

UB Humanities Institute

University at Buffalo *The State University of New York*

Scholars
at Hallwalls

SCHOLARS@HALLWALLS

September 18

Carine Mardorossian, English
An Ecocritical Reading of Madness in Caribbean Fiction

October 16

Philip Kiernan, Classics
Idol Hill and the Lives of Roman Idols

November 13

Mark Nathan, History
From the Mountains to the Cities: Propagating Buddhism in Twentieth-Century Korea

December 4

Hershini Young, English
The Ground Beneath Her Feet: Towards a Black Poetics and Politics of Movement

February 12

Judith Goldman, English
_____ Mt. [blank mount]

March 4

Paige Sarlin, Media Study
A Partial History of the Job Interview

April 1

Marla Segol, Transnational Studies/
Institute of Jewish Thought and Heritage
From Medicine to Mysticism: The Stored Life of the Hebrew Microcosm

May 6

Ndubueze Mbah, History
Emergent Masculinities: Gendered Power and Social Change in the African Atlantic

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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

—ERIK R. SEEMAN

Can we finally declare the “crisis in the humanities” to be over?

Or to be more precise: given that this “crisis” was always more about media perception than reality, is it possible that the tide of opinion has turned?

“Yes” was the resounding answer of the speakers at HI’s very successful “Humanities and the Public University” conference this past spring. Graham Hammill, the conference organizer, and our outside experts reframed the issue as being more about the financial challenges facing U.S. public higher education than about anything particular to the humanities.

But maybe there’s another factor decreasing talk of a humanities “crisis”: the importance of the humanities in recent national conversations about race.

In the wake of civil unrest in Ferguson and Baltimore, and following the horrifying murder of nine black churchgoers in Charleston, many in the media turned to humanists to make sense of the events. My own discipline, history, has been at the center of these discussions. A remarkable number of academic historians have written powerful columns in high-profile media outlets.

The New York Times ran opinion pieces by historians Douglas Egerton and Nell Irvin Painter. Jelani Cobb wrote eloquently in *The New Yorker* about the Confederate battle flag. Anthea Butler had articles in *The Washington Post* and *The Guardian*. Historians were in the *L.A. Times*, *Huffington Post*, *MSNBC*, and elsewhere.

Perhaps most influentially, Chad Williams created the Charleston Syllabus, a reading list of books, most by academic historians (including UB’s own Carole Emberton), meant to provide context for anyone needing orientation in a disorienting moment. On Twitter, #CharlestonSyllabus trended strongly for several days and continues to gain attention.

Historians are not the only humanists who responded to the Charleston murders; literary scholars, fiction writers, artists, musicians, and many others did so as well. The lesson seems to be: forget the “crisis” in the humanities; think instead of the humanities in times of crisis.



2015-2016 HI FACULTY FELLOWS

Every year, the UB Humanities Institute supports the ongoing humanistic research projects of eight tenured and tenure-track UB faculty. It is our pleasure to present this year's class of Faculty Fellows whose research demonstrates exceptional quality and potential and showcases the exciting range of arts and humanities-based work at UB.



JUDITH GOLDMAN holds a PhD in English Literature from Columbia University. After a Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of Chicago and a Lectureship at the University of California, Berkeley, she joined UB as an Assistant Professor of English in the Poetics program in 2012. She is the author of two books of poetry, *DeathStar/rico-chet* (2006) and *Vocoder* (2001). As a Faculty Fellow, Goldman will be completing a book of multi-media poetry and creative scholarship titled *_____ Mt.* [blank mount], which is under contract to launch the "Beyond Criticism" series with Bloomsbury.



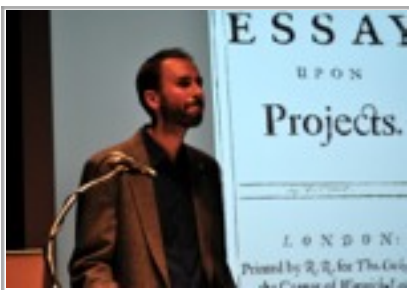
PHILIP KIERNAN, Assistant Professor of Classics since 2010, received his PhD in Classical Archaeology from the University of Heidelberg, Germany. From 2011-13 he directed an excavation site in Germany called Idol Hill. He is the author of a 2009 book, *Miniature Votive Offerings in*



the North-West Provinces of the Roman Empire. As a Faculty Fellow, he will complete *Pagan Idols*, which explores how, in ancient Roman religion, a central aspect to the worship of divine objects was the belief that these objects had a birth, life, and death.



CARINE MARDROSSIAN, Professor of English at UB, studied in Belgium prior to obtaining her doctorate at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is the author of two books, *Reclaiming Difference: Caribbean Women Rewrite Postcolonialism* (2005) and *Framing the Rape Victim: Gender and Agency, Reconsidered* (2014). Her fellowship project, "Creolized Ecologies in Caribbean Literature," draws on environmental studies to explore how Caribbean writers offer ways of conceptualizing the relationship between humanity and the environment that move beyond facile models of hybridity.



David Alff presenting at Hallwalls
October 17, 2014



NDUBUEZE MBAH, originally from Nigeria, received a doctorate in African History with distinction from Michigan State University in 2013. The following year he joined the Department of History at UB as an Assistant Professor. Mbah's work centers on British colonization's impact on gender politics in the Bight of Biafra, a key area of the west coast of what is now Nigeria, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He will be completing *Emergent Masculinities: Gendered Power and Social Change in the Biafran Atlantic Age* during his Faculty Fellowship period.

HI 2014-15 FACTS

Events Organized
93

Attendance
2745

Events Co-sponsored
21

Attendance
2579

HI FACULTY FELLOWS



MARK NATHAN's book project, *From the Mountains to the City: Buddhist Propagation and Religious Reform in Modern Korean History*, looks at Korean Buddhism from the late nineteenth century to the present, and examines how an active attempt to spread the religion led to a particular capacity for coordinated action. Nathan holds a doctorate from the University of California, Los Angeles, and is Assistant Professor in the Asian Studies Program and the Department of History. He co-edited *Buddhism and Law: An Introduction* (2014) with Rebecca French in UB's law school.



PAIGE SARLIN has a PhD in Modern Culture and Media from Brown University. A filmmaker and scholar, she is Assistant Professor in the Department of Media Study. Sarlin will be completing her feature-length "Practice: A Documentary Film about Job Interviews" as a Faculty Fellow; it considers the current economic conditions of Buffalo from the perspective of job seekers learning to present themselves to prospective employers. She is also working on a book titled *Interview-Work: The Genealogy of a Cultural Form*.



MARLA SEGOL will be working on *Kabbalah's Two Bodies: Human and Divine Bodies in Jewish Esoteric Literature* as a Faculty Fellow. She is Associate Professor in the Institute of Jewish Thought and Heritage and the Department of Transnational Studies. Her books include *Word and Image in Medieval Kabbalah: The Texts, Commentaries, and Diagrams of the "Sever Yetsirah"* (2012), *Religious Conversion, History, and Genre in Floire et Blancheflor, Aucassin et Nicolette, and Flamanca* (2012), and a coedited volume, *Sexuality, Sociality, and Cosmology in Medieval Literary Texts* (2013).



HERSHINI BHANA YOUNG, Associate Professor of English, is the author of two books, *Haunting Capital: Memory, Text, and the Black Diasporic Body* (2005) and *Illegible Will: Coercive Performances in Southern African Spectacles of Labor* (forthcoming). Her "Vulnerability of Horizontality" Faculty-Fellow project focuses on disability and race in sub-Saharan Africa from the perspective of performance and popular culture, which repositions illness and the non-normative body as central rather than marginal.



GENDER BENDER

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 7 P.M.

Buffalo History Museum
"Do Clothes Make the Man?" by Dr. Patrick McDevitt

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 7:30 P.M.

Sweetness 7 (301 Parkside Ave.)
Book Group to discuss *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*



Wonder Woman is ™ & © DC Comics.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 8 P.M.

Albright-Knox Art Gallery
Reading and on-stage discussion of *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* by Jill Lepore



SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 11 A.M. — 5 P.M.

Full-day festival including talks, conversations, and roundtables

Buy tickets at buffalohumanities.org by Wednesday, September 23rd to get a free boxed lunch on Saturday. For more on the Buffalo Humanities Festival, see p.5.

UB FACULTY FELLOWS SHARE CUTTING-EDGE RESEARCH DOWNTOWN IN A FIFTH SEASON OF SCHOLARS@HALLWALLS

Located in the heart of Buffalo's resurgent downtown on Delaware Avenue, Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center will again host this year's Scholars@Hallwalls series, featuring talks by the 2015-16 class of HI Faculty Fellows. We gather monthly to learn about one fellow's research through an engaging lecture and lively conversation. This year's Scholars@Hallwalls lineup highlights the cutting-edge and interdisciplinary nature of humanities research at UB.

Talks are on **Friday afternoons at 4 p.m.** and are free and open to the public. Complimentary wine and hors d'oeuvres are served. We hope to see you there!

On September 18th, Professor of English **Carine Mardorossian** kicks off our series with "An Ecocritical Reading of Madness in Caribbean Fiction." Madness has historically functioned as a powerful trope of gender, race, or class oppression in fiction from colonized and postcolonial countries. Mardorossian examines how Caribbean writers have negotiated the danger that the trope of madness poses, namely that of leading to unidimensional characters. She argues that one of the ways Caribbean writers negotiate madness' unidimensionality is through their characters' association with a multi-layered environment and landscape.

Classics professor **Philip Kiernan's** October 16th "Idol Hill and the Lives of Roman Idols" presents preliminary results of excavations completed from 2010-13 with a team of UB Students on "Idol Hill," a Celtic burial mound in southern Germany. Constructed in the second millennium B.C., its medieval name, Idol Hill, connects it with the ancient Roman practice of worshipping images of the gods. Kiernan explores how burial mounds and idols are both sacred monuments and artworks with biographies, the function and meaning of which change over time.

Historian **Mark Nathan's** November 13th talk, "From the Mountains to the Cities: Propagating Buddhism in Twentieth-Century Korea," examines the modern transformation of Buddhism in Korea from a socially marginalized community of monastics under the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910) to a socially engaged and institutionally revitalized religion capable of attracting millions of urban lay followers today. Nathan will explore the concept, practice, and historical context of *p'ogyo*, a method of propagating Buddhist teachings in society that has been central to this transformation.

With "The Ground Beneath Her Feet: Towards a Black Poetics and Politics of Movement" on December 4th, English professor **Hershini Bhana Young** explores a black poetics and politics of movement that questions verticality as the desired norm. Instead of seeing every fall as an opportunity to get up again, is there another way to relate to a living, moving and remembering landscape? For answers, Young turns to African American/Nigerian artist Wura-Natasha Ogunji, whose performances of dragging kegs of water through the streets of Lagos foreground issues of disability, women's labor, and spirituality.

Our spring lineup starts on February 12th with Poetics professor **Judith Goldman's** book-in-progress _____ Mt. [blank mount], which inhabits Percy Shelley's iconic poem of British Romanticism, "Mont Blanc" (1816), to explore the ecological, aesthetic, philosophical, and technological crossroads of the 21st century. Shelley's ode expresses anxiety about glaciers, environmental extremity, and nature's unmasterability. Making the poem a springboard for speculative poetic-critical practice, Goldman will perform work that addresses past futures and future histories of ecological crisis converging at the Anthropocene "now."

Media Study professor **Paige Sarlin** will offer "A Partial History of the Job Interview" on March 4th. All job seekers and employers endure the job interview as a rite of passage. But how did its framework for a work-related interrogation emerge? This talk will chronicle the development of the job interview and changes in the basic conditions of employment. The talk will be illustrated with clips from the history of narrative and documentary film as well as footage from a documentary-in-progress about job-interview training in Buffalo.

In "From Medicine to Mysticism: The Storied Life of the Hebrew Microcosm" on April 1st, **Marla Segol** will trace the transformation of the late antique medical microcosm to the kabbalistic Primordial Man, or the kabbalistic tree of life iconic to Jewish mysticism. While the model of the microcosm initially served to organize the principles of anatomy, late antique and medieval writers reimagined the macrocosm as the divine. With this the human body became a model for both the cosmos and the divine, at the base of the Jewish mystical model.

On May 6th we close out the 2015/16 year with "Emergent Masculinities: Gendered Power and Social Change in the African Atlantic." Historian **Ndubueze Mbah** examines how changing gender identities between 1750 and 1920 in the West African Bight of Biafra defined the 1.6 million slaves exported to the Americas. Mbah draws on European colonial and missionary archives, oral interviews, participatory ethnography, and film documentation of material culture and rituals to reveal the shift from a pre-colonial period characterized by female breadwinners and powerful female political institutions, to a colonial period of male political domination.



HI@10

HI TURNS TEN!

It was in the fall of 2005 that the dreams, plans, and hard work of a number of UB faculty—including Jim Bono, Tim Dean, Martha Malamud, and Ewa Ziarek—came to fruition, and the Humanities Institute was born. Created with the support of CAS's then Dean, Uday Sukhatme, and Senior Associate Dean Charles Stinger, HI was intended to fulfill two primary purposes, to facilitate interdisciplinarity by enabling faculty collaboration beyond departmental silos, and to support faculty research by providing funding and infrastructure for leave time, conferences, and research workshops. An essential aspect of HI from its founding was its neutrality. It has no proscribed thematic focus or research agenda; it can serve any and all in the humanities and arts.

In its first decade, HI has supported the production of multiple books, articles, essays, edited volumes, and works of art; it has seeded the projects of faculty who have gone on to win renowned fellowships; and it has hosted research



workshops, conferences, and symposia on dozens conceptual themes. In short, in its first decade HI has exceeded all expectations in nourishing arts and humanities scholarship and teaching.

HI was also intended to help recruit and retain excellent faculty, something it has done exceedingly well. Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School Graham Hammill recently recalled that he had attended an HI-sponsored conference at UB as a faculty member from another institution. He states, "I was so impressed by the intellectual energy and level of exchange across disciplines that, two years later, when a position at UB opened in my field of research, I decided to apply." Further, he finds that HI is one of the many things that keeps him and other faculty members here. "The Humanities Institute continues to be a source of inspiration and an important laboratory for the advancement of my own research," says Hammill. "It is a large part of what makes humanities research distinctive at UB."

Join us on the afternoon of Monday, November 2nd for the "HI@10" symposium to reflect more on the state of the humanities at UB, and for a celebratory reception.

BUFFALO HUMANITIES FESTIVAL STARTS STRONG, GROWS LARGER

The first annual Buffalo Humanities Festival, *Migration Nation: Moving Stories*, debuted September 2014. Presented by the UB Humanities Institute in collaboration with Canisius College, Niagara University, SUNY Buffalo State, SUNY Fredonia, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, the Burchfield Penney Art Center, and the Buffalo History Museum, the Festival's mission is to foster dialogue and idea-sharing among the public, scholars, and artists. Each year, the Festival draws on our city's many rich academic traditions and resources to engage the most pressing questions of our time.

The 2014 event explored the timely, deceptively simple question, "How did we get here?" Through talks—including a keynote with author Gary Shteyngart—discussions, and performances, *Migration Nation* sought to move beyond buzzwords to investigate the human dimension of migration.



Alberto Rey giving a presentation



Puppet Parade

Audiences were enthusiastic, and a number of the events were standing room only.

The second Buffalo Humanities Festival, "Gender Bender," will take place this September 23rd-26th. Focused on the question, "Are we bound by gender?" the Festival kicks off on Wednesday the 23rd with a talk on the history of the man's suit and a pop-up exhibition at the Buffalo History Museum. Other highlights include Harvard history professor Jill Lepore discussing *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery on Friday the 25th, and the full-day Festival on Saturday the 26th. This will feature gender-bending performances by Shakespeare in Delaware Park, a "drag break" during lunch, gender-probing cabaret and rock 'n' roll, and talks on topics ranging from "The Real Eunuchs of Constantinople" to "#BlackGirlsMatter." Tickets and further information are at buffalohumanities.org.

PAIN: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE

OCTOBER 8-10, 2015 |

UB HONORS COLLEGE
UB CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Although pain has always constituted a central human experience, recently the stakes involved in discussions of pain have become particularly high. This is especially evident in recent debates about torture, war, and the death penalty; the politics of representing, historicizing, and describing pain; changes in medical and alternative approaches to chronic and acute pain; and the spiraling cost of health care. By bringing together some of the most interesting thinkers on these topics in a wide variety of different fields, we hope to help move these conversations forward.

“Pain: An Interdisciplinary Conference” will bring together speakers from medicine, law, anthropology, history, literature, and art history to discuss the nature, implications, and experience of pain. We will consider the ways in which pain can be defined trans-historically or as culturally specific. We will discuss the nature of social suffering. We will consider the aesthetics of pain and the problems pain poses for representation. And we will ask what legal, political, and social challenges pain poses in a variety of different contexts. The conference will take place over the course of three days and consist of eight plenary talks and a concluding round-table discussion. It is free and open to the public. For additional information and to register, please see painconference.wordpress.com.

ELAINE SCARRY, KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Elaine Scarry is Professor of Aesthetics and General Theory of Value at Harvard University. Her first book, *The Body in Pain* (1985), is widely acknowledged to be one of the most important works on pain of the 20th and 21st centuries. Her other major works include *On Beauty and Being Just* (1999) and

Thermonuclear Monarchy (2014).

RITA CHARON

Rita Charon is one of the central voices in the emerging field of narrative medicine. She is Professor of Clinical Medicine and Director of the Program in Narrative Medicine at the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, the author of *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness* (2006), and the co-editor of *Stories Matter: The Role of Narrative in Medical Ethics* (2002).

VEENA DAS

Veena Das's work on “social suffering” has helped reconfigure contemporary understandings of pain. Professor of Anthropology at Johns Hopkins University, her works include *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (2006) and *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (1995).

SHIGEHISA KURIYAMA

Shigehisa Kuriyama is Reischauer Institute Professor of Cultural History in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations and the Department of the History of Science at Harvard University. His book, *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine* (1999) was awarded the William H. Welch Medal of the American Association for the History of Medicine.

MITCHELL MERBACK

Professor of Art History at the Johns Hopkins University, Mitchell Merback's books include *Pilgrimage and Pogrom: Violence, Memory and Visual Culture at the Host-Miracle Shrines of Germany and Austria* (2013), and *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of*

Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe (1999). He is currently at work on a project on torture and memory in medieval and early modern art.

RON SCHLEIFER

Ron Schleifer has written, translated, or edited twenty-two books. Most recently, he has published *Pain and Suffering* in the Routledge series Integrating Science and Culture (2014). Professor Schleifer is the George Lynn Cross Research Professor of English and Adjunct Professor in the College of Medicine at the University of Oklahoma.

DARIUS REJALI

Darius Rejali is a nationally recognized expert on government torture and interrogation and a professor of political science at Reed College. His most recent book, *Torture and Democracy*, won the 2007 Human Rights Book of the Year Award from the American Political Science Association.

AUSTIN SARAT

Austin Sarat's most recent book, *Gruesome Spectacles: Botched Executions and America's Death Penalty* (2013), addresses the problem of inhumane lethal punishment in the U.S. Professor Sarat is the William Nelson Cromwell Professor of Jurisprudence and Political Science and Associate Dean of the Faculty of Amherst College.



NEW FACULTY SEMINAR SERIES

****ALL TAKE PLACE IN 830 CLEMENS HALL AT 3:30 P.M.****



**TUESDAY
OCTOBER 20**

**FERNANDA
NEGRETE**
ROMANCE
LANGUAGES AND
LITERATURES

“Clinical Aesthetics: Psychoanalysis, Schizoanalysis, and Art’s Work on a Body”

The notion of a body and its health as a problem of desire is central to both modern art and psychoanalysis, two fields that emerge simultaneously in Western culture. Gilles Deleuze adopts Antonin Artaud’s term “body without organs” to articulate the potential in modern art and literature to challenge the preservation of traditional values. Although Deleuze calls for an aesthetic clinic apart from that of psychoanalysis, psychoanalysis’ address of the body in terms of desire and language provides keys for understanding the forceful intervention of the aesthetic in the social sphere.



**TUESDAY
NOVEMBER 10**

HENRY BERLIN
ROMANCE
LANGUAGES AND
LITERATURES

“Confession and the Rhetoric of the Passions in Late-Medieval Iberia”

The turn of the fourteenth century in Castile saw the dramatic rebirth of courtly poetry among the aristocracy and other lettered classes. This genre had already flourished centuries earlier in Languedoc, Portugal, and Aragon, and scholars seeking to explain its Castilian resurgence have described an essentially nostalgic and even anachronistic phenomenon. In contrast, through a reconsideration of the relationship between lyric poetry and confession, Berlin argues that the affective rhetoric of this corpus constitutes a mode of resistance to the emerging dominance of the individual ego.



**MONDAY
FEBRUARY 1**

**NICHOLAS
LUSTIG**
GEOGRAPHY

“City of ‘Impudent If’: The Dream of Justice and the Endless Search for the City in the Poetry of Nathaniel Mackey”

This talk discusses the intersection of politics, desire, and the city in the work of contemporary African-American poet Nathaniel Mackey. In Mackey, the city becomes a memory, ideal, delusion, and spur for a wandering collective that seeks a place and practice of justice. This talk examines the evolution of the city in his work, contrasts it to competing notions such as Ezra Pound’s City of Dioce and a traditionalist “shining city on a hill,” and considers the resonances of Mackey’s work with recent events of violence and uprising in American cities.



**MONDAY
MARCH 7**

**JACOB
GALLAGHER-
ROSS**
THEATRE&DANCE

“Mediating the Method: Lee Strasberg, Marlon Brando, and the Sound of Authenticity”

Method acting, the mid-twentieth-century performance style developed at the Actors Studio in New York City, was both renowned and reviled for its monomaniacal pursuit of emotional authenticity in performance, sacrificing textual integrity, and sometimes even intelligibility, to feeling; Marlon Brando’s infamous mumbling is a case in point. But our obsession with the Method’s psychological contortions can cause us to overlook its creative dialogue with new technologies. In this seminar, Gallagher-Ross considers the media behind the Method. Recording undergirded the exercises and thought of Lee Strasberg, the Method’s Svengali. And Brando’s mumbling, upon closer scrutiny, reveals itself as a canny sound experiment.



**MONDAY
MARCH 21**

**LINDSAY
HUNTER**
THEATRE&DANCE

“This Is Not a Threat: Performing Reality in Conspiracy For Good”

In the 2010 alternate reality game *Conspiracy For Good*, players aligned against a fictional corporate villain bent on surveilling British citizens. The game scenario identified consumer surveillance technology as troublesome in the hands of the game’s overtly malevolent villain, but simultaneously as a powerful tool for resistance of corporate overreach when deployed by consumers. This presentation considers the potential for this and other alternate reality games to define and orient the subjectivities of their players, and in particular to place both players and the game’s sponsor, Nokia, in specific relationships to surveillant practices.

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE STAFF

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Program Administrator: **Jinhee Song**



Humanities Institute

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FORMER HI FELLOW HONORED WITH A GUGGENHEIM

Associate Professor of English and 2009-10 HI Faculty Fellow Carla Mazzio was awarded a prestigious John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship for the 2014-15 academic year. The fellowship supported a full year of work on her current book, *The Trouble with Numbers: The Drama of Mathematics in the Age of Shakespeare*, which she will complete in 2016 for the University of Chicago Press. Mazzio credits HI's support for having enabled her to successfully apply for the Guggenheim, one of the most prestigious prizes awarded to humanities scholars. "There is no way that I could have so fully reconceptualized this particular book project without the HI Fellowship," states Mazzio.

Mazzio's work in literature intersects with a number of other fields including the history of technology and the material book, the history of affect and sensory perception, language ideologies and speech disorders, and the history of science in relation to medicine and mathematics. She has served as one of the founders and co-directors of the HI-sponsored Science Studies Research Workshop and as Director of Graduate Studies in English. She is the author and editor of a number of books, including *The Inarticulate Renaissance: Language Trouble in an Age of Eloquence* (University of Pennsylvania Press), which was awarded the 2010 Roland H. Bainton Book Prize for Literature.

