and used within the Caribbean context in ways that echo other manifestations of Surrealism in non-Western contexts such as Egypt.

Discussant
Didier Monciaud, Historian, Associate Research Fellow, GREMAMO (Groupe de recherche sur le Maghreb et le Moyen Orient), University Diderot Paris VI, Paris, France

5:45–7:45 PM

EGYPTIAN SURREALISM: PHILOSOPHY, AESTHETICS AND THE MODERNIST EXPERIENCE IN EGYPTIAN ART
Moderator: Jean Colombain, Independent Researcher, Publisher and Archivist, Paris, France

Alexandra Seggerman
Five College Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in Islamic Art, Smith College and Hampshire Colleges, USA

The ‘Beautiful Black Cloud’ of Egyptian Modern Art
This paper situates the Art and Liberty Group in the larger trajectory of the Egyptian modern art movement, arguing that Surrealism in Egypt was a reaction against nationalist art and politics both at home and abroad. In Egypt, the British-backed monarchy of King Farouk weakened and popular cinema and music expanded. While in Europe, totalitarian fascist governments threatened avant-garde art movements and their practitioners. The paper begins with an analysis of Mahmoud Mukhtar’s monumental sculpture Nahdat Misr (1920–1928), describing how it represents the distinctive nationalism of 1920s and 1930s Egyptian art. Second, it investigates Georges Henein’s response to Alexandrian-born Italian Futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s 1938 lectures in Cairo, and how that vociferous rejection solidified the Art and Liberty Group, leading to their manifesto “Long Live Degenerate Art” of December 1938. Third, it will discuss the artwork, writings and cinema of Kamel Telmisany, whose artistic arc echoes the scope of Surrealism. His early writings and drawings emphasize the internationality of the Surrealist movement, while his film, Al-Souq Al-Souda, expresses a populist turn in the mid-1940s. Lastly, the paper looks to the art movements that succeeded Surrealism, in particular Abdel Hadi El-Gazzar and the Contemporary Art Group. These artists borrowed techniques from Henein and his followers, but turned back to a national subject as Egypt emerged from British occupation and entered the Nasser era. Contextualizing Egyptian Surrealism in the larger span of Egyptian modernism reveals the role of local and international historical and cultural events to the development of the “Beautiful Black Cloud” of Egyptian modern art.

May Telmissany
Associate Professor, Cinema and Arabic Studies, University of Ottawa, Canada

Destabilizing Modernity, Kamel Telmisany’s Surrealist Unrest
Central to this paper is one of the leading, yet under-documented artists of Egyptian Surrealism, Kamel Telmisany. Telmisany’s activities as an influential painter, a committed art critic and a pioneering filmmaker were seldom chronicled and analyzed beyond the historical accounts of Egyptian Surrealism and Egyptian cinema. Aligning himself primarily with the Surrealist project as an expression of rebellion against academism and bourgeois art, Telmisany embraced the movement’s artistic and political considerations while choosing aesthetic “independence” within the Art and Liberty Group’s boundaries. In 1943, he joined Studio Masr as a story-board artist, assistant director and film editor and between 1945 and 1960 he directed ten long feature films including his progressive debut, The Black Market, which bears clear traces of his Surrealist period. While the Egyptian Surrealists’ journals, bulletins, exhibit catalogues and public appearances fiercely defended
modern and contemporary art, using both adjectives as a euphemism for anti-conformism, Telmisany's artistic expression through painting and art criticism as well as his revolutionary political stance, largely contributed to destabilize the collective understanding of 'the modern' and transformed it into a truly unrestricted expression of art and freedom. This paper draws on scholarly articles by Don LaCoss, Sam Bardaouil, Patrick Kane and Jeff O'Brien among others to reinforce the claim that Telmisany's dark and anguished artwork epitomizes what the Surrealist artist wishes to represent beyond the limits of what is recognized as 'modern': the affirmation of the artist's subjectivity and freedom. Works discussed in this paper include the illustrations made by Telmisany for Georges Henein's Dérasons d'être (1938) and Albert Cossery's Les Hommes oubliés de Dieu (1941), as well as paintings produced in the 1930s and 1940s. The paper also references key feature films directed by Telmisany and draws connections between his visual artwork, his feature films and his critical writings.

Amina Diab
Art Historian, Doctoral Candidate, Department of History of Art, University of York, UK (in partnership with Tate Modern, UK)

“Free Art” and Surrealist Aesthetics: Resituating Jama'at Al-Fann Wal-Hurriya in Egyptian Art History

The legacies of the Egyptian Surrealist movement heralded by Jama'at Al-Fann Wal-Hurriya [Art and Liberty Group] in 1939 still spurs debate about the nature and authenticity of the movement. Until the 1980s, Egyptian Surrealism was studied through a teleological prism that fixes it within an essentialist reading, reflecting a failed attempt to imitate an advanced Western modernity, within a stagnant local 'non-Western' reality. Newer scholarship on Middle Eastern art in general and the Egyptian Surrealists has fortunately moved away from such Western-oriented narratives and sees local art as always socially constructed and therefore only intelligible within its particular local historical, social and political contexts. Instead of seeing modernity and its multiple manifestations as somehow reactive and derivative of its Western models, this new approach gives credence and agency to multiple local modernities, paying attention to 'high,' 'middle' and 'low' expressions of the modern, on both individual and collective levels. This presentation also focuses on the manifestoes and artwork of the Art and Liberty Group to illustrate how the Egyptian Surrealists articulated a distinctive aesthetic language and developed a unique artistic practice that is both unquestionably modern and yet deeply local. Through a textual analysis of two manifestoes dating from 1939 and 1940, this presentation first examines the group’s artistic and social project, lending special attention to the notion of artistic freedom. The analysis then turns to a number of paintings and drawings to shed light on Art and Liberty's formative role in Egyptian art and examines the group's new visual language, which broke away and rejected the Academy's formalism.

Discussant
Clare Davies, Art Historian, Assistant Curator, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA

SATURDAY | 28 NOVEMBER 2015

9:30–11:30 AM

EGYPTIAN SURREALISM: PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE CINEMATIC EXPRESSION
Moderator: Salah M. Hassan, Director, Institute for Comparative Modernities (ICM), Cornell University

Malek Khouri
Professor, Film Studies, Department of the Arts, American University in Cairo, Egypt

Surrealist Nuance and Postcolonial Subjectivity: Youssef Chahine’s Alexandria, Again and Again

An integral element in the utility of Surrealist aesthetics in Arab cinema, particularly since the late 20th century, has been the occasional incorporation of an increasingly postcolonial paradigm. In this context, the political vigor of the original Surrealist movement (largely associated with European capitalist conditions of the early part of the last century), assumed here a postcolonial nuance, which indulged a fluid inter-passage between the personal and the political in the form of a more specifically postcolonial subjectivity. As part of the postcolonial discourse of contemporary Egyptian and Arab cinemas, Youssef Chahine's film Alexandria, Again and Again (1990) remains a landmark in the history of these cinemas' subversive utility of Surrealist strategies and conventions. The film takes the shape of loosely connected cinematic episodes of fantasy and reality. It also utilizes visual and elemental dislocations, juxtapositions and distortions by way of presenting the filmmaker's vision of his own personal and political experiences, despairs, anxieties, as well as his hopes and aspirations. As such, the film paints a Surrealistic rendering of tensions between the personal and the collective, as well as between the sexual and national, all in the context of the wider transformations affecting contemporary Egyptian and Arab struggles for social and political liberation.
Mohsen Wify
Film Historian, Critic and Translator, Cairo, Egypt

The Cinema of Kamel Telmisany and the Petite Bourgeoisie

This paper analyses the reason behind the transformation of the Surrealist artist Kamel Telmisany, who worked with the Jamaat Al-Fann wal-Huriyya [Art and Liberty Group] alongside other Surrealist artists and poets as an artist and a critic, and then went on to work in cinema as a filmmaker. Did he remain faithful to the Egyptian Surrealist approach and vision? Or did he, as a filmmaker, adopt a vision and style corresponding with the stylistic conventions of Egyptian cinema at the time? Telmisany’s first feature film titled The Black Market occupies the majority of this paper’s content, to reveal the causes of this transformation from Al-Fann wal-Huriyya to broader, popular horizons. This paper will discuss Surrealism in Egyptian cinema and the broader cinematic context since the emergence of Egyptian cinema through the period of the Art and Liberty Group, to recent times. It will also address The Black Market (1945), as Telmisany’s closest film to Surrealism, and discuss it against his entire cinematic work, including his last film People Who are Beneath which he directed in 1960.

Maria Golia
Writer and Critic, Cairo, Egypt

Notes on Photography: Egypt and the Surreal

This presentation will situate the five exhibitions by the Art and Liberty Group within the context of other 1930s–1940s photographic exhibitions, showing the traditions the group attempted to break, through using and presenting visual art. Photographers associated with Surrealism in Egypt, including Hassia, Idabel (i.e. Ida Kar) and Lee Miller (who lived in Cairo 1934–1937) will be briefly addressed, along with a collage of observations on the surreal experience of surveying Egypt’s photographic record from its beginnings to recent times.

Discussant
May Telmissany, Associate Professor, Cinema and Arabic Studies, University of Ottawa, Canada

11:45 AM–1:45 PM

EGYPTIAN SURREALISM: CRITICAL AND LITERARY PERSPECTIVES

Moderator: Bahia Shehab, Associate Professor of Practice, Director of Visual Studies Program, Department of Art, American University in Cairo, Egypt

Mona Khazindar
Historian, Curator, Literary Critic, and Former Director, Institute of the Arab World, Paris, France

Georges Henein, the Herald of Surrealism in Egypt

Georges Henein (1914–1973), was not merely the initiator and the herald of Surrealism in Egypt, but he also cultivated attentively its ideals during his life, whether in his writings, or political and artistic choices. This presentation will seek to demonstrate the extraordinary influence of Surrealism over this cosmopolitan man, a high-born individual who could have simply settled to be a ‘wanderer between two shores’, but instead became the ‘agent provocateur’ of the bourgeois circles around him, as well as the ‘agent provocateur’ of the powerful of this world and of his own life. The presentation will emphasize the Egyptian period in this atypical path, on the exhibitions organized in Cairo by his Art and Liberty Group where the values he held dear were illustrated: the omnipotence of dreams and of imagination, the perception of writing as a construction of images and the perception of the painted and sculpted images as the first and instinctive writing, the creative force of the necessary individual liberty.

Hala Halim
Associate Professor, Comparative Literature and Middle Eastern Studies, New York University, USA

Afterlife of Egyptian Surrealism: Edwar al-Kharrat’s Texts and the So-called Alexandrian School

In his various roles as novelist, poet and critic, Edwar al-Kharrat (b. 1926) has been instrumental in adumbrating alternative poetics and promoting a modernism rethought in Egyptian/Arab terms. The critical terms he has coined over the years for the purposes of this project — al-hasaiyya al-jadida (the new sensibility), al-kitaba ‘abr al-naw’iyya (trans-generic writing), ma ba’id al-waqi’iyya (meta-realism), among others—have come after the fact of the appearance of these features in his own ‘literary’ texts. This presentation will elicit some Surrealist features from Al-Kharrat’s fiction and situate them vis-à-vis his critical work on Modernism, with particular attention to two essays he has written on Surrealism, as well as his writings on members of what he has called the Alexandria school—contemporary artists and writers from his native city, specifically Ahmad Mursi. In so doing, the presentation, in addition to shedding light on an aspect of Al-Kharrat’s Modernist project, will trace the belated resonance of Surrealism in the literary field in Egypt.
Surrealist Engagements with Ancient Egypt: “Osiris is a Black God”

In his 1944 work, Arcane 17, André Breton invoked the enigmatic phrase ‘Osiris is a black god’ to call for a renewal of spiritual energies in the midst of World War II. Osiris has a particular significance in Surrealist mythology. For Breton in 1944 he represents above all the possibility of a world in which radical change is possible through revolt against the way things are, both at an individual and a collective level. As a god of vegetation and resurrection, he also represents themes of self-redefinition and the reconciliation of natural and cultural worlds, which have always been central interests of the Surrealists, and became especially so after the Second World War. His death and dismemberment and then resurrection also corresponds with the nigredo stage of alchemical from which the transformation of the self begins. As the personification of life and death reconciled, Osiris may thus be seen as the embodiment of the Supreme Point of the personality sought by the Surrealists. This paper will consider this and various aspects of the Surrealists’ interest in ancient Egypt, taking account of the contentions of Georges Henein and René Alleau, both of whom saw ancient Egypt as a ‘nocturnal’ civilization that brings into question the ‘diurnal’ one in which we currently exist.

Discussant
Surti Singh, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, American University in Cairo, Egypt

3:30–5:30 PM

INDIVIDUAL ARTISTIC PERSPECTIVES: ON EGYPTIAN SURREALISM

Jean Colombain
Independent Researcher, Publisher and Archivist, Paris, France

Ramses Younan and Surrealism: From a Password to a Rubber Ball

By examining Ramses Younan’s life, works and research, this presentation shows how Younan used Surrealism as initiation into a wider realm of creative possibilities. It was the catalyst that compelled him forward “to bomb known forms in the hope of discovering, beneath the ashes, the primary matter of existence” and to look “for the new explosions that would give humanity back some of its lost dignity.”

Adel El-Siwi
Artist, Art Critic and Translator, Cairo, Egypt

The Egyptian Surrealists: A Contemporary Egyptian Artist’s Perspective

This paper studies the artwork of the Egyptian Surrealists, mainly analyzing the visual elements of Surrealist work, its aesthetic language, the nature of its structure and its relation with the narrative of the work and the visual use of symbols. This paper reveals the common characteristics among Surrealist works despite the differences in their elements; and retraces their development over the movement’s relatively short life. It also answers the questions regarding the aesthetic specificities and the Egyptian identity of these works. Just as Surrealist art in general cannot be addressed outside the context of Modernism, Egyptian Surrealism cannot be approached outside the context of two movements; global Surrealism (centered in France) and the Egyptian artistic movement in Cairo. Therefore, it becomes necessary to analyze the relationship between Egyptian Surrealism and modernity at large, with global Surrealism at the time. The paper will conclude with some visualizations of the impact of Egyptian Surrealism on Egyptian art over the last four decades.

Salah M. Hassan
Director, Institute for Comparative Modernities (ICM), Cornell University

Egyptian Surrealism’s Time Capsule: Kamal Youssef as Witness

Born in Egypt in 1923, the Egyptian-American artist, Kamal Youssef, who now lives in rural Pennsylvania, has continued to be productive for more than seventy years. In his ideas, intellectual orientation, and style of painting and sculpture, Youssef remains consistently faithful to the cosmopolitan ethos of the Art and Liberty Group, with whom he exhibited as a young man on an invitation from Georges Henein, and the Contemporary Art Group, another avant-garde group he helped found. This paper looks at Kamal Youssef as a “time capsule,” and draws on his oeuvre as “witness” to epic-like events in the artistic, cultural and political arenas in Egypt and the world at large—whether it was the anti-colonial nationalist movement in Egypt of the 1940s and its cosmopolitan outlook, the life of the avant-garde émigré in post war Paris, the Egyptian revolution of the 1950s, America’s revolutionary era of the 1960s, or the Civil Rights movement, Youssef’s work reflects those changes: from Egypt in the midst of revolution, to Paris in the 1950s, to the USA in the aftermath of 9/11 with its exceedingly anti-Arab’s outlook on foreign and domestic politics.

Discussant
Patrick Kane, Instructor, History and Liberal Studies, Sharjah Higher Colleges of Technology, UAE
PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIES

EMAD ABOU­GHAZI is a historian and archivist. He is Professor of Archival Studies at the Department of Libraries, Archives and Information Science, Cairo University, and specializes in Arabic medieval documents. He is former Minister of Culture in Egypt and Member of the High Committee of the Egyptian National Archive. His research in the field of history, archives, diplomatic and cultural policies began in the early 1970s. Abou­Ghazi has published seven books and writes for several regional publications. He received a BA in History in 1976, MA in Arabic Medieval Documents in 1998 and PhD in Arabic medieval documents in 1995 from Cairo University.


HOOR AL QASIMI is President and Director of the Sharjah Art Foundation. She is a practicing artist who received her BFA from the Slade School of Fine Art, London (2002), a Diploma in Painting from the Royal Academy of Arts (2005) and an MA in Curating Contemporary Art from the Royal College of Art, London (2008). In 2003, she was appointed curator of Sharjah Biennial 6 and has continued as the Biennial’s Director since that time. She is Chair of the Advisory Board for the College of Art and Design, University of Sharjah; Member of the Advisory Board, Khoj International Artists’ Association, India, and Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing; and serves on the Board of Directors for MoMA PS1, New York, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, the International Biennial Association, Gwangju and Ashkal Alwan, Beirut. Al Qasimi has been a Visiting Lecturer at Slade School of Fine Art, London and was currently a Scholar-in-Residence with The Institute for Comparative Modernities (ICM) at Cornell University in 2013–2014. She has served on the juries for the Dubai International Film Festival (2014), the Benesse Prize (2013), the Sheikha Manal Young Artist Award (2012) and the selection panel for the Berlin Biennial (2012). Her recent and upcoming curatorial projects at SAF include In Spite of it All (2012) and Ilya and Emilia Kabakov: A Collective Memory (2013), and in 2014 Ahmed Mater: 100 Found Objects, Abdullah Al Saadi: Al-Toubay, Rasheed Araeen: Before and After Minimalism, Wael Shawky: Horsemen Adore Perfumes and other stories, Susan Hefuna: Another Place and Abdul Hay Mosallam Zarara. Hoor Al Qasimi was appointed Curator for the National Pavilion United Arab Emirates at the 2015 International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia.

MONIQUE BELLAN is a researcher in modern and contemporary art and theatre mainly focusing on Lebanon and Egypt. She is currently working with the Orient-Institut Beirut and had previously worked at the Academy of Arts in Berlin and the Collaborative Research Centre 626 on Aesthetic Experience and the Dissolution of Artistic Limits. Dr. Bellan received her PhD in Oriental Studies from Free Universität Berlin in 2012. Her thesis was published under the title Dismember Remember: The Anatomic Theatre of Lina Saneh and Rabih Mroué (Reichert Verlag, 2013).

JEAN COLOMBAIN is an independent publisher, researcher and archivist. As part of his research, Colombain gathered all articles published by Georges Henein in Egyptian newspapers between 1941 and 1961, compiling them as part of the George Henein Library Catalogue at the French Institute in Cairo. Together with Sylvie Younan, Colombain created and catalogued the Ramses Younan archives in Paris and is currently working on assembling Ramses Younan’s catalogue raisonné. Colombain earned a degree in Development Economics from the University of Clermont-Ferrand.

AMINA DIAB is an Art Historian and Doctoral Candidate in the Department of History of Art at the University of York, in partnership with Tate Modern, an editorial assistant at the Kamel Lazaar Foundation, and a member of the White Rose College of the Arts and Humanities. Her Arts and Humanities Research Council funded doctoral project entitled Re-displaying the Modern: A History of Art Exhibitions, Artistic Networks and Institutions in the Middle East and North Africa from 1930–1989 focuses on the institutional history of modern art practices across the region. She holds a BA in History from the American University in Cairo and an MPhil in Modern Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Oxford.


EHAB ELLABAN is an artist and curator, and Director of Ofok Gallery at the Mahmoud Khalil Museum in Cairo. Ellaban’s curated exhibitions include 25 Years of Arab Creativity, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris (2012), Still Valid, Sharjah Art Gallery, American University in Cairo (2011), as well as exhibitions at MENASA Art Fair, Beirut (2011) and the Marrakesh Art Fair (2010). He was coordinator for La Quatrième Pyramide, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris (2008). Since taking over as director of Ofok Gallery in 2005 he has organized several exhibitions such as Alf Leila We Leila (2006), Contemporary Spanish Art Selections from Alicante (2006), and Nuevas Tendencias Fotografía (2005), as well as solo exhibitions of Egyptian artists such as Farouk Hosni and Nazli Madkour (2011), Adel El Siwi (2010), Ahmed Nawar (2009), Salah Taher (2008) and Adam Henein (2007). Ellaban was also art advisor for Arab Express: The Latest Art from the Arab World at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo. His current and future projects include Architecture Created by Sculptors and the first Egyptian applied arts exhibition (both forthcoming).

BACHIR EL-SEBAEI is an author and translator, having translated a large number of creative and intellectual works from Russian, English and French. El-Sebaei is author of Intelligentsia Mirrors (Dar Al Nile,1995) and Above the Forgotten Sidewalks, Modern Discussion (2012). His published translations include, Timothy Mitchell’s Carbon Democracy Political Power in the Age of Oil, in collaboration with Sharif Younis (National centre for translation, Cairo, 2013), Alain Roussillon’s Identity and Modernity: Egyptian Travelers to Japan (National centre for translation, Cairo, 2013), and George Henein: The Adversity of the Haze; Selections of a Surrealist Writer’s Works (Bait Elyasmin, Cairo, 2012). In collaboration with others, El-Sebaei translated Timothy Mitchell’s America’s Egypt: Discourse of the Development Industry (Ebal Foundation, Nicosia, 1991), Z.I. Levin’s Modern Social and Political Thought in Lebanon, Syria and Egypt (Dar Ibn Khaldun, Beirut, 1978) and Modern Social and Political Thought in Egypt and the Levant (Dar Sharqiyat, Cairo, 1997). He was awarded the “Best Conversant in the Russian Language and its Literature” by the Soviet cultural centre in Cairo (1971), the “Best Arabic Translation” in 1995 by the Cairo International Book Fair Prize (1996), the Mediterranean Foundation Book Award (2007), Refaah Rafe Tahtawy Award from the National Centre for Translation (2010), and the Kafavi International Award for Translation (2011). He received a bachelor degree from The Faculty of Arts Department of Philosophical and Psychological studies at Cairo University (1966).

ADEL EL-SIWI is an artist and writer who studied medicine at Cairo University between 1970–1976, and Independent Studies at the Faculty of Fine Arts Cairo from 1974–1975, before pursuing a career in painting. Like other Egyptian artists of the late 1970s, El-Siwi, who had migrated to Europe, was compelled to return to Cairo, drawn by the power of its legacy of artistic achievement. He moved to Milan in 1980 and returned to Cairo in 1990 where he currently lives and works. El-Siwi exhibited at the Cairo Atelier (1985), and has had subsequent solo exhibitions in Germany, Lebanon and Italy. Group exhibitions include 25 Years of Arab...
**TERRI GEIS** is Curator of Academic Programs at the Pomona College Museum of Art in Los Angeles, California. Past exhibitions and publications include *In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2012), an essay on the Brazilian artist Maria Martins in *Surrealism in Latin America: Vivísimos Muertos* (Getty Research Institute, 2012) and multiple essays in *Catalogo comentado del acervo del Museo Nacional de Arte*:Pintura, Siglo XX (Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico, 2014). Geis contributed to the journal *Dada/Surrealism: "Wonderful Things": Surrealism and Egypt* with the article, “Death by Amnesia”: Maya Deren, Egypt, and “Racial” Memory (2013). Geis’s latest work investigates Surrealism’s connections with Afro-Caribbean art and culture, with the recently published “Myth, History and Repetition: André Breton and Vodou in Haiti” (*South Central Review*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015) and ‘*The Old Horizon Withdraws*: Surrealist Connections in Martinique and Haiti: Suzanne Césaire/André Breton, Maya Deren/ André Pierre (University of Manchester Press, forthcoming). Geis is the recent recipient of a Getty Foundation grant under the Pacific Standard Time LA/LA initiative. She received her PhD in Art History and Theory from the University of Essex and she specialized in the intersections between Surrealism and the Americas.

**HISHAM GESHTA** is an Egyptian writer and literary critic and the general editor of journal *Al Kitabah Al Ukhrah* (The Other Writing), a literary journal, which he revived after a ten-year hiatus. He is credited with the republication of *Al-Tatawur*, the mouthpiece of the Egyptian Surrealists (1997).

**SAMIR GHARIB** first worked as a journalist at *Al Akhbar* newspaper in 1975 and continued his journalistic work in Paris at *Future* weekly magazine (1979–1983). He writes on Fine Art and Architecture for *Al-Hayat* newspaper, London. He has published eleven books on art, culture, and intellectual history including *Surrealism in Egypt* (Egyptian Public Book Authority, Cairo, 1986) and most recently *The Book of Art* (2003). He worked as a journalist consultant, then as a technical consultant for the Ministry of Culture (1987–1999), and was appointed the first Director of the Cultural Development Fund (1990–1999) and Chairman of the Egyptian National Library and Archives (1999–2002). Gharib then took over the presidency of the Egyptian Academy in Rome (2002–2004) and established a board of directors for National Organization for Urban Harmony where he was president of the board from 2004 to 2014. Gharib received a BA in media from Cairo University in 1975, a Diploma from International Press Institute in Paris in 1985 and another Diploma from the International Press Institute in Budapest in 1987.

**MARIA GOLIA** is an author who is interested in urban, social, inner, and outer spaces. She is the author of *Cairo: City of Sand* (Reaktion Books UK, 2004), *Photography and Egypt* (Reaktion Books, 2010) and *Meteorite: Nature and Culture* (Reaktion, 2015).

**HALA HALIM** is Associate Professor of Comparative Literature and Middle Eastern Studies at New York University. She is the author of *Alexandrian Cosmopolitanism: An Archive* (Fordham University Press, 2013), which received an Honorable Mention for the Harry Levin Prize for the best First Book from the American Comparative Literature Association. She has translated Mohamed El-Bisatie’s *Clamor of the Lake*, which received an Egyptian State Incentive Award in literature for translation and was selected as runner up for the first London-based Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation, and Mahmoud Al-Wardani’s *Heads Ripe for Plucking*.

**SALAH M. HASSAN** is Director of the Institute for Comparative Modernities (ICM), and the Goldwin Smith Professor of African and African Diaspora Art History and Visual Culture in the Africana Studies and Research Center, and the Department of History of Art and Visual Studies, Cornell University. He is also a curator and art critic, co-founding editor of *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* (Duke University Press), and serves as consulting editor for *Atlántica* and *Journal of Curatorial Studies*. He has authored, edited and co-edited several books including *Ibrahim El Salahi: A Visionary Modernist* (Museum for African Art and Tate Modern, 2013), *Darfur and the Crisis of Governance: A Critical Reader* (Cornell UP, 2009), *Diaspora, Memory, Place* (Prestel, 2008), *Unpacking Europe* (NAi Publishers, 2001), *Authentic/Ex-Centric* (Forum for African Arts, 2001) and *Art and Islamic Literacy among the Hausa of Northern Nigeria* (E. Mellen, 1992). Hassan guest edited a special issue of *SAQ* South Atlantic Quarterly on *African Modernism* (2010). He is currently working on a book length manuscript entitled *The Khartoum School: The Making of the Modern Art Movement in Sudan* (1945–Present). He has contributed essays to journals, anthologies and exhibition catalogues of
contemporary art. Hassan’s curatorial work includes several international exhibitions including at the 49th Venice Biennale in 2001, the Dakar Biennale in 2004, Sharjah Art Museum (2013) and Tate Modern (2013). He is the recipient of several fellowships, such as the J. Paul Getty Postdoctoral Fellowship, as well as grants from the Ford, Rockefeller, Andy Warhol, Prince Claus Fund foundations, and currently working on two major collaborative publications and exhibition projects with Sharjah Art Foundation, namely Khartoum School: The Making of the Modernist Art Movement in Sudan (2015–2016) and The Egyptian Surrealists (2015–2017).

PATRICK KANE is Instructor of History and Liberal Studies at Sharjah Higher Colleges of Technology in the United Arab Emirates. He received his BA in Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Texas, MA in History from Temple University in Philadelphia, and his PhD from Binghamton University, State University of New York in 2007. Kane is the author of The Politics of Art in Modern Egypt: Aesthetics, Ideology and Nation-building (I.B. Tauris, 2011).

MONA KHAZINDAR is the former Director General of the Institut du Monde Arabe [Arab World Institute] in Paris (2011–2013). Prior to her appointment at the Institut du Monde Arabe, she headed the Department of Contemporary Art and Photography in the museum. During that period she focused on modern and contemporary art from the Middle East. Khazindar curated a number of exhibitions at the Institut du Monde Arabe including Palestine, Creation in all its States (2009), Oum Kalsoun, the Fourth Pyramid (2009) and Vision of Arab Photographers. She was appointed co-curator of the first Saudi Pavilion in the 54th Venice Biennale (2010) and was chosen as a nominator for the twelfth cycle of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture (2011–2013). She has also worked as an art consultant for the King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and has collaborated with the King Abdulaziz Centre for World Culture in Dhahran as a curatorial consultant since 2011. Khazindar was appointed Cultural Advisor for the President of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities (SCTA) in 2014. She is also member of the Jeddah-based Saudi Art Commission. Khazindar holds an MA in Contemporary and Modern History from the Sorbonne and a BA in Comparative Literature from the American University in Paris.

MALEK KHOURI is Professor of Film Studies at the Department of the Arts, The American University in Cairo. Khouri is former Chair of the Department of the Arts, The American University in Cairo (2011–2013) and former Director of the Film Studies Program and Head of the Communication Division in the Faculty of Communication and Culture at the University of Calgary in Canada. Khouri’s current scholarship examines Orientalism in Western discourse on Arab Cinema. His early scholarly work studied the work of filmmaker Youssef Chahine, the representation of the working class in Canadian cinema, media and the challenges of political and social change and Marxism and film theory. Khouri is also a film and art curator with special interest in artifacts of Popular Egyptian and Arab cinemas. He is currently working on a book titled In the Eyes of an Empire: Arab Cinema in Western Film Criticism (forthcoming) and editing a volume titled Post 2011 Egyptian Cinema: Challenges and Opportunities. Earlier published work includes The Arab National Project in Youssef Chahine’s Cinema (The American University in Cairo Press, 2010), Filming Politics: Communism and the Portrayal of the Working Class at the National Film Board of Canada, 1939–46 (University Of Calgary Press, 2007) and Working on Screen: Representations of the Working Class in Canadian Cinema (co-edited with Darrell Varga, University of Toronto Press, 2006). He received several research awards from McGill University, the University of Calgary and the Canadian Killam Foundation Award for Research and he was awarded two research funding grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council in Canada, among others. Khouri holds a BA in Film Studies from Carleton University, Ottawa and Film Production from York University in Toronto, an MA in Canadian Studies from Carleton University and a PhD in Communications from McGill University in Montreal.

MICHAEL RICHARDSON is honorary Visiting Fellow at Goldsmith's College, University of London and was previously Visiting Professor in Cultural Studies at Waseda University, Tokyo (2004–2007). His research interests focus on cultural communication and constructions of otherness from a universal perspective, which he has explored through two cultural phenomena of the twentieth century, Surrealism and cinema. He is editor of *Refusal of the Shadow* (Verso, 1996) on Surrealism and the Caribbean, and *The Absence of Myth* (Verso, 1991), a collection of writings of Georges Bataille. He is also author of *Surrealism and Cinema* (Berg, 2006), *The Experience of Culture* (Sage, 2001) and *Georges Bataille* (Routledge, 1994).

NAGLA SAMIR is Associate Professor for the Department of Visual Cultures at the American University in Cairo (AUC) and founder of Passage 35, a cultural center for contemporary art. She was the director of Sharjah Gallery at AUC and currently works as an independent curator, in addition to her research and art practice.

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MOHSEN WIFY is a critic, film historian and translator. Wify has been Chairman of the Egyptian Film Critics Association since 2009, member of International Federation of Film Critics (FIPRESCI) and a judge in several Egyptian, Arab and international film festivals. He has also published numerous translations and authored studies and articles in Egyptian and Arab magazines and newspapers. Wify’s publications include *Palestine Lover*, a study of the director Kais Al Zubaidi and *The Cinematic World in Tawfik Saleh Films*. Wify’s translations include *A Passion for Films: Henri Langlois and the Cinematic* by Richard Roud (Academy of Art University Library), *Cinema and Modernity* by John Orr (Alexandria Library), *Afro-American Folk Tales* (National Center for Translation) and *The ‘I’ of the Camera* by William Rothman (National Center for Translation).
We launched our reading group with the goal of theorizing a notion of what might constitute “diasporic space.” Acknowledging that globalization has increasingly necessitated that modes of production and the sourcing of labor power transcend the boundaries of the nation-state, we felt that a more nuanced understanding of space would need to be reached in order to account for the way in which notions of home and belonging are being renegotiated. While the material reality of the global market has made mobility an imperative for many, the predominance of the nation-state as a framework which continues to mediate relationships between place and subjectivity has created a tension that is arguably one of the most pressing concerns of our time. Rather than analyze from the perspective of fixed space, we wanted instead to attempt a reading of space with movement and dispersion as its precondition. We wanted to question how space is articulated, represented, and/or produced by displaced peoples and how they understand and articulate the space they inhabit. What practico-theoretical possibilities are revealed in following displacement as it relates to the field of power that constitutes the global? To what extent are notions of indigeneity a reaction to globalization and the legacy of the colonial, and can they provide an alternative register in our engagement with these issues?

Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* (1974) had been in our minds from the moment we decided to explore the concept of diasporic space, largely because we felt this work opens up a third space between the realms of what might be called “designed” space on the one hand, and “used” space on the other. For Lefebvre, the “production” of space is a dialogical process which occurs in between these points, and as such space can be...
signified in often unintended ways. This is particularly significant from the perspective of analyzing diasporic peoples, as it seems to account for the discrepancy between the intention of design and the reality of use which is often apparent when “outsiders” occupy spaces that are not necessarily intended for them. While we were drawn to the importance of dialogue in Lefebvre’s text, we also felt that his analysis still relied on a perception of space that was largely fixed. The production of space for Lefebvre seems to occur as mobile bodies move through space that is always fixed. We on the other hand wanted to formulate a concept, whether possible or not, of space-as-movement.

For this reason we were particularly drawn to a recent book entitled The Figure of the Migrant (2015) by Thomas Nail. Nail suggests that demographic movement should be understood as an economy which follows a specific logic or rationale. Clearly informed by a Foucauldian understanding of governmentality (and perhaps Bataille’s concept of “general economy”), Nail argues that demographic movements are often encouraged to flow through predetermined routes. These routes, he argues, are structured around nodal points (border controls, market hubs) through which bodies are encouraged to move in corroboration with a particular governmental or market rationale. This encouraged us to consider what different types of logic might be directing the passage of bodies through certain routes. What routes, for example, do affective ties travel through? Do notions of belonging and/or cultural identity flow through the same routes as commodities (and thus become commodified in the process), or are the ‘hubs’ that direct affective flows found elsewhere? We felt that Nail’s book was far too macroscopic in its orientation to answer this question, and so we turned to more context-specific examples of diasporas in an attempt to explore the more cultural aspects of diasporic space that remained unaccounted for in Nail’s book.

For this purpose we turned to Epeli Hau’ofa’s “Our Sea of Islands” (1993; We are the Ocean, 2008), “Our Sea” has become a cornerstone text in Pacific-Island Studies where Hau’ofa responds to dependency theory. He is clear from the very beginning about what compels him to write this text; a generation of Pacific-Islanders who have internalized a discourse of “belittlement” and the effects of psychological colonization. It is a text that is, in tone especially, very self-conscious of itself; it asks, “What do you say to a generation that has been taught to imagine itself as coming from a “small” place?” It is a text with a very specific intended audience: it was written for Pacific-Islanders. But, in what might arguably constitute its “afterlife,” it is a text that has been cited, used, and read in many additional contexts and by an audience for whom it was not intended. Therefore, it is a text that moves within unexpected networks, circuits, and spaces. What is the relationship between that which is “projected” and the “unexpected”? What can be said about a text that travels within circuits of asymmetry? And in what sense is this belated turn different from a sense of belatedness that has traditionally been associated with the space of the “not yet”—specifically, the idea that the Pacific-Islands are too small, and therefore “not yet” ready for economic development. Of particular interest to our group was how “Our Sea of Islands” reconfigures nodes of reference: to think of the Pacific-Islands as a ‘sea of islands’ rather than ‘islands in a far sea.’ Our reading group found particularly provocative the figure of the Tongan introduced at the end of the text. The Tongan brings t-shirts from California in a cooler, and takes back kava to his community in the U.S. He is a figure that travels those routes created and constituted by asymmetrical colonial relations, but carries goods to and fro “illicitly.” How might illicit activity be constitutive of, at least, a provisional position that could offer a way out of a difficult double bind between the poles of structural determinism and agency?

Finally, Haunting the Korean Diaspora (2008) by Grace Cho provided us with yet another framework from which to think of diasporic space. Travelling through disciplinary boundaries, Cho’s book is at once an auto-ethnographic and socio-political analysis which attempts to map what might be called a transpacific space of affective ties. Embedding quotes in the body of her text that are left uncited, Cho draws on these disembodied testimonies to link the experiences of her mother—a former “camptown” sex worker in South Korea who came to the U.S. after marrying her former G.I. husband—with the experiences of other women who ended up in the U.S. under similar conditions. Throughout, Cho insists that it is through their conspicuous silence with regards to their past experiences that her mother’s generation have communicated their trauma to the next. Cho refers to this silent transmission as a haunting, and one which demands to be given voice to. Cho’s text provided us with a model of diasporic routes that differed somewhat from the economic, academic, and literary trajectories of diaspora that we had previously seen. It also prompted us to consider how the experience of diaspora is inevitably gendered. In contrast to the previous figures we had seen, which tended to be male figures of transnational labor—like the Tongan in Hau’ofa’s text—the figures of sexual labor in Cho’s text were clearly signified in very different terms. Here, the movement of bodies was not so much equated with the production of surplus capital so much as they were themselves the commodities to be exchanged. Furthermore, the economy within which this exchange took place was not only a monetary one but an affective one also; it was precisely through the de- and re-territorialization of women’s bodies—from “camp town whore” to “yankee bride”—that the patriarchal-national
We briefly discussed Kieran Healy’s article “Fuck Nuance” (2017; published previously on the author’s website) in which he advocates for strong theoretical and empirical positions in academic work. This served as a way for us to reflect on the politics of academic work. His points were well-taken in so far as academic work can become inconsequential with regard to practical politics if it is instrumentalized solely for the purposes of debates in academic journals. In particular, the current trend towards nuance allows academics to avoid reflecting on the political consequences of their work and to take a political position that will clearly be related to the power dynamics between capital and labor. In this way, we reflected on our own political positions and tended to agree with the need for an incorporation of politics as a dimension of academic work.

As an interdisciplinary mix of Development Sociology, Industrial Labor Relations, and Literature graduate students, our familiarity with and approaches to the material differed, but we all shared a deep interest in contemporary, non-Eurocentric Marxist theories concerning modernity. The happy intersections between our approaches yielded considerable new ground for thought and freed us from our more settled disciplinary routines. Such diversity of backgrounds need not sacrifice topical focus, and accordingly, several of our shared readings were meant to serve as a corpus of common reference through which we could express our differences. Our early examination of debates concerning formal and real subsumption in the context of colonial and postcolonial India through the work of Vivek Chibber (Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital, 2013), Dipesh Chakrabarty ( Provincializing Europe, 2000), Vasant Kaiwar (The Postcolonial Orient, 2014), and Harry Harootunian (Marx After Marx: History and Time in the Expansion of Capitalism, 2015) provided ample opportunity to explore intersections with regard to cultural difference, notions of universality, and how modernity might be thought of as singular. This specific engagement between subaltern studies and Marxism excellently grounded our subsequent discussion of non-Eurocentric approaches to the “transition debate,” which included Robert Brenner (“Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe,” 1976), Immanuel Wallerstein and Etienne Balibar (Race, Nation, Class, 2011), and Alex Anievas and Kerem Nisancioglu (How the West Came to Rule, 2015). Theoretical problems around the “transition debate” regarding the nature of the transition to capitalism both within individual states and globally,
elicited further engagement with extra-sociological and historical contexts, such as literary and critical theory, and theories of relationality. Our combination of more finely contextualized sociological research with broader theoretical arguments offered a detailed, yet expansive investigation of what is at stake in contemporary Marxist social theory. Furthermore, it allowed for discussion of “uneven and combined” notions of production and labor to expand beyond any exclusive disciplinary focus, leading to the productive interrogation of topics such as temporality, the phenomenology of everyday life, literary production, the capacity of cultural “difference” for both struggle and commodification, and the notion of “world literature.” In sum, “Global Marxism Today” yielded a detailed investigation of divergent contemporary Marxist understandings of “modernity” not readily available in limited and canon-based departmental course offerings.

South (to) South: Dialogues across Media

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The South to South reading group was originally a collaboration that began four years ago as the Caribbean Reading Group. Through it has changed both in focus and in its members over time, it has always been an important space for graduate students to read and discuss texts that in some way or another brought our interests together, whether it was Francophone literature, postcolonial theory, or revolutionary history. This year, the South to South Reading Group decided to move beyond the archipelagic and marginal geographies in which we have always grounded our research, to consider them as optimal points of encounter for dialogue. That is, in focusing on dialogues from one “South” to another, from one “East” to another, we hope to move beyond the inevitable and apparent interaction between binaries of center and periphery, between colonizer and colonized, to conversations along the margins, and among supposed peripheries.

The South to South Reading Group opened the fall semester adhering to the focus of “movement,” of people and of ideas. Members presented on their own writings, which we took as the principle critical piece for discussion, supplemented by a second primary text. We discussed Dany Laferrière and littérature sans frontières and Edouard Glissant’s Monsieur Toussaint (1961) through Marshall Smith and Neal Allar’s conference papers for the Haitian Studies Conference. Alex Lenoble shared a dissertation chapter written on Zong! (M. NourbeSe Philip, 2008), and Elise Finielz presented on a visual essay pending publication on the film Life on
Panth the influence of the Black Panthers on the Dalit Indian and Black American activism, more specifically and caste. She spoke about a revolutionary "South to introduced her latest research on the questions of race of the postcolonial debate in France. Claire Joubert then of translation, but also on the delay and marginalization English, and raised key issues not only on the question Bhabha.

The spring semester was oriented toward the media of film. In collaboration with a Society of Humanities postdoctoral scholar, Maria Flood, we organized a film event called “Humanizing Terror” that included the screening of Abderrahmane Sissako’s *Timbuktu* (2014) and a recent work called *Salafistes* (2016) directed by François Margolin. (Note: This was the first official screening of *Salafistes* in North America.) Afterwards, we were able to ask Margolin questions directly via Skype in a public conversation about his film project. By way of our workshop title, “Humanizing Terror,” we hoped to look at Salafism, a Sunni Muslim ideology, as an object of religious and political inquiry, and to hear religious leaders and jihadi militants speak from their point of view, perhaps for the first time on an American screen.

Returning to the idea of dialogues from one South to another, our year concluded with a workshop with Claire Joubert, a visiting professor from Paris 8, on her idea of transcolonialism, particularly articulated through the Dalits, a radical movement of "untouchables" in India. The workshop brought together two comparative projects she had been pursuing to highlight their transcolonial perspectives and common goals for a poetics of postcolonial critique. The first part of the discussion was devoted to the French reception of Homi Bhabha. *The Location of Culture* (1994), translated in French nearly thirteen years after its first publication in English, and raised key issues not only on the question of translation, but also on the delay and marginalization of the postcolonial debate in France. Claire Joubert then introduced her latest research on the questions of race and caste. She spoke about a revolutionary “South to South dialogue”: the mutual influence of anticolonial Indian and Black American activism, more specifically the influence of the Black Panthers on the Dalit Panthers. (Note: *Panth* in Sanskrit means “path” or “following,” so although the reference to the Black Panther movement is deliberate, the Dalit Panthers are also rooted in an Indian way of religious living.)

Thinking South to South was not only relevant within the academic context, but is a phenomenon we can see realized in radical movements that criticize certain social structures. While we each have our own intervention, we found through sharing texts, films, and discussing political movements, that our interventions may be connected in unexpected ways.

*Space, Place, Resistance, and Alternative Modernities in Latin America*

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We were motivated to create a reading list and academic group oriented around questions of space, place and resistance in Latin America. Although those ideas are presented in individual sections, the readings and overall theme was developed in a way to look at the tensions and synergies between each of those areas throughout our respective disciplinary, geographical and thematic areas of expertise. To do this, we collaborated on putting together a syllabus that addresses these interests and issues. We met every two weeks and rotated serving as discussants for different readings each week. We concluded the year with a two-day research workshop “Space, Place, and Resistance in Latin America” held between Cornell University and the University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass) on April 28–30, 2016. Participants from UMass included professor of political science Dr. Sonia E. Alvarez and five doctoral students from the disciplines of political science, anthropology and sociology.

*Thinking about Space and Place*

In our kick-off meeting, we discussed Lefebvre’s *Production of Space* and Massey’s *For Space*, two seminal works that helped us conceptualize resistance and alternatives. In particular, Massey helped us think beyond the dichotomy of space and place and rather to think dialectically about how the global and local are mutually constituted. In the article “Theorizing Sociospatial Relations”, Jessop, Brenner, and Jones provided a framework to operationalize research that took into account the multi-dimensionality of space. They divided space into four dimensions: territory, place, scale, and networks. We found this article useful for transposing theoretical insights into a research agenda. One of the real delights in our reading list was discussing Gordillo’s *Rubble*. In this book, the author engaged with Adorno’s concept of the negative dialectic to problematize Lefebvre’s emphasis on active construction of space. According to Gordillo, we need to pay attention to the destructiveness of the present, the ways in which particular places were reduced to rubble in order to produce other spaces. Finally, Brazilian geographer Porto
Gonçalves reminded us that space is not only produced from above, but also from below. He introduced us to the triad of territory (physical space), territorializations (ways of taking hold of that space), and territorialities (subjectivities made in taking hold of space). In this conceptual framework, a territory becomes the site of struggle among multiple territorialities that co-exist in tension.

Resistance
A key problematic that ran through our discussions and readings was the role of “resistance” in our respective projects. As an area of study made famous by James C. Scott’s writings on peasant life in Malaysia, resistance studies has a long and important history in the social sciences. We sought to build on this early work by attempting to find new approaches that take into account the complexities of Latin America. In his review article “A Case for Rethinking Resistance,” John Gledhill argues that while early frameworks drew criticism for ascribing a “single and fixed identity to subalterns,” they effectively challenged frequent distinctions made between “pre-political” forms of action and more overt political movements. (See New Approaches to Resistance in Brazil and Mexico, 2012) Our own research found that resistance has taken radically new forms, considering that many of the same social movements that inspired these early scholars have now become “institutionalized” into NGOs and even state functionaries, while others have pursued paths of autonomy and even separation from the state. Such complexities suggest exciting opportunities and challenges for resistance studies in Latin America.

Nature/Society Relations
Understanding the relationship of humans with nature helps us to conceptualize the notion of space, arguably in a nuanced manner in which nature plays a paramount role. The space needed to protect a particular species is different from another not only physically but in terms of energy (i.e. trophic levels), cultural and above all political. William Adams and Jon Hutton (“People, Parks and Poverty,” 2007) explained the political dimensions behind the creation of protected areas, whereas Brenda Baletti (“Saving the Amazon?,” 2014) deconstructed the neoliberal logic underlying sustainable development in the Amazon. This critique poses a variety of questions about the commodification of “nature” as a sort of transformed space to provide socio-economic development. Nature is constructed as a place isolated from human interaction. This imaginary helps to reinforce a system of exclusion. Environmental NGOs and the State legitimize this exclusion in the name of the “common good”. But this exclusion engenders its own forms resistance from the social actors that differ from these conceptions. For example, Eduardo Gudynas explained the emergence of new governance systems in the Andes, such as Buen Vivir in Ecuador, that involve a different ontological relation to nature (“Buen Vivir: Today’s Tomorrow,” 2011). Considering our research interests, one question becomes clear: how can we
engage with the materiality of nature in a way that takes into account its social construction? This is particularly important when certain ideas of nature are formulated, purified and harnessed to social action in ways that reveal profound inequalities in the power of different actors.

Concluding Remarks
The two-day workshop we hosted with UMass highlighted the centrality of space and place in the study of resistance in Latin America. This raised a broader question about the importance of geographical thought both here at Cornell University and UMass. In the next year, several of our members will convene with UMass doctoral students in the fall 2017 to review the progress of our research proposals and projects. Looking ahead, we hope to continue our collaboration as graduate students and to broaden our reach to the rest of the Cornell community by deepening and expanding our relationship with the ICM, the Polson Institute for Global Development and the Latin American Studies Program.

The Open Frame:
Montage in Filmic Narrative
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Lara Fresko, Department of History of Art and Visual Studies
Asli Menevse, Department of History of Art and Visual Studies
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Lauren van Haften-Schick, Department of History of Art and Visual Studies

The Open Frame group structured a series of workshops in which we paired a range of key texts on visuality with exemplary films from the canon. For each workshop participants read independently and meet for film screenings leading up to a final meeting that lends itself to a promising conversation between the visual and the written material. This model allowed for individual group members to take turns curating a workshop based on her academic and intellectual interests, which lent itself to collaboration, allowing participants to present their working research ideas and to solicit critical, interdisciplinary feedback from fellow group members. Simultaneously, participants were able to take away aspects of each workshop that are relevant to her work.

As a form of avant-garde, modernist aesthetics, montage allows for democratic coexistence, as the hierarchy of the contexts to which the fragments originally belonged to become irrelevant. Our collective readings on montage inescapably included a discussion of modernity, and its antagonistic sibling in the realm of aesthetics, modernism. Modernism, offers a cure to the experience of modernity that shatters the sensible experience into fragments, and montage as a modernist formal principle was seen by Walter Benjamin as a strategic tool, as demonstrated in his employment of the technique in One Way Street (1928) or the colossal Arcades Project (1927–1940, unfinished), to reconstruct the traumatically fragmented experiential world. We were excited to find this umbilical relationship between experience of everyday life under modernity and the principle of montage formulated in Sergei Eisenstein's treatise on film, “A Dialectical Approach to Film Form.” In this text, Eisenstein identifies the perceptual principle of montage not as sequential elements placed next to each other, but as superimposition of one impression on another. In this articulation, montage is mimicking the crisis in perception due to the speeding up of time and the fragmentation of space under the experience of modernity. The director takes advantage of this cognitive stress on modern psyche by adopting what Rosalind Krauss describes as the dialectic of October (1928): “alternation between documentary and formal space,” as evident in director's seamless move between abstraction and narration (“Montage October,” 1973). This, then led us to acknowledge montage's preference of non-linear logic over a linear one, which we found to be fundamentally important for our understanding of the technique.

Our workshop, “Montage of Revolution: Victory and Defeat” (1917–1968), allowed us to study the potentialities of montage's aesthetic principles. Montage, in conjunction with political context, can seize the “disillusionment” of the masses (Eisenstein's utopian promise), and can weave together illusions for the construction of new possibilities. Significantly, according to Eisenstein, it is the incongruence between individual fragments that assure the power of impression, not similarity and unity. Similarly, Chris Marker in his pseudo-documentarian “elegy” to the social movements of the late 1960s, Grin Without a Cat (1977) deployed a radical montage strategy with found footage of popular protests to visualize the gap between fiction and reality while at the same time fictionalizing popular media.

Marker provided a transition to our other workshop, “The Medium is the Message: Media Intervention and Critical Documentary” (1968–1978). This session considered forms of montage in media intervention that were enabled by the introduction of hand-held video cameras and in-camera editing in the late 1960s. Underpinned by Marshall McLuhan's famous posit that “the medium is the message,” the selected videos and texts for this session sought to question what montage as both formal and tactical technique enabled for critiques of television and news media. For this particular meeting, we started with Haskell Wexler's 1969 film Medium Cool, an in-part fictional and factual account of the racial and class divisions in late 1960s Chicago that ends with the
film's actors and crew caught in the actual midst of the riots at the 1968 Democratic convention. Here montage takes a broader definition beyond literally collaging existing or disconnected filmic moments; instead, it encompasses both cinema verité technique, and more importantly, is also the lens through which we chose to interpret Wexler’s use of both familiar shots and spectacular news-worthy moments (the opening car crash may as well be footage of any car crash we have ever seen reported). It all reminded us Chris Marker’s disruption of the authority of the historical narrative. We returned to Walter Benjamin, who touted techniques of montage for their “special, perhaps even total rights” as a progressive form that “interrupts the context into which it is inserted” and thus “counteracts illusion” (as quoted in Buck-Morss, Dialectics of Seeing, 1989). Wexler’s film was coupled with the media art collective Ant Farm’s groundbreaking Media Burn and The Eternal Frame (both 1975). The Eternal Frame is a re-enactment of the Kennedy assassination in Dallas, TX, where spectators are documented exclaiming how “real” the scene seems, just like they saw on television, and becoming more real with each reenactment. This was grouped with film theorist Gene Youngblood’s observations on montage as abstraction, and television as a homogenized format, suggesting that montage may be taken up as a subversive technique. Peter Burger, comes to a similar conclusion as our directors and authors did in his Theory of the Avant-Garde (1984), “argues that the parts of the montage “are no longer signs pointing to reality, they are reality” and this the political potential of the form, showing “a new type of engaged art becomes possible.”

With these conclusions in mind, we turned to Iranian Cinema, especially drawing from David MacDougall’s work on the corporality of imagery. In this context, our reading group thought through bodily relationship in filmmaking and in filmic montage in conjunction with experimental documentary, an overarching theme from Eisenstein and Chris Marker to Ant Farm collective. Through this lens, we kept in mind our bodies as viewers, connecting to the viscerality of our differentiated and shared experiences in viewing these films. Some of us noted our emotive experience of director Abbas Kiarostami’s montage in his renowned film, Close Up (1990), in which we established confusing affinities with the film’s protagonist, who plays himself re-enacting his fraudulent impersonation of famed director, Mohsen Makhmalbaf. Among a younger generation of Iranian documentarian filmmakers, Firouze Khosrovani’s film Rough Cut (2008) cuts between shots of mannequins that are themselves cut and dismembered, deploying radical feminist politics in her montage work. Instances such as this reinscribe the centrality of filmmaker and film-viewer positionality in experiences of montage.

Finally, Omer Fast’s film adaptation of the acclaimed novel Remainder by Tom McCarthy offered an opportunity to study montage’s narrative functions more closely. Remainder (2015), very simply put, focuses on a
man’s obsession with framing up, and then living inside, precisely reenacted scenarios culled from his memory and peopled with hired “reenactors,” who each perform a single task, repeatedly, within their respective confined spaces. Unlike in the novel, where the main character repeatedly and strictly forbade the use of cameras to monitor these scenes, Fast’s version is rife with them, and their cumulative montage effect exemplifies the filmmaker’s interest in “the way that experiences turn into memory, and the way memories become stories, mediated, they become recorded and broadcasted and things like this.” The protagonist does not, and cannot, watch the many separate acts occurring around him, but his sense of place is achieved through the acts being carefully monitored through closed-circuit TVs by his hired “facilitator.” The “reenacted” experiences are mediated and maintained by surveillance; in turn, our cinematic viewpoint shifts from the relatively “uncut” main film camera, the realist narrative views of the acts, to the CCTV’s grainy, observational views and to the main monitor, upon which all of the views are visible, including those of the main character. The film hearkens to Wexler’s and Ant Farm’s blurring of the lines between real events, caught on camera, and reenacted, staged simulacra. By making the grains visible and switching our viewpoint from the filmic narrative to the surveilling montage, Fast’s technique challenges the realist’s thinking on the aesthetic and political divides between that which is lived and that which is observed.

Reading Sensibly: Rancière and the Politics of the Sensible

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Throughout the year our group has undertaken a number of related tasks in order to deepen and contribute to the work of its members and their various projects, all of which have been oriented around Jacques Rancière’s wide-ranging contributions to the fields of political philosophy, aesthetics, and contemporary debates about the distribution of the sensible within, and the conceptualization of, politicized or depoliticized public spaces. In the end of year report we deliver today we have included testimonies as to how each meeting and each aspect of our readings have influenced individual members of our reading group.

In setting out to formulate this reading group we had been interested in the locus of French thought from which Rancière’s work derived and particularly appreciated the way it was situated within the contemporary terrain of thought by his insistence upon the transformative character of aesthetics. His deep investment in the radical equality of intellect stands in contrast with the modernist distinction between scientific discourse and ideology and its suspicion of modes of populist collective engagement. This contrast has led him to develop an exploration of regimes of aesthetic perception and intelligibility, and in turn to fundamentally rethink the nature of politics, the people, and the modes of perception, experience and affect that structure what Rancière calls “the distribution of the sensible,” the way in which we understand, relate to, and perceive the possibilities of our worlds.

In the spirit of Rancière, we began our meetings in the fall with an egalitarian spirit, in which we would each assign two texts to read in conjunction, one text by Rancière’s and another by a contemporary author who spoke to the ways in which we’d like to engage with Rancière’s work.

Our first reading was From Politics to Aesthetics (2004) written by Rancière himself and weaving together his diverse projects. Our intention was to map out the various aspects of his work that brought us together in which the interdisciplinary nature of our group really shone through. We had all brought in two ideas for the weeks that we would like to organize. Of these proposals, the initial proposal by Michelle Tong, our resident scientist, informed our scheduling and her presence influenced the way our other discussions were dislocated from a purely theoretical realm. Instead, we were pushed to make Rancière sensible in the realm of the sciences as well.

Our next few meetings revolved around the reading of The Philosopher and His Poor (2004) which was assigned alongside Jason Frank’s “Logical Revolts: Jacques Rancière and Political Subjectivization” in Political...
Social relations in and of Africa are being reconfigured in the 21st century as a new set of actors contest political power structures, re-imagine African histories, and forge alternative visions of development on the continent. While in the 20th century it was possible to imagine that Euro-American institutions dominated discourses on African societies and their desirable futures, today this hegemony has been fractured by new actors and processes. Today’s discursive landscape is characterized by increasing social differentiation within African countries, movements of people and ideas across social and geographic boundaries, deepening economic linkages, and profound shifts in the global geopolitical order. New actors are playing increasingly visible and assertive roles, including transnational diaspora, business networks, new religious movements, urban youth, rural producers, and organizations championing South-South cooperation. Yet this challenging of the post-colonial order tells us little about the historical significance, trajectory, and implications of new actors and processes. Building knowledge that responds to the contemporary requires thinking comparatively and connecting emerging empirical findings with social theory.

This reading group proposes that new actors in African society and development call for renewed social theory; in order to analyze current political, economic, and cultural shifts and assess the roles of particular actors, we need to re-examine social theory of and for African societies and states. Rather than dismissing historical theorizations as out-of-date, we propose a dual approach: reading contemporary trends with a view to historical continuities and disjunctures (for example, comparing contemporary discourses about social and economic transformation with late-colonial projects of modernization), while also examining how the contemporary sheds new light on historically-situated bodies of theory (for example, highlighting contestations already underway during periods of colonial and post-colonial ‘order’). Through this reading, we will look for salient questions that are under-addressed in classic theory. A historicized and comparative approach will help us to identify how social theories exist in convergence, tension, and resonance with contemporary social dynamics on the continent.

**The ICM Graduate Reading Group Program is supporting six groups in 2016–2017. The groups’ proposals follow.**

**Africa’s Contested Future: New Actors and Social Theory in African Politics, Societies, and Development**

Janet Smith, Department of Development Sociology  
Samel Ndungu, Law School  
Alex Dyzenhaus, Department of Government  
Amanda Hickey, Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management  
Cosmas Emezie, Law School  
Conall Cash, Department of Romance Studies  
Ewan Robinson, Department of Development Sociology

Social relations in and of Africa are being reconfigured in the 21st century as a new set of actors contest political power structures, re-imagine African histories, and forge alternative visions of development on the continent. While in the 20th century it was possible to imagine that Euro-American institutions dominated discourses on African societies and their desirable futures, today this hegemony has been fractured by new actors and processes. Today’s discursive landscape is characterized by increasing social differentiation within African countries, movements of people and ideas across social and geographic boundaries, deepening economic linkages, and profound shifts in the global geopolitical order. New actors are playing increasingly visible and assertive roles, including transnational diaspora, business networks, new religious movements, urban youth, rural producers, and organizations championing South-South cooperation. Yet this challenging of the post-colonial order tells us little about the historical significance, trajectory, and implications of new actors and processes. Building knowledge that responds to the contemporary requires thinking comparatively and connecting emerging empirical findings with social theory.

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**GRADUATE READING GROUPS**  
**2016/2017 RECIPIENTS**
Difference in Unity: Legacies of Enlightenment Cosmopolitanism on Conceptualizations of Relationality and Difference in Postcolonial Thought

Jonathan Davenport, Department of Comparative Literature
Kaitlin Emmanuel, Department of Asian Studies
Lara Fresko, Department of History of Art and Visual Studies
Aslihan Gunhan, Architecture, Art, and Planning
Nazli Konya, Department of Government
Aslihan Meneşe, Department of History of Art and Visual Studies
Jacob Swanson, Department of Government

Our group seeks to understand the influences of Enlightenment Cosmopolitanism on how postcolonial thought—namely the work of Franz Fanon, Edouard Glissant, and other contemporary thinkers following up on their work—have theorized and challenged the concepts relationality and difference. While open to the new directions that such interactions can bring, we currently imagine our reading group to confront the centrality of Enlightenment Cosmopolitanism for liberal thought and empire through Immanuel Kant’s “Perpetual Peace” (1795). A key innovation of the group will be to then further approach the legacies of Kant’s work, and other formative texts of liberal/colonial empire, first through two key Western thinkers critical of this tradition who also are vital for examining relationality and difference: Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida. After that, we plan to complicate these essential postcolonial thinkers and their specific work on relationality and difference: Franz Fanon and Edouard Glissant. All of these readings will be supplemented with secondary readings.

Accordingly, the more specific contemporary problems that motivate our readings include a concern with how to re-coordinate relationalities within a homogenizing market-world, which employs “powers that organize life, even the powers that differentially dispose lives to precarity as part of a broader management of populations through governmental and nongovernmental means, that establish a set of measures for the differential valuation of life itself” (Butler 2015, 196). The extension of market rationality (i.e. practices, discourses, norms of behavior that are properties of the market) to all spheres of existence, where it construes all social agents as accountable, entrepreneurial, and (recently) financialized subjects that are ranked, rated, and evaluated in a competitive environment, is the contemporary normative ground that determines the terms of relation and the negotiation of difference in both Western and, increasingly, postcolonial contexts. What we aim with this reading group is, beginning with Kant and working our way to Glissant, to find ways of challenging those terms, and more importantly exploring the ways of negotiating the terms of our cohabitation or belonging together—to explore relational norms that would govern our collective life in forms of relationality that always already presuppose navigations of difference.

Indeed, the theory of relation that Glissant articulates is also related to his desire to promote a concept of Antilanité, Caribbean-ness, which provides the perfect destination for our shared preoccupation with multilingualism and cultural diversity. Diversity becomes the enabler of Poetics of Relation (1990), as its celebration and recognition will be approached as a way of seeing the Other as equal while maintaining a relation of difference. In this regard, diversity is imagined by Glissant as ‘the quantifiable totality of every possible difference’ and attributed the position to be the motor driving universal energy, and productively expand the Enlightenment Cosmopolitanism, as it further transforms the duality of Hegelian dialectic into a generously inclusive multicity, just as the conflict between opposites as the driving force is replaced by affirmation and working together of the differences.

Hence, a shared focus on how the concepts of relationality and difference work in contemporary postcolonial and neoliberal contexts structures the work of each member of our group. We include graduate students from AAP Architecture Art Planning, History of Art and Visual Studies, South Asian Studies, Comparative Literature, and Government.
**Ghostly Dystopias: Colonial History through Speculative Fiction**

Gabriella Friedman, Department of English  
Stephen Kim, Department of English  
Ji Hyun Lee, Department of English  
Jahyon Park, Department of Asian Studies  
Vinh Pham, Department of Comparative Literature  
Aye Thant, Department of Asian Studies  
Brianna Thompson, Department of English  
Kelsey Utne, Department of History

This group will investigate the currents of colonial history in late twentieth and twenty-first century speculative fiction. Coined by writer Robert Heinlein in 1847 to refer to science fiction’s capacity to extrapolate from known facts, the term “speculative fiction” has come to signify a range of genres, including science fiction, fantasy, alternate history, supernatural fiction, and magical realism, that explore what does not exist in our current known world—the what if? In the past few years, critical works such as André M. Carrington’s Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction (2015) and Ingrid Thaler’s Black Atlantic Speculative Fictions: Octavia E. Butler, Jewelle Gomez, and Nalo Hopkinson (2010) have insightfully theorized race through speculation, while anthologies like Grace Dillon’s Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction (2012) have suggested that speculative fiction can be a useful way to conceptualize and resist settler colonialism.

Taking as our starting point the critical thrust of the extrapolative and the exploratory, we will hone in on two strands common in speculative fiction—the figure of the ghost and the trope of the dystopic future—to ask several intertwined questions: How do ghosts (literal or otherwise) fit into futuristic or dystopian fiction? How do speculative texts think through history, especially historical trauma and atrocity? What is the connection, in other words, between the spectral and the speculative? And if we take the ghost, further, as a liminal figure, between life and death as well as between disparate time frames, how might the ghost help us to think about identity, hybridity, and transnational movement in the context of a (post)colonial world? Finally, how do ghosts and dystopian futures, both tropes that involve temporal displacement, speak to the temporality of race and colonialism? What new insight and understanding does this temporal speculation grant us?

By way of these questions, and by way of a range of texts including poetry, short stories, novels, and critical works, we hope to theorize the relationship between history and speculation. We will consider how speculative genres might be uniquely situated to look back at the colonial past as well as look ahead to the potentially postcolonial future. In particular, we take seriously the idea that speculative texts (especially ones which reconfigure the past or the future) should be treated as objects of historical inquiry that might usefully rethink (post)colonial historiography. Bringing together approaches from British and American studies, comparative literature, Asian studies, and history, we will also consider how speculative fiction, which often questions our demarcations of the world into units such as continents and countries, helps us (dis)locate colonialism in a global context. Our chosen texts, from a wide range of writers, some well-known and some less so, are bound by a concern for thinking colonialism across time-spaces, and for imagining unexpected possibilities for the future.

**Global Seams and Frictions: Rethinking Borders and Boundary Making**

Rachel Odhner, Department of Anthropology  
Hilary Faxon, Department of Development Sociology  
Maggie Jack, Department of Information Science  
Jennifer Goldstein, Department of Science and Technology Studies  
Lauren Kilgour, Department of Information Science  
Brian Clarke, Department of Science and Technology Studies  
Fernando Galeana Rodriguez, Department of Development Sociology

Amidst the discourse and realities of “seamless” globalization and real-time interconnectivity, this reading group takes as a starting point the question of borders in the contemporary world. We will explore this theme by studying various types of borders and processes of boundary making and unmaking—(geo)political, sociocultural, environmental, material—across space, time, and academic disciplines. In conversation with scholars who have investigated border as method (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013), the production of space (Lefebvre 1991, Massey 2013), boundaries between ecological zones (Helmreich 2009, Rozwadowski 2005), and distinctions between bodies and social groups (Barth 1994, Barth 1969, Tucker 2012), we consider how borders are created, maintained, contested, and dismantled in our era.

Taking border as method (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) as our departure point, we will first inquire into border not only as a research object but also as an epistemic framework. We then inquire into disciplinary borders and interdisciplinarity (Gieryn 1999, Jones 2008, Lamont and Molnár 2002, Star and Griesemer 1989). How do the borders between our academic disciplines, and our imposition of academic categories, contribute...
to conceptual breaks in our understanding of the world and its borders? Alternately, what are the possibilities for scholarship in redrawing boundaries in meaningful and politically effective ways?

We will consider borders and processes of boundary creation, maintenance, contestation, and destruction in spatial, technical, and historical terms. We will consider how history itself is divided and bound in particular ways, and how certain temporal boundaries inform our understandings and theories of history (Carter 1987). Geopolitical borders, and of the nation-state in particular, will be another central theme of our investigation. How do such borders figure into geopolitical imaginaries, shape nationalist versus globalist discourses, and how are they experienced by people in their everyday lives and struggles, for example through walls and fences (Alvarez 1995)? We will then delve into reformulations of the classic division between the rural and the urban. In considering the city, we will be drawing on the theoretical lenses of architecture (de Certeau 2002) and urban ethnography (Farquhar and Zhang 2012) to examine the everyday physical boundaries of our built environment. We will also explore how infrastructures bound off social and technical as well as global and local systems (Star and Ruhleder 1996).

Turning to the “natural” environment, we explore the notion of ecotones—the transition area between two ecological communities—such as that between land and sea (Rozwadoski 2005; Hau'ofa 1994). How do scientists contribute to our understandings of these boundaries? And how do scientific discourses and representations of these ecotones map onto a nature/culture dualism or indicate the unsustainability of such a binary? We then turn to an exploration of how social boundaries are built between bodies through racial, ethnic and gender distinctions (Tucker 2012) and at interfaces between human and nonhuman animals (Alaimo 2010).

Guiding our investigation of borders is the notion of borderlessness (Jackson 2005), which is invoked by discourses of global commerce and trade, earth stewardship, and the connection made possible by information and communication technologies. Amid these discourses of global connection and inclusion, how are borders contested in new ways, and how can sites of friction in an age of globalization (Tsing 2004) help us understand how the world’s borders get dismantled, rebuilt, and reimagined? How do new technological zones (Barry 2006) and digital worlds (Burrell 2012) bring the world together in new ways and also maintain longstanding divisions? With this comparative lens, and through motifs such as interdisciplinarity, ecotones, and infrastructure, our investigation will shed light on the changing role of borders in a global world, and the role of academic inquiry in understanding these transformations.

### Indigeneity, Creolization, Fugitivity: Tensions in Diasporic Thought

**Marquis Bey**, Department of English  
**Jackqueline Frost**, Department of Romance Studies  
**Katryn Evinson**, Department of Romance Studies  
**Magdala Jeudy**, Department of Romance Studies  
**Mayowa Willoughby**, Department of Africana Studies  
**Kristen Wright**, Department of Africana Studies

As scholars working in Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanophone, and Turkish-language literature covering the Americas, as well as Caribbean, African, and Middle Eastern spaces, the terminology and methodology of Diasporic Studies informs each of our approaches to literary and critical thought. In this reading group, we intend to survey the works and schemas associated with three major axes of analysis: Indigeneity, Creolization and Fugitivity. While at times these frameworks are employed in tandem, we observe more readily the ways in which they exclude the terms of each other, as they concern anti-colonial and postcolonial cultural production.

Diasporic subjects may not be indigenous to the lands to which they move, but they are in fact indigenous to a somewhere. Or, perhaps, more specifically, they do in fact originate in a somewhere. The relationship to this somewhere, though, is often left outside of critical engagement. It is as if the point of departure is relevant insofar as it provides the starting point from which to measure a subject’s distance from their own authenticity. However, indigeneity provides a way to think proximity and distance not to authenticity but to power. Its invocation is a necessary part of understanding the complex ways power unevenly constitutes us all. Thinking indigeneity as a praxis—rather than a mere qualifier of relative origin—is a necessary part of an intellectually honest diaspora discourse.

Relatedly, it is helpful to think about the conceptual modality of fugitivity—described by Fred Moten as, among other things, a disruptive, iconoclastic pathogenic force perturbing normativity; an “original lawlessness” that is predisposed to break hegemonic laws and “is immediately disrupted by an incapacity for law, an inability both to intend the law and intend its transgression.” What happens, then, when those diasporic subjects, originating somewhere, transgress that somewhere and their some “here” through their movement through liminal spaces, through their praxis of indigeneity in, we might say, sites of foreignness? We might argue, indexing Moten’s fugitivity as “The air of the thing that escapes enframing,” that diasporic subjects open up new possibilities for subjectivity, for being and becoming. Fugitives un-fix normative categories and
present the very opportunity for possibility—and, as Judith Butler has made clear, “possibility is not a luxury; it is as crucial as bread.”

While the diasporic referents are always origin, filiation, and exile, creolization occasions an understanding of diaspora that accommodates aleatory and non-cooperative historical exchanges, such as métissage. For Glissant, contamination rather than autonomy and origin provide a way of thinking the reality of racial confrontation in the history of Atlantic World colonization. From the philosophical framework of cultural autonomy it is difficult to speak of “cultures, whose composition did not result from a union of “norms” but, rather, was built in the margins…thrust headlong into the world by necessity, oppression, anguish, greed…” (Poetics, 91). The highest value of refused creolization is to organize and dispense existence and non-existence (which is to say social life and social death).

We are interested in interrogating both longstanding and ascendant conceptual frameworks in Diasporic Studies pursuant of what they facilitate, foster, negate, foreclose, or confound, as well as the material and philosophical conditions of these frameworks. By analyzing the contours and the limits of different methodological approaches, we hope to gain a deeper discursive fluency for thinking the material and metaphysical determinations of slavery, apartheid, and colonization across our respective domains.

The New Wounded: Trauma Theory Today

Valeria Dani, Department of Romance Studies
Ji Hyun Lee, Department of English
Gustavo Llarull, Department of Romance Studies
Nasrin Olla, Department of English
Fernando Galeana Rodriguez, Department of Development Sociology
Katherine Thorsteinson, Department of English

Our reading group centers on foundational paradigmatic shifts in trauma theory today. We therefore propose an investigation into the following three major interventions in trauma studies: postcolonial perspectives, theories of diasporic identity and neurological philosophy. Traditionally, trauma theory has privileged European contexts and examples—the Holocaust being the most prevalent. Furthermore, there has been a general privileging of catastrophic or exceptional events and little attention has been paid to quotidian, mundane or everyday forms of trauma. Turning to the postcolonial, we ask the following questions: how does what Achille Mbembe calls the “time of entanglement” intersect with thinking around traumatic histories? How do we read psychoanalysis as itself entangled with a colonial project and immanently providing a language to think critically about that colonial project? How does the temporality of traumatic histories affect our understanding of race, embodiment and gender?

Catherine Malabou, a student of Jacques Derrida, has been a leading figure in the effort to understand the relation between neurology, philosophy and psychoanalysis. In her book The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage (2012) she has argued that the encounter between psychoanalysis and neurology calls for a consideration of “identity without precedent.” What, Malabou asks, can we make of the neurological wound that emerges without a preceding drive? How can we understand wounding—such as severe brain damage—that has no capacity to return?

Turning to the question of trauma theory and diaspora, we ask: do Freudian insights on trauma provide us with a language to think about non-European diasporic forms of identity? Here we are inspired by Edward Said’s suggestion in Freud and the Non-European (2003) that within Freudian thinking we find an aspiration to conceive of ‘identity without repression.’ Said finds in Freud’s Moses and Monotheism (1939) a possibility to think about Jewish identity not as formed by or constituted through the repression of its otherness—the murder of the Non-Jewish and Egyptian born founder Moses—but as the inability to repress this otherness at its foundation. Instead of reading repression as having a constituting capacity in psychoanalytic thought Said pushes us to see a radically diasporic tradition in which psychoanalysis seeks an unbinding and undoing of its founding repressive narrative. Similarly, Hortense Spillers in her essay “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” (Diacritics, 1987) reminds us that the ‘body and flesh’ is always becoming undone and it is this unbecoming that marks the diasporic afterlife of slavery. How do we think about traumatic experience at the level of the body and flesh? How do these shifts allow us to reread Freud’s work? What voice emerges when we think of psychoanalysis as actively seeking the destruction of its own foundational frame?
The Institute for Comparative Modernities seeks to provide greater opportunities for graduate students from across the campus to engage each other through interdisciplinary and collaborative research working groups. To that end, the Institute provides meeting space as well as seed money for the establishment and the maintenance of a small number of graduate student research working groups each year.

**PROPOSAL GUIDELINES**

The Institute for Comparative Modernities invites proposals that include a 500-word statement of intent, a bibliography, and a list of the names and departmental affiliations of the proposed group members, along with the curriculum vitae of each participant. Cross-disciplinarity must be an integral part of both the design of the research proposal and the composition of the group; applications from groups composed of members from a single department will not be approved. We imagine most groups will consist of six to eight members. A minimum of six members is required to be eligible for the subvention. This program, which is announced annually, provides both a subvention of $1,000 that can be used for books, copying, and/or bringing outside speakers to campus, as well as a comfortable, even congenial, meeting space at the ICM, housed in the Toboggan Lodge. We expect the sustained collaboration to culminate in a public presentation (oral or written) at the end of the award year. The subvention covers one year, but renewal may be possible under certain circumstances. It is likely that academic year 2016–17 will see four to five awards.

**PROPOSAL SUBMISSIONS**

Please include all of the following:

- 500-word statement of intent.
- Bibliography.
- List of the names, departmental affiliations, and e-mail addresses of the proposed group members, along with the curriculum vitae of each participant.

Submit proposals to Alexis Boyce, ICM program coordinator: ab449@cornell.edu.

**Deadline:** Friday, April 15, 2016

**ICM INTELLECTUAL VISION AND OBJECTIVES**

The Institute for Comparative Modernities (ICM) addresses a key problem in the study of modern culture and society: the transnational history of modernity and its global scope. A broad range of scholarship over the last few decades has contested and complicated the two primary dimensions of the received narrative of modernity: that it arose strictly within the confines of Europe; and that its extension outside Europe was a matter of simple diffusion and imitation. What is emerging instead is an account of modernity as a global process in which deep and multifarious interconnections have created complementary cultural formations.

The Institute is dedicated to the study of modernity in such a transnational and comparative perspective. Its primary emphasis will fall on neglected or under-studied articulations of modernity outside of the historically constituted hegemonic spaces of Europe and the United States, but it will also give serious attention to conflicts and complexities within the West.

Inadequate understandings of the complex history of modernity have led to simplistic and untenable positions that unknowingly repeat colonialism’s ideological juxtapositions of “us” and “them,” with modernity (and all the positive connotations of historical progress that accrue to the term) all on one side and inscrutable backwardness all on the other. This results in ghettoized scholarship that is damaging to all.

The standard equation of modernity with the West needs to be problematized and opened up to comparative examination. The Institute hopes to galvanize work in this direction by encouraging cross-disciplinary collaborative research that advances a genuinely global analysis of modernity that is also empirically faithful to geographical and historical specificity. By bringing attention to less frequently studied aesthetic and social practices from non-Western and immigrant communities, the Institute hopes to correct accounts of modernity as primarily Western in origin and dynamics.
Alexis Boyce is the program coordinator for the Institute for Comparative Modernities. She received her B.A. in British and American literature from Wells College and her M.A. in gender and cultural studies from Simmons College, and continues to take courses in the French and Arabic languages, international relations, and human rights whenever she has time. She previously worked at Harvard Law School as the International Legal Studies program officer and the Institute for African Development at Cornell University as the outreach and publications coordinator.