

Pembroke Center Seed Grants 2016-17



Animal Studies Working Group



Geo Bird, from Design Motifs of Ancient Mexico,
Jorge Enciso, Dover Publications, 2004

Animal Studies is an emerging field that supports exploration of interspecies relations and interdisciplinary investigation into non-human animality as a critical site of difference. Extending across the creative arts, humanities, social sciences, and life sciences, the “question of the animal” entails a revisiting of boundaries assumed to separate humans from other species. Questions of rights and ethics are prevalent, but the attention to the animal as life form informs a wide range of intellectual projects across the disciplines. These include approaches to the animal as wildlife, companion species, scientific specimen, object of curiosity, exploitation or collection, industrial “produce,” literary and aesthetic figure/theme/form, ecological actor/indicator, and vulnerable (or endangered) subject.

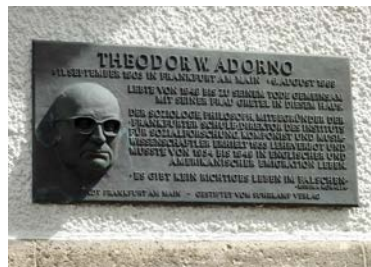
The growing academic interest in animals in recent years has emerged partly as a response to an increased awareness of ecological interconnectedness, threats to biodiversity and natural habitats, and concerns relating to the ethical treatment of and meaningful coexistence with animals. Leading scholars across the disciplines have converged around the necessity of rethinking the terms of humanist and scientific inquiry. Scholars are considering the ways in which species difference has historically and conceptually been linked to the production of other forms of material, political, cultural, and symbolic difference, including those of gender, race, and class.

Faculty members participating in the newly formed Animal Studies Working Group at Brown University share an interest in all of these questions with particular emphasis on those that favor a thinking of animality as what may trouble preconceived notions of human sovereignty, autonomy, and knowledge; that is, as what may complicate human-centered orientations of historical, cultural, and scientific narratives. Our symbol the Geo Bird, a figure from an Aztec clay seal, represents our broad global and chronological interests.

Seed grant funding will support monthly discussion groups, a research assistant, guided field trips, co-sponsorship of the 2016-17 Animal Lecture Series, and bringing a faculty member from another university with an established Animal Studies program to Brown to consult about programmatic and curricular development.

- **Nancy Jacobs**, Associate Professor, History (project director)
- **Palmira Brummett**, Visiting Professor, History
- **Constance Crawford**, Adjunct Lecturer, Theater Arts and Performance Studies
- **Thalia Field**, Professor, Literary Arts
- **Iris Montero**, Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow, Cogut Center for the Humanities
- **Thangam Ravindranathan**, Associate Professor, French Studies
- **Rebecca Schneider**, Professor, Theater Arts and Performance Studies
- **Andrea Simmons**, Professor, Cognitive, Linguistic, and Psychological Sciences
- **Ada Smailbegovic**, Assistant Professor, English

Conference: Inheriting the Frankfurt School



By Frank Behnen at German Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

One of the great strengths of the humanities at Brown is the cross-disciplinary engagement of its faculty and graduate studies with the legacy of the Frankfurt School of critical theory. The Frankfurt School is a school of social theory and philosophy associated in part with the Institute for Social Research at the Goethe University Frankfurt. Founded during the interwar period, it consisted of dissidents who did not feel at home in the capitalist, fascist, or communist systems of the time.

Writers and thinkers from the Frankfurt School such as Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, and Siegfried Kracauer continue to inform discussions of critical theory, literary studies, modern media, as well as critical approaches to gender, class, and race, both in and beyond German Studies. Scholarship and translation work of Brown Faculty, such as Gerhard Richter, Thomas Schestag, and Kevin McLaughlin, play a critical

role in the dissemination and study of Frankfurt School thought in the English-speaking world.

To build upon the shared concern of Brown’s humanities faculty with this lineage of modern thinkers and to create a larger forum for the diversity of perspectives brought to bear upon it, this project entails the organization of an international conference on the critical question of what it means to inherit the contested legacy of the Frankfurt School. Questions to be considered at the conference include the problems of intellectual and cultural inheritance, as well as issues of transmission, survival and reception. The conference will address the problem of wishing to inherit a critical legacy without knowing how; it will also devote itself to the threat of unreadable legacies.

Seed grant funds will be used to support a three-day conference consisting of presentations by Brown faculty and graduate students from various departments, as well as distinguished speakers from a broad range of national and international institutions. The aim of the conference is to initiate scholarly exchanges among Brown faculty and graduate students and senior scholars from some of the most prominent universities in Brazil, Europe, and North America. The group plans to publish a collection of essays based on the proceedings, written by scholars from a variety of disciplines including critical theory, film studies, history, literary studies, and philosophy.

- **Kristina Mendicino**, Assistant Professor, German Studies (co-director)
- **Gerhard Richter**, Professor German Studies and Comparative Literature, Chair of German Studies (co-director)

Multimedia Project at the Intersection of Global Health and Politics: *Lissa (Still Time)*



A page from the graphic novel, *Lissa (Still Time)*

Lissa (Still Time) is a narrative adaptation of original field research by Sherine Hamdy in Egypt about kidney and liver disease and research by Coleman Nye about breast cancer in the United States. The narrative is focused on two strong women characters at the center of critical life-or-death decisions involving medical technologies, global health inequalities,

and political revolution.

Seed grant funds will help to present the research and story in three ways. 1) A graphic novel, to be published through the University of Toronto Press and through Anne Brakenbury's ethnographic series, will feature two fictionalized characters based on in-depth sustained ethnographic and interview research. 2) A digital platform, hosted by the Brown Digital Scholarship Initiative, will explore more deeply the conceptual themes of the graphic novel, including bioethical conundrums, the political economy of global health, and the uneven effects of biomedical technologies, religious difference, and political instability against the backdrop of the Arab Spring. 3) A documentary film will present the process of the collaboration including a research trip to Egypt and the development of the characters.

The project seeks to explore questions about the following issues:

- The vulnerability of people to health/disease in the context of poor health governance, particularly with deregulation of manufacturing and toxic waste disposal
- The problematic of women's health and bodily autonomy to their reproductive viability
- The problems of over-treatment and iatrogenesis (treatment-induced illness)
- How societies wager life-and-death decisions in the context of restrained resources
- The problems of commodifying health and the body, privatization and patenting of scientific information, including the BRCA gene, and the consequences of this for individual patients and global health more generally

The project aims to establish a lasting collaboration between Brown, the Rhode Island School of Design, the Watson Institute, and the Pembroke Center for the publication of visually rich scholarship and research. It seeks to translate academic ideas about gender, sexual autonomy, religion, ethics, and politics into accessible and emotionally resonant stories about characters with whom readers can identify. In this way, the project aims to present important interventions for rethinking the politics of global health in an easily accessible format that invites a wide readership.

- **Sherine Hamdy**, Associate Professor, Anthropology (project director)
- **Alice Coleman Nye**, Assistant Professor, Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies, Simon Fraser University
- **Paul Karasik**, Instructor, Illustration, Rhode Island School of Design
- **Francesco Dragone**, Independent Filmmaker
- **Caroline Brewer**, student, Illustration, Rhode Island School of Design
- **Sarula Bao**, student, Illustration, Rhode Island School of Design