



UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

3260 South Street • Penn Museum • Philadelphia, PA 19104-6324
www.phf.upenn.edu • 215.573.8280

PENN HUMANITIES FORUM

Twelfth Annual

GRADUATE HUMANITIES FORUM

Conference

February 17, 2012



Adaptations

UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

Adaptations

Twelfth Annual Graduate Humanities Forum Conference

Friday, February 17, 2012

University of Pennsylvania
Nevil Classroom • Penn Museum

A program of the 2011–2012 Penn Humanities Forum on Adaptations

The Graduate Humanities Forum gratefully acknowledges the support of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

GRADUATE HUMANITIES FORUM

A program of the Penn Humanities Forum, the Graduate Humanities Forum (GHF) was established in the year 2000 as an interdisciplinary research forum for Penn doctoral students in the humanities and allied disciplines. Penn Ph.D. students have the opportunity to participate in the GHF through the Andrew W. Mellon Graduate Fellowship program of the Penn Humanities Forum (PHF). Ten \$1000 fellowships are offered each year for graduate and professional students in all humanities-related disciplines who are interested in exploring the trends and challenges of interdisciplinary research related to PHF's annual theme. In addition to their regular research seminar, GHF fellows each year organize a graduate conference on the Forum's theme.

2011–12 Andrew W. Mellon Graduate Fellows in the Humanities Penn Humanities Forum

Avram Apert, Comparative Literature
Alyssa Connell, English
Claudia Consolati, Romance Languages
Sarah Dowling, English
David Gardner, English
Erin Kelley, History of Art
Melanie Micir, English
Ekin Pinar, History of Art
Courtney Rydel, English
Reed Winegar, Philosophy
Lucas Wood, Comparative Literature
Jason Zuzga, English

WELCOME AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of the Graduate Humanities Forum, I am thrilled to welcome you to “Adaptations,” our twelfth annual conference.

The Graduate Humanities Forum is a gathering place for graduate students from across Penn, fostering collaboration and exchange among the humanities disciplines. In biweekly meetings fellows present works in progress addressing the theme we share with the Penn Humanities Forum as a whole. This year, we consider adaptations as they appear in and among artistic practices, human behavior, and the sciences. As we move between the disciplines we adapt, so to speak, a broad range of theoretical and methodological approaches to our purposes. In planning this conference we felt compelled to test the boundaries of adaptation, seeking points of continuity and rupture between different versions of the concept. From our discussions we conceived four panels: “Technologies of Adaptation,” “Self-Writing,” “Adapting Visuality,” and “Translations,” each of which itself adapts (there it is again!) our theme to new contexts and practices.

“Adaptations” developed through the dedication and hard work of many. I especially thank the Graduate Humanities Forum Mellon Fellows, and Warren Breckman, our Faculty Advisor, for their thorough and thoughtful labor in shaping this conference. Our deepest thanks go to the Penn Humanities Forum: Jim English, director, Sara Varney, Administrative Coordinator, and Jennifer Conway, Associate Director. This conference would not have taken place without their expertise and tireless support. Finally, I extend special appreciation to our keynote speaker, Rey Chow of Duke University.

Thank you for joining us!

Sincerely,
Sarah Dowling
Research Assistant
Penn Humanities Forum

PROGRAM

9:00-9:20 | COFFEE AND REMARKS

9:20-10:50 | SESSION I: TECHNOLOGIES OF ADAPTATION

Moderator: Jason Zuzga, English, University of Pennsylvania

Jonathan Rey Lee, Comparative Literature, University of California, Riverside
Playing Media: Interactive Narrative in *Lego* Adaptations

Tara Mendola, Comparative Literature, New York University
Trophophilia: Catachresis and Its Ab(uses) in Contemporary
Literary-Critical Discourse

Mihaela Mihailova, Film and Slavic Languages and Literatures, Yale University
From the Fairy Woods to the City Jungle: The Evolution of the Cartoon
Pin-up Girl in Tex Avery's Animated Shorts

11:00-12:30 | SESSION II: SELF-WRITING

Moderator: Courtney Rydel, English, University of Pennsylvania

Nicole McCleese, English, Michigan State University
Contemporaneous Adaptations: Masochistic Time in Kathy Acker's
Empire of the Senseless

Katie Price, English, University of Pennsylvania
The Adaptations of Kenneth Goldsmith's *Fidget*

Ben Tam, English, Cornell University
From Memoirs to Case History: De-casing Daniel Paul Schreiber

12:30-1:30 | LUNCH

1:30-3:00 | SESSION III: ADAPTING VISUALITY

Moderator: Avram Alpert, Comparative Literature, University of Pennsylvania

Shana Cooperstein, Art History, Temple University
Scientific Manipulations of Astronomical Photography

Monica Hahn, Art History, Temple University
The Adaptable Image: Performance, Manners and Agency in Joshua
Reynolds's *Portrait of Omai*

Shana Klein, Art and Art History, University of New Mexico
The Fruits of Empire: A Study of Foreign Food in Nineteenth-Century
American Still-Life Painting

3:15-4:45 | SESSION IV: TRANSLATIONS

Moderator: Claudia Consolati, Romance Languages, University of Pennsylvania

Christa DiMarco, Art History, Temple University
Living in Paris: Van Gogh's Adaptation of Signifying Modernist Ideals

Steve Dolph, Romance Languages, University of Pennsylvania
Edges of the Zone: Sawako Nakayasu's *Mouth: Eats Color*

Rachel Epstein, East Asian Languages & Civilizations, University of Pennsylvania
Japanese Poetry and the English Language

5:00-6:30 | KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Rey Chow, Anne Firor Scott Professor of Literature, Duke University
Documentary Realism Between Cultures

6:30 | RECEPTION

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Harrison Auditorium, Penn Museum

Documentary Realism Between Cultures

Rey Chow, Anne Firor Scott Professor of Literature, Duke University

New media technologies have given us unprecedented power to simulate, fabricate, and falsify, while casting doubt on any notion of objectively recording or documenting actual life. Why, then, is the present moment a time of unprecedented vigor and excitement among documentary-makers? Rey Chow, a renowned scholar of Asian-American film and literature, uses this question as her point of departure to discuss some new forms of documentary realism.

Influential across many fields and disciplines, Rey Chow has made substantial contributions to comparative literature, film studies, visual studies, postcolonial studies, ethnic studies, and gender studies. Her books include *Entanglements, or Transmedial Thinking about Capture* (forthcoming 2012), *Sentimental Fabulations, Contemporary Chinese Films* (2007), *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2002), and *Primitive Passions* (1995), which won the James Russell Lowell Prize, the Modern Language Association's highest honor. Dr. Chow's current work concerns the legacies of poststructuralist theory, the politics of language as a postcolonial phenomenon, and the shifting paradigms for knowledge and lived experience in the age of visual technologies and digital media. Formerly Andrew W. Mellon Professor of the Humanities at Brown University, Dr. Chow is currently Anne Firor Scott Professor of Literature at Duke University.

Cosponsored by Penn's Department of English.

ABSTRACTS

Shana Cooperstein, Art History, Temple University

Scientific Manipulations of Astronomical Photography

By exploring two historical instances of the scientific manipulation of astronomical photography and discerning differences in approaches used by nineteenth- and twentieth-century practitioners, this paper relays the ways in which techniques of scientific image-making adapted to developing photographic and telescopic technologies, as well as the way in which the pictorial aim of astrophotographs adapted from reproductive to productive. Of course, even in the nineteenth-century there were types of productive photographs being generated, such as spectroscopic images. Yet, photographs allowing the inference of information about stellar spectra seem comparatively marginal to the role of reproductive photography in nineteenth-century visual culture and extant scholarship on the history of photography, and a majority of nineteenth-century photography aimed to substitute or reproduce that which is visible to the eye. Nonetheless, the tendency of rendering immateriality becomes greatly magnified in the twentieth-century owing to Hubble Space Telescope. For instance, a very lengthy temporal process or exposure that records visible, infrared and ultraviolet light is collapsed into the form of a single image. Furthermore, through a comparison of modern and contemporary methods of astronomical image-making, this paper reveals the authority of early, reproductive photograph over the most advanced forms of current astrophotography as produced by Hubble. In other words, an exploration of earlier and present forms of astronomical photography reveal the practice of contemporary scientists to render immateriality in such a way that relates to sensory counterparts even while representing details, elements and bodies invisible to the eye.

Christa DiMarco, Art History, Temple University

Living in Paris: Van Gogh's Adaptation of Signifying Modernist Ideals

Vincent Van Gogh's (1853-1890) painting career spanned ten years, from 1880 to 1890, a fascinatingly rich period when art and arts criticism articulated theoretical issues that forged Modernist ideals. The artist lived in Paris from February 1886 through February 1888 where he completed over 200 paintings and befriended Impressionist and Neo-Impressionist painters and critics. Scholars overlook this significant time when Van Gogh was creating in one of the centers of the late nineteenth-century art world as there is neither a focused study of the artist's transition to Modernism nor of the Paris paintings.

Upon his winter arrival, Van Gogh had not yet studied the Impressionists, who were then arranging their eighth and last exhibition. I find the Parisian critical discourse, which was grounded in Baudelairean aesthetics, affected Van Gogh, prompting him to adapt modern formal qualities and content, probe visual experiences and search for a new painterly identity. In *Bridges across the Seine*

(1887) he tried on early modern and Impressionist pictorial elements. The figures occupy indeterminate places; they neither engage with one another nor seamlessly co-exist. The fisherman is a residue of his earlier work and the fashionably dressed woman is indicative of Impressionist influence. The artist adapted other signifying elements, such as a bridge onlooker purveying the scene, the steam train carrying passengers from Paris to the suburbs, and varying brush strokes symbolically capturing fleeting motion. Van Gogh represented avant-garde concepts of spectatorship, contemporary life and artistic fragmentation, underscoring that the image was built on a fractured Modernist foundation.

Steve Dolph, Romance Languages, University of Pennsylvania

Edges of the Zone: Sawako Nakayasu's *Mouth: Eats Color*

Emily Apter describes the "translation zone" as a site that "defines the epistemological interstices of politics, poetics, logic, cybernetics, linguistics, genetics, media, and environment." As such, she argues, these zones are charged with the potential for subjectivity disruption and reformation. Translation zones are the in-between: rough, liminal spaces that lay bare the semiosis that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls shuttling, a violent process of transcoding through which the subject is continuously produced and then reproduced into culture. Following these theorists, this paper undertakes a reading of poet Sawako Nakayasu's *Mouth: Eats Color* (2011) a hybrid multilingual text that stages the process of translation from Japanese to English and back again with translations, anti-translations, and originals of the poems of Chika Sagawa (1911-1935). What results is palimpsestic. Both English and Japanese, the text compels the reader who does not possess the latter language to repeatedly grope along the outside edges of intelligibility. Drawing on historical examples—from Pound's Noh plays and Spicer's *After Lorca* to the poetry of Nicanor Parra—I argue that *Mouth: Eats Color* can usefully be read as a translation zone rather than as a translation proper. It urges a reading that negotiates contingency while relinquishing expediency and refusing expertise. In short, it recommends that we repurpose the task of reading in translation toward an ethical re-imagining of nation, genealogy, and authorship.

Rachel Epstein, East Asian Languages & Civilizations, University of Pennsylvania **Japanese Poetry and the English Language**

In accounts of the first modern Japanese poetry, it is a truism that English-language poetry inspired experiments in diction, format, and theme. During the 1880s and 1890s, *shintaiishi*—"new poetry"—developed in tandem with nation-building projects, and poets took recourse to texts from the corpus of modernization. Because *shintaiishi* determined the standards for what followed, such a sketch of its beginnings makes all of modern Japanese poetry look like a matter of the influence of Western ideas and poetic formal principles.

What about the impact of a Western *language* on *shintaiishi*? Two of its main initial forgers lived in America in their twenties. Surely their pioneering collection contains effects of their isolation within the foreign language abroad. The next generation of poets was moved by Christian thought to read not only the King James Bible, but also Milton, Byron, Wordsworth, and Tennyson. When they composed, these idioms were present in their minds. And English circulated deeper still. State officials—and dissenters—spent time in England and America, and returned home to speak and write for attentive audiences. Poets engaged these and other discourses that were shaped through intimacy with English.

Can a person be adapted by a language? Can a language be adapted by a language? *Shintaiishi* is typically dismissed as a flat product of faddishness. But if the notion of influence is replaced with the notion of adaptation, it looks to be rather more complex. How did properties of English play into this transformation of Japanese poetry?

Monica Hahn, Art History, Temple University

The Adaptable Image: Performance, Manners and Agency in Joshua Reynolds's *Portrait of Omai*

This paper will focus on Sir Joshua Reynolds's portrait of the South Pacific Islander called Omai and the complex relationship it negotiates between the Anglo observer and the depicted Polynesian subject. Captain Cook brought Omai on board during his second Pacific voyage, taking him back to London, where he became an exotic celebrity of sorts. *Omai*, the man and the painting, vividly embodies the fascination with which the English public observed the native, his appearance and manners. More than simply an ethnographic representation or a depiction of the noble savage however, this painting locates the native man in a European theatrical framework in order to negotiate complex questions about adaptation, the transcultural encounter and colonial power in the late 18th century.

I will critically situate Reynolds's famous pictorial representation of Omai within English social and dramaturgical conventions in order to problematize a simplistic colonialist reading of the painting. In other words, I will argue that Reynolds's painting, in addition to describing the novelties of Omai's appearance and comportment for purposes of colonial control actually deploys contemporary theatrical tropes in an agile way that registers a kind of moral hesitancy about the European colonialist civilizing impulse at this historical moment. Moreover, in doing so, the painting raises questions about the viability of Western mimesis itself as an enduring artistic tradition. For even as it ostensibly presents the Polynesian as an exotic, noble savage, the painting also broaches an unsettling possibility (theorized influentially by Homi Bhabha) that English art and manners might themselves constitute little more than objects of performance or mimicry.

Shana Klein, Art and Art History, University of New Mexico

The Fruits of Empire: A Study of Foreign Food in Nineteenth-Century American Still-Life Painting

Between 1850 and 1900, still-life representations of food were pervasive in North America. Still lifes of food appeared in paintings, cookbooks, sideboards, and other artifacts inhabiting the domestic sphere. In these representations, artists displayed a cornucopia of food from Caribbean, Central American, and Hawaiian cultures. Artists also depicted African American and Native American foods in still lifes of pastoral bounty. The diversity of foods in still-life representations was also a useful strategy to integrate “non-white” foods and cultures into the North American empire. This presentation more deeply explores how still-life artists helped incorporate “non-white” foods and cultures into the North American empire.

This presentation also investigates how still-life artists attempted to resist the incorporation of foreign foods into the North American empire. This is best evident in still-life representations created outside U.S. borders by Mexican artist Hermengildo Bustos and Puerto Rican artist Francisco Oller. Both artists painted still lifes of indigenous Mexican and Puerto Rican foods to reclaim these foods that were being assimilated into North American homes and diets. Artists within the United States also used still-life representation to challenge imperial practices. Artists in support of abolitionism painting still lifes of local homegrown foods to protest foods produced abroad by slave labor. This presentation further probes the charged meanings of still-life representations and their significance within the larger context of food and empire.

Jonathan Rey Lee, Comparative Literature, University of California, Riverside **Playing Media: Interactive Narrative in *Lego* Adaptations**

This paper proposes to examine movie-based *Lego* toys as playful, agential, and material adaptations of popular film narratives. I will consider *Lego* as a medium by investigating how the materiality of the interlocking blocks embodies both a teleological design (the set is supposed to come together a certain way) and a playful contingency (the pieces can come together in many different ways). Similarly, I will consider the tension between fidelity to the represented storyline and the imaginative subversions and re-tellings in the act of playing itself. The agency of this play is opened up by a primarily active and spatial medium (such as *Lego*) rather than a primarily passive and temporal medium (such as film). I therefore argue that where other narrative forms ask the viewer to interpret and judge a predetermined story, *Lego* adaptations ask the player to align him- or herself with or against the narrative development of the original story, leaving open the possibilities of re-inscribing or revisioning an existing narrative. On the other hand, this agential space demands the player's self-definition with respect to a narrative and is thus also a move of interpretation and evaluation. Likewise, the imagined counterfactuals that underlie any temporally portrayed narrative

themselves encourage an imaginative play with narratives. Thus, although the emphases of *Lego* as medium may differ from more traditionally linear media, the fundamental relationship between audience and fiction remains intact.

Nicole McCleese, English, Michigan State University

Contemporaneous Adaptations: Masochistic Time in Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless*

Adaptation has two senses temporally at odds. First, it has the general sense that a form might be modified to suit different uses. The text is inevitably re-constructed and re-purposed—something old. Secondly, it connotes the biological, organic nature of an organism adapting to its changed environment—something new. I examine this paradoxical existence within the same space and time of two competing adaptations of texts, or the contemporaneity of adaptation. Adaptation, in many guises, is one of the striking features of Kathy Acker's experimental writing and it has been explored at length through intertextuality, or plagiarism, or her inheritance of post-structural theory. Instead, I propose to analyze the strange temporality created in the novel in the contemporaneous adaptation that Acker's novel *Empire of the Senseless* stages, specifically, the translation/repurposing of Persian (in Arabic script), repeatedly inserted into the English text without explanation. The criticism on Acker does not adequately address the presence of the Persian in this novel. On the page, English and Arabic stand off, neither yielding to the other. The Farsi operates differently in this novel than in others, like the "Persian Poems" of *Blood and Guts in High School*. I read the delay caused for the reader in the circulation of disruptive signs which impede the pleasure of meaning making, as masochistic time. In Deleuze's articulation of masochism, time is the primary characteristic of masochism, not pain. Like adaptation, masochism is another aspect of Acker's oeuvre that many notice, but few have addressed in terms of temporality.

Tara Mendola, Comparative Literature, New York University

Trophophilia: Catachresis and Its Ab(uses) in Contemporary Literary-Critical Discourse

The history of adapting explicitly scientific techniques to literary studies is marked by not only a profound—and paradoxical—investment in figurative language, but by a species of persistent catachresis as one metaphorical-ontological system is displaced onto another. This paper will examine selections from the recent work of Franco Moretti, Wai Chee Dimock, and the French *ALIEN TO* group, meeting it seriously on its own terms—accepting the challenge, for the purposes of argument, of what Moretti in his 2002 *Graphs, Maps, Trees* called "a quantitative approach to literature" (4). At the same time, it will read closely for those places in which the metaphorical graft falls apart and one system of knowledge cannot easily shift into another. When, in other words, do our efforts at the adaptation of our traditional critical apparatus to a new digital age begin to crack, to show

the magician behind the curtain on the level of language itself? I argue that the critical attempt to patch the fissures between the two systems results in an excess of figurative language which takes its empiricism and scientism as its subject. In deconstructing the language of these points of excess, larger questions can be raised: can figurative language ever do the work of bridging one metaphorical-ontological system of reasoning onto another? *Should* it? Taking as a given that we can never be rid of tropes or troping, then we must pose the attendant question—what is the place of rhetoric in the integration of interdisciplinary work into literary-critical discourse?

Mihaela Mihailova, Film Studies, Slavic Languages & Literatures, Yale University

From the Fairy Woods to the City Jungle: The Evolution of the Cartoon Pin-up Girl in Tex Avery's Animated Shorts

The advent of color animation facilitated a revival of the fairy tale as a prominent cultural phenomenon. The static universe of book illustrations was replaced by the dynamic form of the moving picture, inscribing fairy tales within the framework of increasingly visually oriented culture. However, popular adaptations such as the films of Walt Disney did little to revitalize or reinvent the well-known literary formula, shying away from challenging or revising traditional children's narratives. It wasn't until Tex Avery's cartoon shorts of the 1940s—which boldly subverted fairy tale clichés and rebelled against accepted norms of representation—that a modern version of the fairy tale was born.

Avery's *Red Hot Riding Hood* (1943), *Swing Shift Cinderella* (1945), and *Little Rural Riding Hood* (1949) function as literary pastiche in animated form and offer an irreverent, innovative take on the fairy tale heroine. In these shorts, the demure, innocent girl from children's bedtime stories cedes her place to a buxom red-haired bombshell, America's poster-girl of the 1940s. Responding to Disney's cloying and sterile aesthetic, Avery brings the sexual undertones of well-known narratives to the surface of his suggestive, rowdy parodies. His fairy-tale/pin-up hybrid simultaneously embodies the concept of the woman as a spectacle and a gold-digger and the notion of her as a self-reliant, independent individual. Thus, Avery's shorts may be read as explorations of female stereotypes shaped by recent historical events and social changes, a commentary on the process of stereotyping itself, and—ultimately—a deconstruction of its mechanisms.

Katie Price, English, University of Pennsylvania

The Adaptations of Kenneth Goldsmith's *Fidget*

Kenneth Goldsmith's *Fidget*, in which he attempts to describe every move his body makes in a single day, exists in at least four versions. It is a book published by Coach House Books, an interactive applet created by Clem Paulsen, an art exhibit, and a recorded text at PennSound. Most critics focus on the printed *Fidget*, assigning the text primary authority. This paper maintains that there is no primary version of *Fidget*, and that it might better be understood as a specific

experiment—that of describing a body’s movements over a given day—that must *adapt* or *be adapted* to different situations. In short, this paper argues that these “versions” of *Fidget* are better understood as adaptations of a primary concept. As Goldsmith describes, one of the rules for *Fidget* was that “[he] would never use the first person ‘I’ to describe movements.” This is because *Fidget* is less about Goldsmith’s body, and more about any body and how it moves throughout any given day. Like the somewhat un-locatable yet always described body that inhabits each adaptation, *Fidget* constantly disrupts its own locatability by constantly adapting.

Ben Tam, English, Cornell University

From Memoirs to Case History: De-casing Daniel Paul Schreber

If the case, as Lauren Berlant notes, is a genre where singularities are condensed, organized and adapted into exemplary and normative patterns, it is also a site of transformation where the subject of inquiry is ossified as a Foucauldian “species,” a “patient” in this case. Over the past century since Sigmund Freud published his paper on paranoia in 1911, Daniel Paul Schreber’s *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (1903) is continually recognized as the most famous case study for psychoanalytic inquiry. While some (Niederland) argue that Freud’s speculation of Schreber’s repressed homosexuality can be substantiated and thus validated through a close scrutiny of the traumatic childhood of the young Schreber with his sadistic father, others (Deleuze and Guattari) disrupt the triangular schema of Oedipus by de-sublimating desire as a material desiring-production of capitalism. In any case, psychoanalytic and Marxist theorists suggest the Schreber’s psychosis is fundamentally attributed to a long “pre-history” that has from the onset inscribed the patient’s later development into schizophrenia. In rendering the coherence of causation legible, these theorists must turn Schreber’s divided self into a coherent figure for the purposes of writing a case history. Refusing the imperative of reparative reading which asks for a reorganization of fragments in order to renew the optimism suppressed by its own context, this paper argues that tracking the moments of affect lost in “total institutionalization,” including his moments of despair in the face of the “unending monotony of [his] dreary life” in the sanatorium, is essential to tracing Schreber’s subjectivity in ways that don’t assume self as necessarily sovereign, autonomous, or indivisible.

PENN HUMANITIES FORUM

Established in 1999, the Penn Humanities Forum is charged with taking a fresh look at ideas that touch on the human experience. The Forum’s goal is to introduce humanistic perspectives to the sciences, professions, and public, and to bring ideas, long confined to the ivory tower, into popular discourse. Addressing a different topic each year, the Forum offers an integrated program of research, teaching, and outreach, which invites students, scholars, the cultural community, and the general public to discover common ground. For 2011–12, the topic has been Adaptations, its cultural forms and products of human creativity that have defined it across the ages.

For more information on events and fellowship opportunities:
www.phf.upenn.edu

Warren Breckman

Topic Director; Faculty Advisor, Graduate Humanities Forum;
Associate Professor of History

Jennifer Conway

Associate Director

James English

Director; Professor of English

Heather Sharkey

Faculty Advisor, Undergraduate Humanities Forum; Associate
Professor, Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations

Sara Varney

Administrative Coordinator