

Calgary Institute for the Humanities
NEWSLETTER



SPRING 2024



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Spring 2024 Director's Report

Although the academic year has not yet come to an end, and we're still looking forward to our 43rd annual community forum, it has been a great year so far for our public talks, with record levels of attendance. Two talks last fall attracted enthusiastic crowds to the Gallery Hall at the TFDL: the McCready Lecture, given by Dr. Courtnay Konshuh, and a Resident Fellows Lecture by Dr. Anthony Camara on "Neural Netfics: Science Fiction Stories for your Posthuman Family."

In January, we held the first ever Egmont Lee Founders' Lecture at the Taylor Institute. This lecture, which will be given annually by a CIH fellow, was made possible by a generous gift from the family of Egmont Lee. Dr. Lee was a professor of history at the University of Calgary, and a driving force behind the foundation of the CIH in 1976. He went on to serve as its second director. Lee was a scholar of medieval and Renaissance Rome, looking in particular at the role of immigrants to the city. As an immigrant himself, he was sensitive to the challenges immigrants face, and one of his projects later in his career involved having undergraduates from the university provide information to high schools about the different immigrant communities in our city.

The inaugural Egmont Lee Founders' Lecture was given by Dr. Matthew Croombs, an assistant professor of Communications, Media and Film. Another of Dr. Lee's interests was

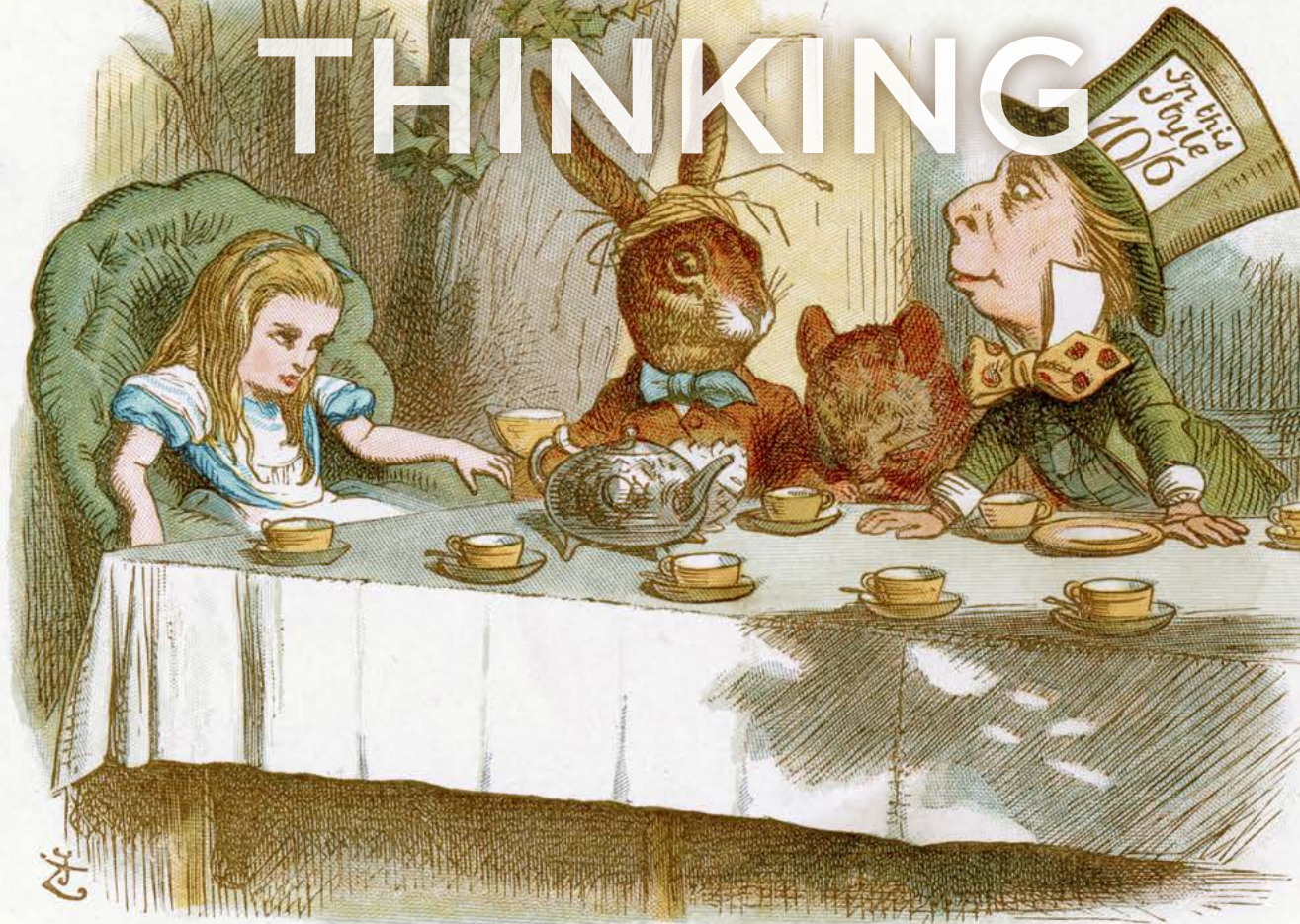


dissent, and so it was fitting that Dr. Croombs' lecture looked at the career of the controversial film director René Vautier, best known for his documentaries about the Algerian War. This year's Naomi Lacey Memorial Lecture, given by Dr. Martin Wagner, was held at the beautiful theatre in C-Space, with a reception generously provided by the Lacey Family. You can read about the subject of the lecture in the pages below, as well as the subject of our Applied Ethics Lecture, "Towards an Ethics of Belonging," given by Dr. Agnes Tam. That lecture took place in March at the Calgary Central Library; all three lectures this term attracted audiences of over a hundred people.

We are very grateful to the Lee Family for adding to our suite of public lectures, and to all of our donors who make the work we do possible. A special thank-you as well to long-

time supporter of the CIH, Valerie Seaman, who made a special gift last year that will support the Calgary Atlas Project. If you'd like to learn more about how you can support the work of the CIH, you can contact me or Cathy Billington, Director of Development for the Faculty of Arts. As I write, our 43rd Community Seminar will soon be upon us. This year's seminar takes on one of the most pressing social and political issues of our time, the rise of conspiracy thinking. Speakers from Canada and the United States will reflect on the history of conspiracy thinking and how social media may have provided new avenues and new audiences for the spread of misinformation. I hope that you'll be able to join us at what will be, as usual, a lively and informed community discussion on May 10.

CONSPIRACY THINKING



The Calgary Institute for the Humanities presents its 43rd Annual Community Forum on May 10, 2024.

Conspiracy thinking has a long history, dating back at least as far as the Middle Ages, and often connected with anti-Semitism. The nineteenth century saw a rise in belief in conspiracies such as international bankers controlling world politics, and the twentieth century witnessed an explosion of theories about extraterrestrials (these would merge in a theory concerning Jewish space lasers causing forest fires in California).

In recent years, however, it seems that conspiracy thinking is spreading further, faster and with more effect due to

social media, and we see its effects in the world: conspiracy thinking was part of the January 6, 2021 insurrection in the United States and it fueled the trucker convoy that besieged Ottawa in 2022. Are we in a new age of conspiracy thinking? Has social media simply amplified conspiracy thinking that would have spread through other channels in the past, or is there something new and different about the internet-driven conspiracies? Is conspiracy thinking an understandable response to certain social conditions, or is it pathological? Why do some conspiracies have such long lives, in spite of repeated attempts to debunk them? What is the appeal of conspiracy thinking?

Guest Speakers

Kay Burns, MFA, is a multidisciplinary artist, curator, and researcher living in Moh'kinstsis / Calgary whose practice includes installation, performance art, sculpture, photography, audio, and other media. Much of her work over the past couple of decades attests to her strong interest in the intersection of art and museum practices. Her work questions the authority of information and has included performance lectures, alternative history tours (as performances and as locative media), and the creation of a parafictional museum.

Her hybrid interests have also led to research/curatorial work in heritage museums, and within this presentation she revisits research undertaken while she was the 2023 Historian in Residence at the Calgary Public Library.

Dr. Matthew Hayes is an educator, writer, and filmmaker. He teaches philosophy, politics, and English at Northern Lakes College. For his PhD, which he completed in 2019, he wrote a history of Canada's UFO investigation, published as the book *Search for the Unknown: Canada's UFO Files and the Rise of Conspiracy Theory*. He researches "unorthodox" beliefs and conflicts with the state, including conspiracy theories, UFOs and the supernatural, satirical political movements, and the history of Cold War espionage. Hayes is an interdisciplinary scholar who approaches the study of conspiracy theory as a mechanism for coping with unfulfilled emotional needs and the effects of a disenchanting world. His "favourite" conspiracy theory is the moon landing hoax. As much as he wants to, he does not believe aliens have visited Earth.

Dr. Donald Netolitzky is the Complex Litigant Management Counsel for the Alberta Court of King's bench, where he assists in management and responses to abusive litigants and litigation. Prior to working in law, Donald was a biological defence researcher and a biology and biochemistry college instructor. Alberta appointed Donald as King's Counsel in 2022. He has published eighteen academic papers documenting the history, nature, and implications of the pseudolaw phenomenon in Canada. In 2020, Donald

completed a LLM thesis that was the first statistically valid population study of a Canadian self-represented litigant population: all self-represented litigants who initiated Supreme Court of Canada proceedings in 2017. That investigation then expanded with ten follow-up quantitative investigation publications that further characterize Canadian appellate litigation and self-represented litigant activities.

Dr. Whitney Phillips is an Assistant Professor of Digital Platforms and Media Ethics in the School of Journalism and Communication at the University of Oregon. She has published three academic books exploring digital culture, political communication, and journalism. Her latest academic book is *You Are Here: A Field Guide for Navigating Polarized Speech, Conspiracy Theories, and Our Polluted Media Landscape* (MIT Press, 2021), which she adapted in 2023 as a media ethics guide for teens, *Share Better and Stress Less: A Guide to Thinking Ecologically about Social Media* (Candlewick Press/MIT Teen). Her current co-authored book project focuses on the historical fusing and contemporary consequences of evangelical and secular rightwing media in the US.

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Alice sighed wearily. "I think you might do something better with the time," she said, "than waste it in asking riddles that have no answers."



Personal Well-Being and the Welfare of the World in the *Mahābhārata*

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The *Mahābhārata* is an ancient South Asian epic, dating from the early centuries of the Common Era or earlier. It might be the longest work of fiction in the history of world literature at 100,000 verses. I've still not read the whole thing, but I've dwelled in certain passages for a year or two at a time, always noticing new implications and connections.

The central story revolves around two sides of a family—and two sets of first cousins in particular—who eventually end up in a massive war that is said to kill over one billion people. Only nine of the warriors survive. At the end of the war, in the 12th book, titled the *Śāntiparvan* (*The Book of Peace*), the king-in-waiting, Yudhishtira, grieves the

massive loss of life and suffers acute guilt over his own role in bringing about the genocide.

Yudhishtira resolves to abandon the kingship and become a renunciate rather than fulfill his obligations as king. This means he will live in the forest on seeds and fruits, homeless, or live as an itinerant, begging daily alms.

Yudhiṣṭhira takes this path to promise the alleviation of his suffering. Part of the solution relates to the eventual attainment of some highest state - either heaven or liberation - entirely devoid of pain. Another element involves avoiding further harm to others and thereby precluding the accumulation of additional demerit ("bad karma") that would afflict him in the future. The more immediate component of the plan, however, is to eliminate desire and attain the renunciate's perfect impartiality (*nirdvandva*) toward earthly states of affairs - including life and death. This ought to resolve his debilitating grief and insulate him from further despair.

His family, friends, and a series of wandering ascetics respond. They outline at least a dozen arguments *against* renunciation, and in favor of serving as king. The most prominent of these arguments are focused on Yudhiṣṭhira's obligations to others. Only as king and householder can Yudhiṣṭhira perform the great sacrifices that sustain the cosmos, repay his debts to gods, teachers, and ancestors, cultivate the prosperity of the kingdom, keep his promises to family, and so on. In the end, Yudhiṣṭhira seems convinced. He assumes the kingship after all and performs his *dharma* (right action in accord with personal obligations) as king.

This passage might be understood in terms of the tension between self-concern and concern for others. Yudhiṣṭhira's prudential concerns about his own suffering seem to weigh in favor of renunciation. These concerns are overridden, however, by the sheer



weight of those moral considerations relating to the welfare of the world.

This way of reading the early chapters of the *Śāntiparvan* conceals a less obvious tension, however, between two divergent ideals enjoined by the immediate family. Yudhiṣṭhira's wife Draupadī and his two older

brothers, Bhīma and Arjuna, disregard Yudhiṣṭhira's suffering as senseless sniveling. With little empathy, they insist that he serve as king come what may, enjoying all of the pleasures of victory, sovereignty, wealth, and comfort.

His two younger brothers, Nakula and Sahadeva, instead recommend that

Yudhiṣṭhira fulfill his *dharma* as king, while at the same time embodying the internal motivations of the renunciate. (This ideal is reminiscent of the *karmayogin* ideal of the *Bhagavadgītā*, with important differences.) Even as king, Yudhiṣṭhira might abandon desire, cultivate impartiality, and thereby alleviate the suffering that torments him—just as he initially planned—while also fulfilling every obligation of *dharma*. In this way, Yudhiṣṭhira might promote the welfare of others while at the same time fully securing his own well-being.

It might seem like the renunciate-king ideal fully resolves the tension in the text between prudential and moral considerations. But this ideal too is vulnerable to objections. One objection arises many chapters later in the *Śāntiparvan*, when Yudhiṣṭhira's wisest teacher, Bhīṣma, tells him the story of King Janaka. Janaka serves as king, but also insists that he has eliminated all desire, become perfectly impartial to the opposites, and thereby attained liberation.

The Buddhist nun Sulabhā hears about Janaka and comes to see for

herself. Having conversed with Janaka by means of a telepathic melding of minds, Sulabhā explains that ruling a kingdom requires partiality - for allies over enemies and victory over defeat. So Janaka cannot be impartial. It also requires possessiveness - or at least some sense of ownership - toward armies, lands, treasure, and so on. So Janaka cannot be desireless either. The passage ends with the sense that Janaka is indeed something of a fraud. Interestingly, the story is told to Yudhiṣṭhira after he has decided to become king, and after Nakula and Sahadeva have enticed him with the renunciate-king ideal.

The ideal is also subject to a second objection, drawn from the interstices of the earlier debate over whether Yudhiṣṭhira should renounce or serve as king. In those passages, Draupadī, Bhīma, and Arjuna argue that the forest dweller or wandering mendicant, who abandons desire, possessions, and partiality, lives a life devoid of earthly pleasures and personal pursuits. Such a life, they insist, is not really living. As a renunciate-king, however, Yudhiṣṭhira's

life will fall short for the same reason.

These objections serve to underline the less obvious debate over whether the king should rule in the spirit of the renunciate. They highlight the imperfection of the renunciate-king proposal. Moreover, these objections are not unique to the king. The ordinary householder faces the same challenges in trying to fulfill all of the obligations of *dharma*. The abandonment of desire seems inconsistent with retaining the basic motivational structure required to operate within a particular cultural nexus in the world. It also seems inconsistent with living a good life and living life fully.

The debate over whether Yudhiṣṭhira should renounce the kingship and become a renunciate is explicit in these chapters. Less obvious is the debate over whether he should combine the two modes of life as a renunciate-king or simply live - and enjoy - life as a world-embracing king. In the end, it is not clear that Yudhiṣṭhira achieves either ideal. His life thereafter is neither devoid of suffering, nor especially joyful. Maybe it is the worst life of all.

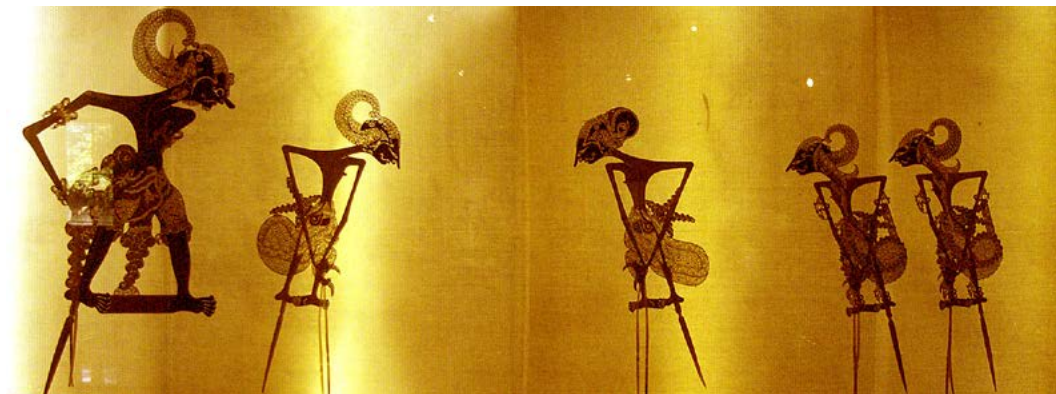
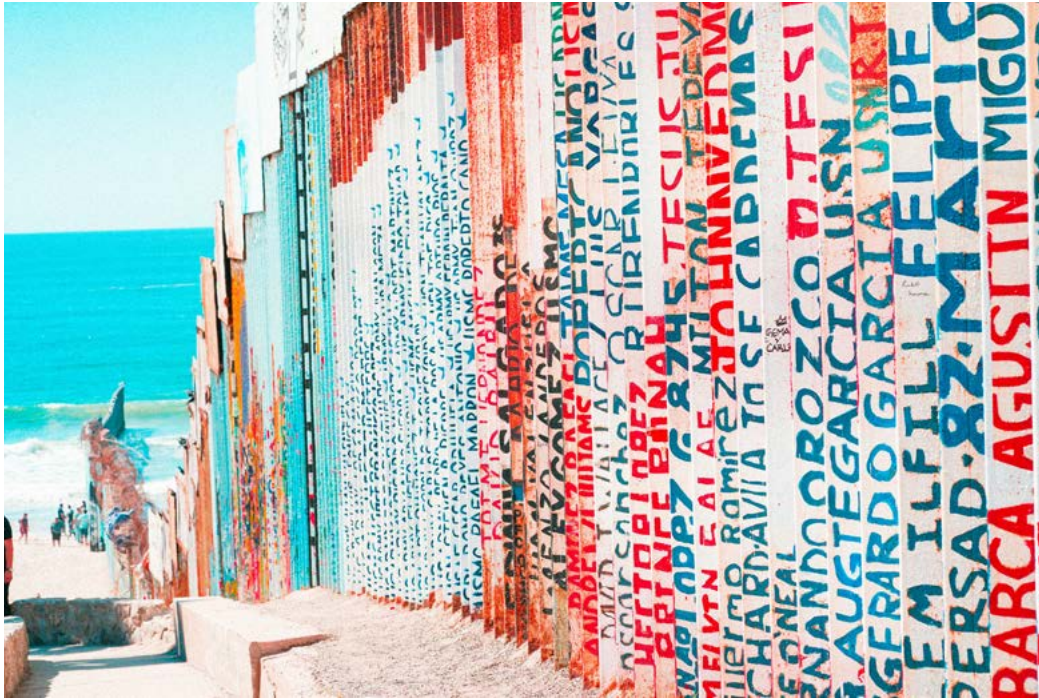


Image: Five Pandavas in Wayang form. From left to right: Bhīma, Arjuna, Yudhiṣṭhira, Nakula and Sahadeva. Indonesia Museum, Jakarta. Photo by Gunawan Kartapranata. (CC-SA-3.0)



Toward an Ethics of Belonging

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In today's world of escalated migration, many societies are grappling with a crisis of belonging. Not only do many immigrants and minorities experience alienation from their communities, but even national majorities are feeling increasingly disoriented. Recently, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre remarked that ordinary Canadians "feel like strangers in their own country." Regardless of one's personal view of Poilievre, there is some truth to his statement about national sentiment, and it should concern all of us.

Alienation is detrimental to the mental well-being of individual citizens, but it is even more so to the stability of liberal democracy. As political scientists have observed, misplaced belonging is triggering the return of xenophobic and authoritarian populism, which threatens to upend the institutions of human rights, pluralism, and rule of law.

Despite the alarm sounded by political scientists, political philosophers, particularly those in the liberal tradition, have been slow to respond to the crisis of belonging. Over the past 50 years,

numerous books have been written on the ideals of freedom and equality as the foundation of a good society. However, questions about belonging remain unanswered. What is belonging? What does it mean to belong to a political community? Does everyone have a right to belong? Can and should the state foster national belonging, and if so, how? Our knowledge of belonging remains lamentably thin on the ground.

This general silence on the topic of belonging is not accidental. Many liberals view the desire for national

belonging as a dangerous force, one that should have no place in modern society. The argument for this position is largely historical. In the heyday of nation-building, belonging fueled some of the worst catastrophes in human history, including racial exclusion, ethnic cleansing, and even genocide. The lesson, as it is commonly drawn, is that diversity in modernity makes inclusive belonging impossible. National belonging is thus necessarily xenophobic and exclusionary in multicultural societies. Libertarian Jacob Levy has argued, what liberal democracy needs is not an ethics of belonging, but an ethics for *strangers*. We should see our co-citizens as who they are—“strangers who find themselves locked in a very large room together.” We are not “brothers and sisters” who belong to “an extended family or a voluntary association united in pursuit of a common purpose” (Levy, 1). In virtue of our humanity, everyone is entitled to a right to exit and settle. The task of the state is to uphold such basic individual freedoms. Nothing more, nothing less.

While acknowledging the challenges of inclusive belonging, the yearning for national belonging cannot be easily dismissed. Sociologist Rogers Brubaker argues that, despite repeated assertions of its obsolescence, “the nation-state remains the decisive instance of belonging even in a rapidly globalizing world” (Brubaker, 7). In a similar spirit, historian Chad Bryant reminds us that the rise of nationalism, despite abuses by empires and totalitarian regimes, “happened in tandem with people’s individual needs to create a sense of belonging for themselves” (Bryant, 254).



Set foot in the house of an immigrant and one will likely see various ornaments and trinkets from their homeland. On display in such homes are not just cultural symbols of national identity, but also markers of homesickness and a desire to keep alive the ties to one’s old home.

Other liberals recognize that citizens are and ought to be more than strangers. Liberal egalitarians like John Rawls argue that citizens are members of a shared polis. And as members, citizens enjoy a more robust set of membership rights as a matter of social justice. But even here, the guiding ideal of social justice is not belonging but equality. In this view, the liberal state is just if it includes everyone in the shared political, social, and cultural life on equal terms. This view has been influential in the shaping of welfare states like Canada. The ideal of equality has been translated into equal voting rights, anti-discrimination laws, fair access to education and healthcare, among others.

In my view, a community of equals is certainly more habitable than a land of strangers, but it is not yet a home. Many Rawlsian liberals tend to equate inclusion and belonging. That’s a mistake. One can be included as an equal without feeling a sense of belonging. Put differently, social justice, while necessary, is not sufficient for belonging. According to a 2023 study of immigrants’ sense of belonging to Canada by province of residence, even after controlling for sociodemographic characteristics, such as perceived discrimination on structural factors, immigrants in British Columbia reported a much weaker sense of belonging than those in Ontario (Stick et al., 2023). Another survey released this month found that well-to-do immigrants in Canada, namely those enjoying a high degree of socio-economic status, are actually more likely to emigrate, indicating a weak sense of belonging (Bérard-Chagnon et al., 2024). Both studies suggest that belonging is underdetermined by measures of equal inclusion, even when successfully implemented.

We have now seen how liberal political philosophy has evaded the question of belonging. But as the ongoing crisis of belonging suggests, liberal democracy cannot stand on ideals of freedom and equality alone. So, what is belonging? The answer is both phenomenological and political. Belonging is not just a formal right to settle or equal membership; it is a bond of history. It involves citizens mutually recognizing each other as special and irreplaceable. More importantly, this mutual recognition is not grounded in our merits, not even shared values, for these are contingent and unstable features of ourselves. Inspired by the work of Avishai Margalit, I claim that this bond is grounded in the “historical depth” of the relevant relationship (Margalit 2017). In other words, home is a nonjudgmental relationship, which accepts us as we are. We feel homed when we recognize the meaningful roles we have played and

will play in the shared, open-ended historical narrative.

If belonging is conceived of as a bond of history, then an ethics of belonging requires an ethics of narration. Every liberal democracy has a history, but not all liberal democracies have a meaningful story in which natives and immigrants can find their dignified roles. The philosophical task is to conceptualize what a meaningful and ethical story is, and how to tell it, listen to it, and contest it. While narratives can be and have been fanatical, totalizing, and conservative, we should not forget that honorable histories are made possible by stories. At the heart of the Civil Rights Movements, projects of reconciliation, and various anti-authoritarian struggles lie stories of resurgence, redemption, and resilience. The time has come for citizens of liberal democracies to narrate stories that bind all.

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Image: Deserted refugee camp in Calais, France. Photo by Radek Homola on Unsplash.



What is the Freedom of Literature?

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In his seminal book on the poetics of hip hop, Adam Bradley argues that “it is possible [...] for an artist to be too free.” His reasoning goes like this: “If you can say anything in any way you choose, chances are you might not say anything at all, or at least anything worth remembering.”

Rappers—perhaps *the* poets of our age—have understood this danger of excessive freedom. Thus they have accepted the rule and constraint of the

rhyme: rap music almost invariably uses end rhymes to connect its verses, and this need to find a rhyme constitutes a productive engine for the rap-artist, propelling him or her forward in their writing to discover through their rhymes new music and new meaning. The rapper’s creativity is a product of the constraining rule of the rhyme.

Within this constraint, astonishing new freedoms can emerge, bending the very rules of our language. Consider these

famous verses from The Notorious B.I.G.’s song “Juicy” (from his 1994 debut album *Ready to Die*), in which he tells the story of his rise from rags to riches: “Birthdays was the worst days/ Now we drink champagne when we thirst-ay.” Biggie obeys the expectation to rhyme, at the same time that he flouts the rules of common English pronunciation. In the slant rhyme of “worst days” with “thirsty”, Biggie does not resort to a makeshift solution of

one desperate for a rhyme (in the way in which we encounter such solutions in some amateur poetry). Instead, he demonstrates his ability to bend the foundations of our shared language. He has not just gone from sad birthdays to champagne; he has lifted himself beyond the conventions of speech. Biggie's fascinating and compelling lyrics help underscore the point that Bradley wants us to see. Rappers willingly give up some of their freedom to produce their art; they gain the possibility for new creative transgressions by first accepting a set of constraints.

While rap's poetics, ever since its emergence in New York's Bronx in the early 1970s, has deep and complex roots in Black American culture, Bradley's conceptual lens of freedom (as well as the lack thereof) also has a very different origin: the Enlightenment's recalibration of literature and the arts around the concept of freedom. Since ancient times—since Horace's *Art of Poetry* (first century BCE)—the purpose of literature had been firmly established as serving either instruction or amusement or, ideally, both. The eighteenth century broke with these goals to replace them with the idea of freedom.

In his recent breathtaking survey *The Enlightenment: The Pursuit of Happiness, 1680-1790* (2020), Ritchie Robertson argues that the Enlightenment innovated the arts by shedding instruction or usefulness and focusing on amusement or pleasure. In that manner, the arts are a crucial building block in Robertson's understanding of the Enlightenment as

a period of the *Pursuit of Happiness*, as Robertson subtitles his monograph, drawing on the first article of the US constitution from 1776: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

“ Since ancient times—since Horace's *Art of Poetry* (first century BCE)—the purpose of literature had been firmly established as serving either instruction or amusement or, ideally, both. The eighteenth century broke with these goals to replace them with the idea of freedom.

Yet in dropping the idea of usefulness or instruction, the arts were not simply reduced to a source of pleasure. By liberating the artwork from any external use, it became, in the minds of Enlightenment writers, in both its production and reception an important expression of human freedom. In his 1789 poem "The Artists," the German poet, playwright, and philosopher Friedrich Schiller thus addresses artists as "the freest sons of the freest mother." And in his *Letters on*

the Aesthetic Education of Humanity (1795), art appears as a "daughter of freedom."

Two points about this new idea of the freedom of the arts (and of literature) strike me as particularly important. First, the new idea of art's (and literature's) freedom was, depending on the context we look at, formulated in decisively different ways. One could be free not only from serving instruction, but also from patronage, the pressures of the literary market, or the rules defining literary genre (to name just a few examples). Freedom became one of the big buzzwords for literature in the second half of the eighteenth century—but to a hundred different writers it meant a hundred different things.

Second, and more importantly still, the idea of the artist's (and writer's) freedom unlocked a new conceptual spectrum in which writers would henceforth situate themselves. This spectrum extended far into each direction in the vast new realm that had now been opened between dependence and independence. The most productive way to look at the new idea of freedom in literature, in other words, is neither to say that writers now cast off their shackles and became suddenly free—nor to claim that the ideal of freedom was never realized and remained a delusion. Instead, the idea of dependence was born together with the idea of autonomy or freedom, and while neither the one nor the other could ever be fully found in literary practice (or even literary theory), one could productively define oneself by locating oneself on various places on this spectrum.



In the discussion of literary rules—probably the main field for the discussion of freedom in literature in German-speaking Europe—this idea of a spectrum of freedom (or of relative freedom) is particularly striking. To give but one example, in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790)—Immanuel Kant’s seminal work of aesthetic theory—we are confronted with the question of whether artistic production can be broken down to rules. Kant looks skeptically at critics who point to the pleasure we take in geometric objects (like perfect circles or squares) as evidence that the beautiful can be described with quasi-geometric rules.

Everywhere we perceive a rule, Kant warns, tedium is soon sure to set in. In a remarkable passage about the pleasure that we take in birds’ song, Kant further explains how important freedom is to our appreciation of art: “the song of birds, for which we cannot find a musical rule, appears to have more freedom—and thus offers more to our taste—than even human song that is produced according to all rules of music: we grow tired of the latter when we hear it for too long or too often much sooner than of the former.” Yet while Kant rejects the idea that the production of beauty can be reduced

to rules, he insists that when we do perceive beauty, we expect everyone to agree with us in our estimation—which even to Kant seems to suggest that there is some concept or rule by which art should be objectively judged. We regard the beautiful object, as Kant puts it in another striking formulation, as “the example of a general rule that one cannot name” (156).

As the case of Kant indicates, the late Enlightenment’s critical discourse on rules was not so much about a simple replacement of rules with freedom, than about the introduction of a new spectrum: art and art theory would henceforth develop on a continuum between rules and their transgression (or their absence). This spectrum has shaped the way people looked at art and literature for centuries. Arguably, it has proven so long-lasting because it allows for a myriad of varying ideas and formulations that—in one way or another—all negotiate freedom and the lack thereof in the arts. Such formulations reach from Immanuel Kant’s idea of the beautiful artwork as “the example of a general rule that one cannot name” all the way to rap expert Adam Bradley’s point that “it is possible [...] for an artist to be too free.”

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SUPPORT THE CIH

The Calgary Atlas Project

is an **ART** project of

The Calgary Institute for the Humanities

With your support, we can continue to engage local artists and writers to document forgotten and lesser-known stories from Calgary’s history.

The Calgary Atlas Project is producing a series of historical maps that uncover crucial stories about Calgary’s past that illuminate, in surprising ways, the character of the city. Each map starts by documenting 30-40 sites in the city; this information is then interpreted by a Calgary artist to produce a new vision of the geography of the city.

These maps illustrate the diversity of Calgary’s past and present, showing how the city is more than just a collection of buildings and people in a geographical location. They show how different communities interacted with and shaped the landscape and the built environment that emerged over the years. The Calgary Atlas Project recognizes that our city is at once one community and many. By researching and sharing the stories of the diverse communities within our city, we hope to show how this diversity contributes to our shared history.

The first two maps produced showcased Calgary’s LGBTQ2S+ history and First Nations participation with the Calgary Stampede. Newly completed maps explore the history of alternative art movements, labour activism, Calgary’s lost cinemas, our architectural heritage, and the story of the 1920s literary scene.

Our most recent phase of the Calgary Atlas Project was supported by a generous grant from the Calgary Foundation. We now need your support to complete the next series of maps in this project. To support the next phase of the Calgary Atlas Project, the CIH needs to raise \$46,000 to produce its next four maps, which will illustrate immigration waves (as reflected in ethnic groceries and restaurants of International Avenue), Calgary’s Black history, Chinese Fraternal Societies, and Calgary’s Abandoned Routes.



To learn more or to give, please contact:

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Image: Detail from *City of Romance: The Literary World of 1920s Calgary*, artwork by Eveline Kolijn.

The Stuff of Reality

Hidden Materiality of Animated Documentaries

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Imagine working with plasticine: when playing with a piece of clay in your hands, you can notice how malleable it is. After molding it a couple of times, you can see how it reacts to changing temperatures. It has a texture, weight, smell, and it retains your fingerprints on its surface. Now imagine holding a piece of fabric; for instance, cotton. Its physical qualities are very different from plasticine. Cotton feels rougher, even rigid compared to clay. It is light, but it snaps back when you fold it leaving a crease in the place where it was held. Now imagine these materials on a film screen moving in an animated frame. Do they still preserve their physical properties? Do they elicit a memory of you touching them? Do you still recognize them as clay and cotton? Finally, imagine that these materials, now animated in front of your eyes by the invisible hands of an artist behind the screen, start telling

you a real-life story. Their animated space blends with non-fiction narrative and offers you an opportunity to engage with both animation and documentary discourses all at once.

During my term as a Frances Spratt Graduate Student Fellow at the Calgary Institute for Humanities, I am working on my doctoral dissertation that explores material qualities of contemporary independent animated documentaries. In the last two decades, cinema scholars have noted the proliferation of this genre of film that presents factual content in a fictional form. Animated documentaries, colloquially known as anidocs, are exactly what they sound like – they are documentary films that use animation as their expressive medium of choice. This type of documentary filmmaking is most often produced by independent artists and engages themes and narratives

often excluded from conventional non-fiction cinema. The majority of animated documentaries are interested in the internal, not-readily visible aspects of human reality, such as mental health conditions, invisible disabilities, traumatic experiences, and



stories of vulnerable and historically marginalized populations.

In addition, animators of animated documentaries frequently describe themselves as independent creators working outside of commercial industry frameworks. Not being limited by the requirements of big animation studios, documentary animators sometimes favor time-consuming, labour-intensive manual techniques, such as puppet, clay, and cutout animation. This trend goes against mainstream animation production methods influenced by the developments of digital technology.

In a way, contemporary animators push against dominant capitalist ideologies and practices that have shaped Western animation industry. Yet while the themes and contents of animated documentaries are widely discussed by the experts of the field, tendencies in animated documentary production often stay overshadowed. Thus my research aims to challenge this outlook in film and through an examination of Canadian and international works in contemporary documentary animation ask a question: what happens when in documentary animation real-life events become represented with real-life things?

So here I would like to circle back to your imagining of plasticine and cotton. How do the physical properties of these materials affect the stories that the animators present to us? Here are a couple of examples.

Childhood Memories is a short autobiographical animated documentary based on, as the name suggests, the childhood memories of its animator. In the film, a UK-based animator Mary Martins presents a silicone avatar of her child self wandering around the streets of Lagos during her family visit to Nigeria in 1988. The film provides a reflection on the mysterious nature of processes of remembering, as well as on narratives about one's heritage. It combines the

“ Not being limited by the requirements of big animation studios, documentary animators sometimes favor time-consuming, labour-intensive manual techniques, such as puppet, clay, and cutout animation. This trend goes against mainstream animation production methods influenced by the developments of digital technology.

archival 16mm footage of the city with stop-motion and hand-drawn 2D animation, and with that it connects Martins' recollections to the cultural environments of Lagos in the second half of the 20th century.

One of the materials that Martins uses in her film is the textile that alludes to the traditional attire of Nigerian

women. In my personal interview with the artist, she explained that she specifically looked for the authentic Ankara fabric at a Nigerian market in London. Then she animated it on glass, and her collaborator created a dress for the puppet. Dancing square patches of textile appear right when Martins' child character becomes introduced to the viewers. These pieces reveal the point of view of the puppet and illustrate the "colorful sounds" of urban Lagos which Martins refers to in her voice-over (*Childhood Memories* 0:43). Moving textile shapes draw attention to the figurine's dress that matches vibrant gowns of local women captured in archival shots. In this way, Martins' animated documentary creates a physical space for the experiences that are impossible to witness directly. The film brings the artist's memories to life and connects them to a specific cultural context that inspired this film.

Tim Mercier's *Model Childhood* is another animated documentary short that utilizes object animation. Specifically, Mercier works with clay to process his experience of sexual abuse that he was put through as a child. *Model Childhood* then serves as Mercier's attempt to reconcile with this event and take control over the past that has been haunting him. The short begins with a live-action sequence in a form of a diary entry. Mercier shows his studio and process of working with the materials that will later turn into stop-motion sets



and characters. He cuts and molds a block of orange plasticine and rips some pieces of fabric to make a polo shirt reminiscent of his childhood clothes. Later in the film we see him building a miniature set using model cars, trees, and other pieces of urban infrastructure. In my personal interview with the artist, Mercier explained his choice to animate these objects through their connection to his own childhood experience of building models and toy sets. He mentioned feeling great pleasure from the very process of putting together a model car, as well as from molding plasticine, and recalled the childhood joy of constructing toys from scratch (Mercier, Personal Interview).

Therefore, the artist's attention to these set elements (sometimes considered secondary) along with the very process of building them by hand has ultimately achieved two goals:

first, it has formed a bond between the real and the animated worlds to the point of blurring the boundary between the two; and second, it has allowed Mercier to take back control over the traumatic events that occurred decades ago.

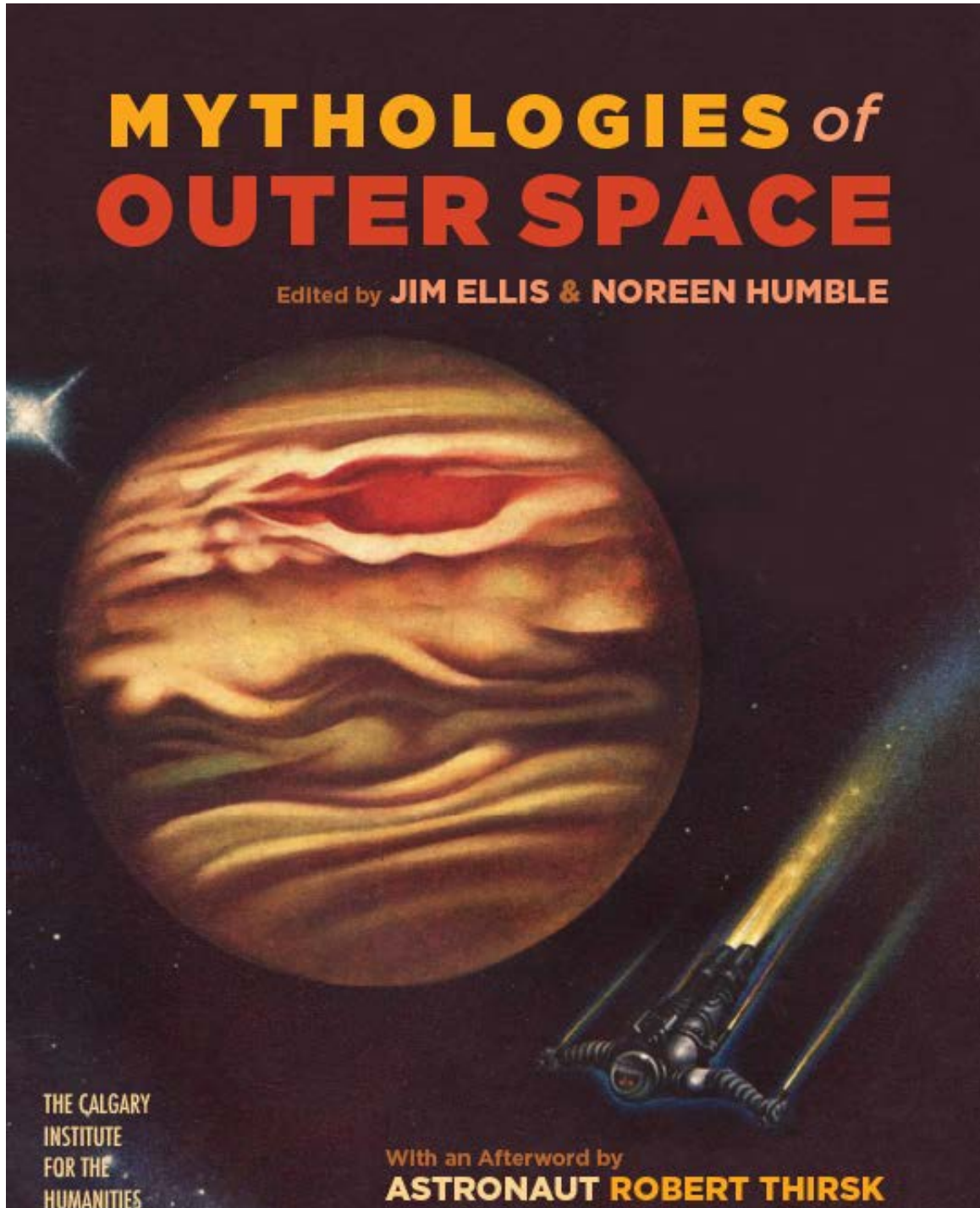
These two films represent a larger body of non-fiction animation produced by a diversity of artists who decided to use physical materials to support their narratives. Thus I offer to consider the materiality of these kind of anidocs because their documentary quality comes precisely from their props' real-life use. I argue that their objects' textures and materials (i.e. stiffness of models, malleability of clay, patterns of fabrics, etc.) reveal that animated narratives hold intimate connections to broader historical environments, as well as to the people that made them come to life on screen. In animated documentaries,

their frames indicate that toys, fabrics, or clay have been there, placed in front of the camera, in time and space; in turn, the puppets, fabrics, clay, and paint point out the existence of the historical world where some events occurred. Thus, I view the animation of animation documentaries as an "epistemic practice" (Johnston 3) because exploring its materiality helps to gain an insight into the conditions of its production and address larger questions about the interwovenness of real personal experiences with craft.

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COMING SOON!



Transformative Partnerships: Reflections on the CIH Public Humanities Fellowship

Sara Salavati
2022-23 Public Humanities Fellow
PhD Candidate
Department of Psychology

My experience as a public humanities fellow at the Calgary Institute for the Humanities (CIH) was nothing short of transformative. Through this fellowship I experienced applying academic skills to effect real-world change in underserved communities. The Public Humanities Fellowship serves to illuminate to humanities students the transferability of their skills and demonstrates to community organizations the benefits they can derive from employing humanities graduates. Reflecting on my experience, I firmly believe that the CIH Public Humanities Program is highly successful in achieving this goal. CIH offers unwavering support for fellows throughout various stages of the fellowship, which is especially beneficial for those new to working beyond academia. The CIH seminar series, held prior to the internship, creates an interactive and intellectually stimulating environment. Here, fellows can critically engage in discussions focused

on establishing equitable partnerships with community organizations. This serves as an excellent opportunity for familiarizing oneself with the responsibilities of the role before the fellowship placement.

During my fellowship, I partnered with the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS) to enhance the integration of immigrants in Calgary. Over the course of my 12-week summer fellowship with CCIS in 2023, I focused on two primary tasks: promoting cultural safety within organizations serving immigrant communities and designing programs to facilitate immigrant integration into Calgary and Canadian society.

In my capacity, I conducted comprehensive literature reviews to inform the practices of organizations serving immigrant populations, emphasizing the importance of cultural accommodation. Cultural accommodation is adapting interventions and services to align with the cultural practices and needs

of diverse individuals. I extracted practical insights on linguistic and cultural accommodation from the literature and actively disseminated this information. This involved co-facilitating meetings with organizations like Luna Child and Youth Advocacy Center to advocate for culturally responsive services.

Regarding programming, I played a pivotal role in the initial stages of developing the Music as a Second Language program at CCIS. This innovative program aims to enhance integration, language proficiency, and early musical skills among participants, all while respecting and celebrating their diverse cultural backgrounds.

To inform the program's design, I conducted extensive literature reviews on topics such as the use of music in second language learning and multicultural music and language programs for immigrant children and youth. Drawing insights from these reviews, I crafted a program logic model. This model highlighted the

anticipated impacts of the program, such as fostering a sense of belonging and improving social connections among immigrant children and youth, as well as outlining the activities planned to achieve these outcomes, such as group performances and musical games. Additionally, I prepared a comprehensive grant proposal aimed at securing funding for the project from the Calgary Foundation.

Throughout this fellowship, I applied a diverse range of skills acquired during my graduate studies including literature review and synthesis, critical thinking, effective writing and communication skills, crafting compelling research proposals and scholarship applications, meticulously planning research methodologies, and engaging in constructive feedback exchanges.

I also acquired invaluable new experiences and expertise while forging meaningful collaborations and relationships through this fellowship. I learned and practiced the art of building genuine partnerships with community organizations, emphasizing a reciprocal exchange of knowledge, experiences, and expertise between academia and the community as equal collaborators, all aimed at addressing the community's immediate needs.

I also enhanced my skills in communicating research to diverse audiences. Unlike the traditional academic approach of extensive technical manuscripts and conference presentations, collaborating with

communities required more engaging and concise communication methods. This highlighted the importance of utilizing diverse knowledge dissemination methods, including handouts, resource sheets, and concise presentations tailored to community settings.

For me, the most significant and fulfilling aspect of the program

was how it allowed me to integrate advocacy into my work, actively contributing to the advancement of equitable services for immigrants. The Public Humanities Fellowship program provided a profound firsthand experience of how community-oriented research can serve as a catalyst for advocating and effecting social change.



During my time at CCIS, I formed meaningful connections and friendships. I was delighted by the warm reception from the cultural brokers at CCIS, who welcomed me into their community and graciously invited me to their diverse events. This photo encapsulates one of those memorable occasions.



Welcome to the 2024-25 CIH Fellowship Recipients

Since 1977, the Institute has offered Resident Fellowships to faculty members at the University of Calgary. In 2024-25, four annual Resident Fellowships will be awarded to outstanding scholars in order to pursue a particular research project. Two of these are named: The Wayne O. McCready Resident Fellowship for an Emerging Scholar, and the Naomi Lacey Resident Fellowship. Awards are given to support specific research projects and provide the recipient with release from a portion of their teaching obligations. Without such leave time, the scholarly output that is crucial to a university's mandate would be substantially reduced. The CIH also traditionally supports a PhD candidate whose research contributes to the public good by promoting the core values of the humanities and building bridges of learning to the broader community. This year, thanks to generous community support, the Calgary Institute for the Humanities will award two CIH Graduate Student Fellowships.

2024-25 Graduate Student Fellows



AMANDA FOOTE

GRADUATE STUDENT FELLOW
PHD STUDENT IN ANTHROPOLOGY
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND
ARCHAEOLOGY

Dagugun Woakide Akide Hnebigan Echin Bathtabi
(Studying Museums in a Good Way)

Museums are important sites of representation where issues of identity, history, culture, and value are built and entrenched. Yet museums have traditionally been operated by an elite community of scholars, who do not represent the diverse cultures that are put on display. Indigenous people have been diligent advocates in seeking greater control of and access to their cultural belongings. Much scholarship exists on the criticality of this work for Indigenous communities, yet museums still grapple to accommodate notions of ownership and care from outside western norms. Working in the museum field I have learned much about nuanced challenges in supporting Indigenous people towards greater access and control of their material cultural belongings. This research furthers work that I have been doing to steward access and control for the Îethka Nation, and asks: how have formal structures impacted Indigenous access to, and control of, cultural belongings in museums and collections?



JAMIE MICHAELS

GRADUATE STUDENT FELLOW
PHD CANDIDATE IN ENGLISH
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Armageddon: A Comic Book History of the Nationalisms that Made the Modern Middle East

Jews and Arabs have historically enjoyed generally positive relations. However, the last hundred years have been marred by seemingly intractable violence between Jewish and Arab nationalists. My work focuses on how art and literature might better enable Israelis and Palestinians to understand each other's national narratives. Particularly, I'm interested in how popular history can be re-taught and re-imagined. My research-creation dissertation takes the form of a graphic novel showcasing the emergence of Jewish and Arab nationalisms. I curate the emergence of this nationalist sentiment amidst the backdrop of the First World War, a conflict that saw Jews and Arabs fighting as military allies. Crucially, this graphic history showcases both the Jewish and Arab perspectives of this turning point. Conjoining these narratives will create a singular work of history, deliberating juxtaposing a familiar history with a lesser-known narrative. In doing so, I aspire to the sharing of national stories between Israelis and Palestinians in new and surprising ways.

2024-25 Resident Fellows



LEE CARRUTHERS

NAOMI LACEY RESIDENT FELLOW
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF FILM
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION,
MEDIA AND FILM

Cinematic Late Style: Last Works and Late Culture

In recent commentaries, filmmakers and scholars have suggested that cinema may be in a waning phase of development in which the enduring values of an artform will soon be eclipsed. This is a stark forecast for the medium and a significant one for its creative practitioners; whether for a mature director, or in terms of the medium's evolution, one wonders how the work is transformed by the knowledge that it may be a final creative effort. In response, my research contemplates cinema in its late phase, highlighting the distinctive features of late works and the ways they reflect the values of our contemporary critical practice. It also examines the relationship between the late films of an individual artist and those produced during a late cultural phase, dissolving an artificial divide between aesthetic and cultural analyses. The research interrogates the heuristic value of the concept of 'late style,' mobilizing it as a sensitive descriptor for film's aesthetic, technological, and cultural permutations. Thus, it aims to discover what late and last works mean to us, and to the filmmakers who have created them, during a period of profound change for cinema.



ANURADHA GOBIN

RESIDENT FELLOW
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ART HISTORY
DEPARTMENT OF ART AND ART HISTORY

Resistance Dance: Dolls, Dioramas and the Dutch Atlantic

This project seeks to foreground new types of knowledge that can be gleaned from objects often regarded as lacking scholarly merit: early modern doll houses and dioramas. Placing select doll houses and dioramas in conversation with more traditionally studied media such as paintings will facilitate an expanded understanding of the lived experiences of the enslaved who toiled on Dutch-owned Atlantic plantations. To structure this analysis, dance and the role of the senses will be used as the guiding theme. Dance practices were one of the few remaining links to African traditions and can be regarded as a rare display of bodily autonomy for enslaved men and women working on plantations. Ultimately, this project will contribute to calls for decolonising by demonstrating the importance of the senses to retrieve knowledge about the realities of groups who often left little physical traces such as material culture or texts in the archives.



JANNA KLOSTERMANN

RESIDENT FELLOW
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

Reimagining Meanings and Expectations around Gendered Care Work in Aging Communities: What can We Learn at the Limits?

What kinds of care stories resist and recast the inequitable histories, relations and meanings that underpin late life care in Canada? This project weaves approaches from the arts, humanities, and social sciences to transform issues in care provision in our aging society into conversations and practices that address complexities and open up creative possibilities. While a range of scholarship examines everyday work and organizational conditions in long-term residential care, to date, few studies have considered how meanings and expectations around gendered care work are actively being rethought and renegotiated, including through expressions of agency and resistance. Responding to this need, this project mobilizes feminist rhetorical and arts-based approaches (involving storytelling workshops and participatory community events) to spark new conversations about care ethics in aging communities. The aim is to learn from the insights of a feminized and racialized workforce, while uncovering and rethinking moral, relational and philosophical complexities.



ANNA VEPRINSKA

McCREADY EMERGING FELLOW
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Listening as Pain and Necessity: Ear, Unfolding

My proposed book of poems traces an autotheoretical tension between my reduced tolerance to sound and my accessibility-driven reliance on listening. Exposure to an acoustically-traumatic event, which has triggered a sensitivity to noise pollution, has led to hyperacusis, a condition resulting in pain from everyday sounds. Meanwhile, an eye condition has led me to seek auditory accommodations, including structuring an oral history research project around my accessibility needs. With the improvement of text-to-speech software and the unprecedented rise of audiobooks, listening has become the method through which I access literary and cultural spaces and perform academic work. Drawing on the one hand from my auditory pain experiences and on the other from my oral history research and audio learning, my book of poems will ask what happens when one both has an intolerance to and a reliance on sound, probing the noise pollution health crisis and our collective acoustic futures.

Fifty years after the 1973/74 oil crises and the February 1974 Washington Energy Conference which led to the establishment of the International Energy Agency, an international conference entitled “Everything, Everywhere, All at Once: The Energy Crises of the 1970s and the Transformation of the Postwar World” took a closer look at the causes, course, and consequences of the energy crises of the 1970s to understand the transformation of the international order in the late twentieth century.

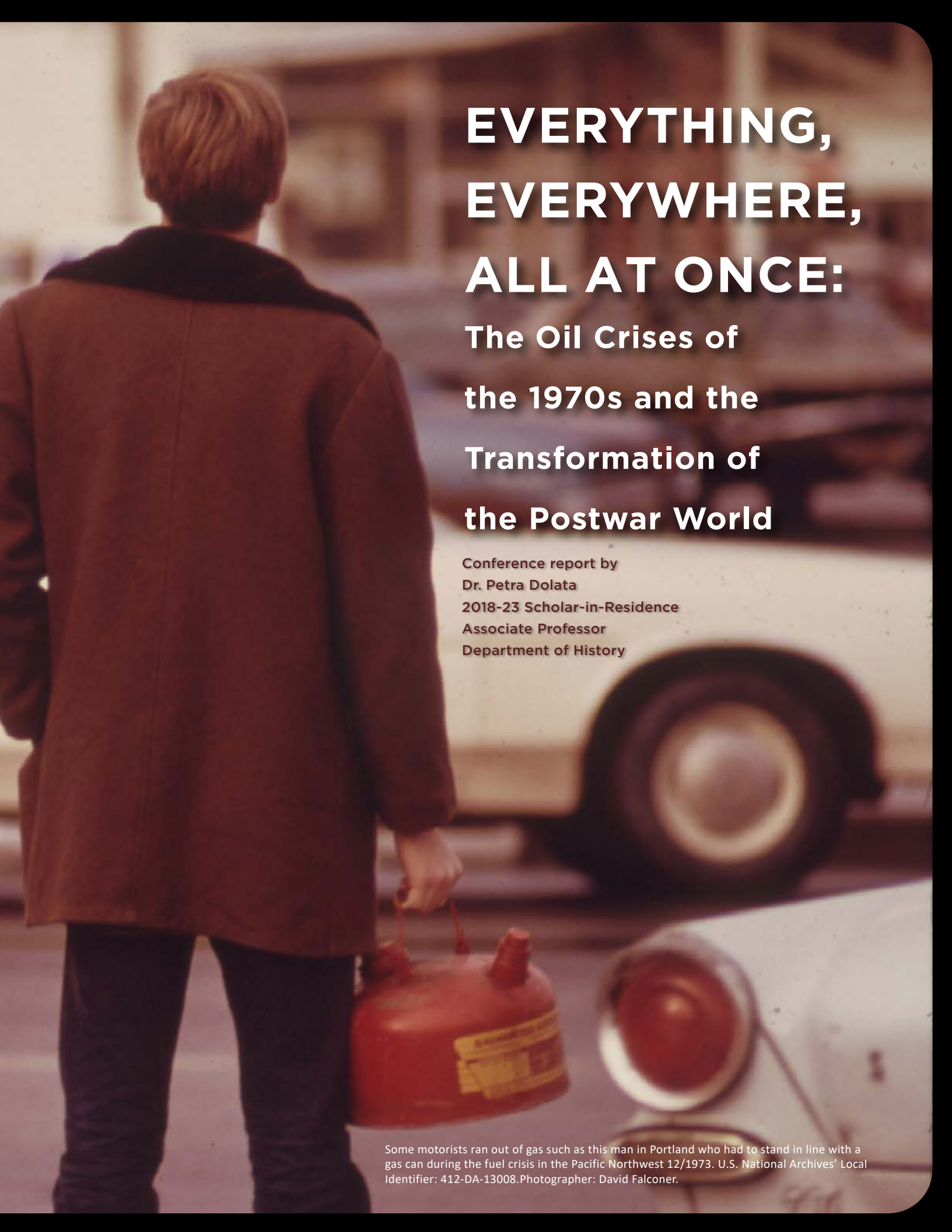
The conference theme was particularly topical at a time when events in the Ukraine and the Middle East capture the world’s attention as they highlight the connection between political events and the price of oil but also between energy and the environment. In October 1973, in the wake of another Arab-Israeli war, Arab members of OPEC imposed an oil export embargo on the United States and other allies of Israel while OPEC reduced oil production and raised prices. Together, both measures led to a quadrupling of oil prices and the search for new oil fields outside the Middle East and alternative energy carriers, including renewables. In 1979, the Iranian revolution led to a similar price hike and reduced shipments of oil to the West. The resultant high oil prices had equally disastrous economic effects as the first energy crisis of that decade. Although most historical studies recognize the inter-connections between the energy crises and Middle East politics, the impact of the crises on the *Global Cold War* has only recently begun to attract scholarly study. Very few works address in more detail the role and experience of the Global South or examine the relationship between the energy crises and the environment. Equally, the experience of Canada has so far received little attention from historians, even though it found itself in a unique position during the oil crises as one of the few Western and NATO countries which produced oil. In addition to restructuring the global energy order, the crises led to significant changes in national economies and the global economy, including deindustrialization.

To address these themes of the Global South, the environment, and Canada, and to amplify some of the lesser-known stories and histories of the 1970s energy crises, which cover narratives of scarcity,

vulnerability and dependence in an increasingly interdependent world, over 30 scholars from the Americas, Europe, Africa and Asia came to Calgary and Banff between 14 and 17 March 2024. The conference, which was organized by former CIH Scholar in Residence Petra Dolata together with David Painter (Georgetown University), was supported by the CIH and funded through a SSHRC Connection Grant. Besides a public keynote at the Central Library in Calgary by environmental historian John R. McNeill on “The Oil Crises and the Global Environment, 1973-2023,” the conference keynote presentation by Elizabeth Chatterjee (University of Chicago) entitled “Everything All at Once: The Early 1970s Polycrisis in the Oil-Importing Global South” focused on the relationship between deindustrialization and industrialization during the early 1970s energy crisis, arguing that deindustrialization in the UK in the wake of the energy crises led to a redirection of funds toward industrial projects in India facilitating industrialization there.

Both talks and the many presentations at the conference help us understand the impact of the 1970s energy crises which brought about structural changes within and across states transforming global politics and establishing the issue areas of energy as integral components of national and international policies. As we are facing multiple energy crises today, the conference contextualized current energy and geopolitical crises.

More details about the conference can be found on the conference website which will also feature some blog posts related to individual papers: niche-canada.org/oil-crisis/.

A photograph of a man from behind, wearing a brown coat and dark pants, holding a red gas can. He is standing in a line of cars, likely at a gas station during a fuel crisis. The background is blurred, showing other cars and a building.

EVERYTHING, EVERYWHERE, ALL AT ONCE: The Oil Crises of the 1970s and the Transformation of the Postwar World

Conference report by
Dr. Petra Dolata
2018-23 Scholar-in-Residence
Associate Professor
Department of History

Some motorists ran out of gas such as this man in Portland who had to stand in line with a gas can during the fuel crisis in the Pacific Northwest 12/1973. U.S. National Archives' Local Identifier: 412-DA-13008. Photographer: David Falconer.



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