

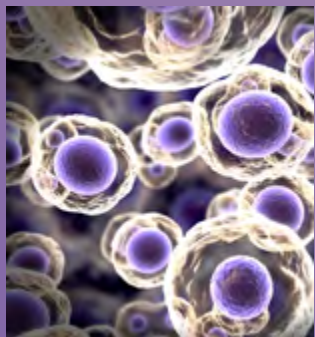
CSWupdate  
MARCH 2012

A PREVIEW OF THE UPCOMING SYMPOSIUM

# life (un)ltd

**Feminism, Race,  
and Biopolitics**

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# Life (Un)Ltd

## A Symposium on Feminism, Race, and Biopolitics

MAY 11, 2012, IN THE PRESENTATION ROOM OF THE CHARLES E. YOUNG RESEARCH LIBRARY AT UCLA

**H**ow do biotechnologies both ameliorate and produce new health disparities and augment the production of “expendable populations”? What effects have blood transfusion, tissue engineering, transplantation, IVF/gestational surrogacy, ES cell therapy, population genotyping, and experiments in nutritive milieu had on feminist studies, especially those theorizing the circulation of biomaterials in relation to race and (neo)colonialism? How have non-normatively gendered bodies, poor women’s bodies, as well as gestational body parts served as opportune sites and sources for medical experimentation and the speculative contouring of life unlimited? What methods (historical materialist, psychoanalytic, ethnographically realist, deconstructive, cybernetic/systems theory) lend themselves to this feminist bioscientific critique? To what extent have feminist approaches to reproductive labor and childrearing

(the emotional labor of cultivating human life) made connections with bioscientific research, practicalities, and ethics? And finally, how have literature and the arts shaped and reflected upon the biomedical imagination?

On May, 11 2012, scholars will gather to address some of these questions at “Life (Un)Ltd: A Symposium on Feminism, Race, and Biopolitics,” which is presented by the UCLA Center for the Study of Women, with support from the UCLA Office of Faculty Diversity and Development; Deans of the Humanities and Social Sciences at UCLA; the Partner University Fund project on 21st Century Cuisine, Nutrition and Genetics in France and the United States; and the UCLA Institute for Society and Genetics.

Rachel C. Lee, CSW Associate Director, organized this symposium and invited scholars from diverse fields to present their works related to feminism, race, and biopolitics.

These speakers include Khiara Bridges, As-

sociate Professor, Anthropology, and Associate Professor, Law at Boston University; Melinda Cooper, ARC Future Fellow, Department of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Sydney; Hannah Landecker, Associate Professor in Sociology and Institute for Society and Genetics at UCLA; Michelle Murphy, Associate Professor of History at University of Toronto; Diane Nelson, Associate Professor of Cultural Anthropology at Duke University; Renee Tajima-Peña, Professor of Social Documentation and Film and Digital Media at UC Santa Cruz; Mei Zhan, Associate Professor of Anthropology at UC Irvine; Allison Carruth, Assistant Professor of English, University of Oregon and Susan M. Squier, Brill Professor of Women’s Studies and English at Pennsylvania State University.

The symposium is free and open to the public. For updated info, visit the CSW website: [www.csw.ucla.edu](http://www.csw.ucla.edu)

# Rachel C. Lee

**CSW Associate Director and Associate Professor of English and Women's Studies at UCLA**

*SYMPOSIUM ORGANIZER Rachel C. Lee will also serve as a respondent. She is Principal Investigator for CSW's Life (Un)Ltd research colloquium and the organizer of the symposium. She teaches courses in critical theory, ethnic literature, and medical humanities. She is the author of The Americas of Asian American Literature: Gendered Fictions of Nation and Transnation; lead editor of Asian America.Net: Ethnicity, Nationalism, Cyberspace (Routledge, 2005), and editor of A Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature and Culture (Routledge, forthcoming 2014). Her current book project, "The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America," examines how the specific subset of historical practices we associate with U.S. orientalism—for example, the legal and literary rendering of Asian Americans as perpetual "aliens," the classifying of Asian culture, diet, and styles of government as the quintessential other of their respective American practices, and more recently, the anxiety toward East Asian nations as ascendant economic competitors and harborers of deadly viruses—act as crucial psychic and social mechanisms by which Western societies manage and make sense of biotech's destabilization of the human. The monograph explores within a variety of genres such as stand-up comedy, literature, and new media, the thematic and formal (narratological) corollaries to technoscience's capacity to alter the temporal sequence of biological growth and development, to cross species boundaries on the cellular level, and to alienate and regard as superordinately valuable entities, the organ, tissue, or body part that has been disentangled from the self.*



# Khiara M. Bridges

Associate Professor, Anthropology, and Associate Professor, Law, Boston University

## Writing an Ethnography of “Life”

An analysis of “life” during the event of pregnancy. The central preoccupation that motivates this study is the irony that the concept of “life” has such incredible power precisely because it has no definition. For example, when a person asserts that abortion is wrong because the fetus is “a life,” the “life” referenced need not be defined: Upon hearing the signifier, the hearer knows that what is being signified is distinct from biological life—the capacity possessed by all living organisms—and, accordingly, dutifully conjures up notions of a precious, sacred entity that must be revered, respected, and protected. Yet, “life” acquires its power precisely because it is not defined. It means everything that those who invoke it desire because it denotes nothing with precision. Its power lies not in its ambiguity, but rather its vacuity. This exploration will investigate the stakes of “life” for those who are charged to care for it.

Special attention will be paid to providers of obstetric and gynecological services; the objective is to note the contradictions that erupt when the sciences, understood as the quintessence of rationality, are engaged to care for “life”—an entity that exceeds rationalism. The paradox is that the quasi-ideal, quasi-divine, quasi-unearthly phenomenon of “life” is thought to be neglected, and tragically so, unless it is nurtured with the most vigorous of biotechnical (i.e., material, human, earthly) attention. This paper explores the ambiguous position occupied by the actual caretakers of “life.” Ethnography of these caretakers is an important corollary to ethnography of pregnant women, as healthcare providers share with women the social responsibility for the future of the “life” that many—including, at times, the healthcare workers themselves—believe women to carry.



*KHIARA M. BRIDGES has written many articles concerning, race, class, reproductive rights, and the intersection of the three. Her scholarship has appeared in Columbia Law Review, California Law Review, Washington & Lee Law Review, Harvard Journal of Law and Gender, among others. She is the author of Reproducing Race: An Ethnography of Pregnancy as a Site of Racialization (University of California Press, 2011).*

*She received her J.D. from Columbia Law School and her Ph.D., with distinction, from Columbia University’s Department of Anthropology. She was a member of the Columbia Law Review and a Kent Scholar. While in college, she was a counselor at the Feminist Women’s Health Center in Atlanta, gaining experience with policies affecting the availability of abortion services in Georgia. She teaches Critical Race Theory, Criminal Law, and a course on the Fourteenth Amendment at BU Law.*

# Melinda Cooper

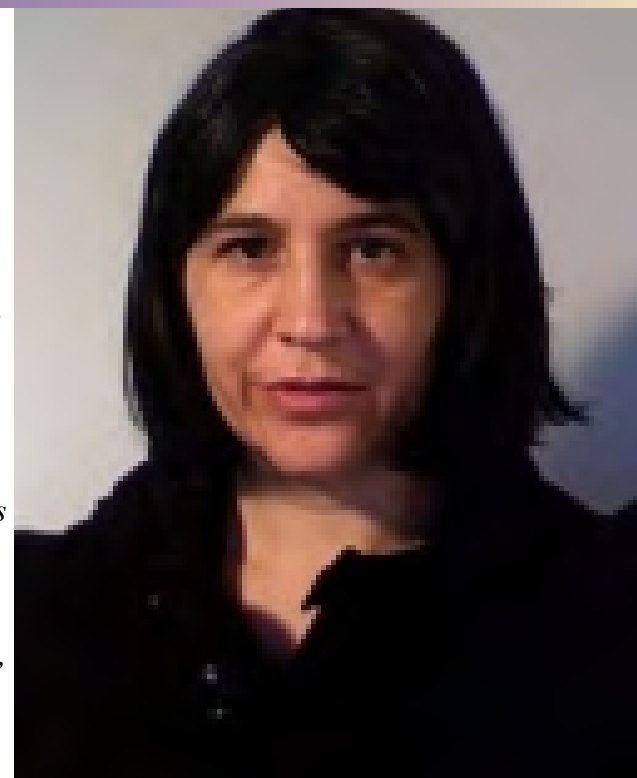
ARC Future Fellow, Department of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Sydney

## Experimental Economies and the Contingencies of Labour:

### CLINICAL TRIAL WORK BETWEEN CHINA, INDIA AND THE UNITED STATES

This project examines the evolving institutional and legal contexts of clinical trial work in the global pharmaceutical economy, with a particular focus on Beijing/Shanghai, Ahmedabad (Gujarat, India) and the United States. While mid-twentieth century tort law defined clinical trial work in diametric opposition to the norms of Fordist labour, the rise of the independent contractor and the generalization of labor contingency now places clinical trial work on a continuum with other forms of uninsured, risk-bearing labour in the post Fordist economy. Clinical trial work is contingent labour par excellence in the sense that it devolves uninsurable economic and metabolic risk onto the body of the individual worker. This paper argues that the human research subject should be understood as the bio-innovation economy's risk-bearer of last resort.

MELINDA COOPER is an ARC Research Fellow in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Sydney, Australia. Her research is focused on the expansion of multinational clinical trials in China and India, with a special focus on Beijing/Shanghai and Ahmedabad. She is the author of *Life as Surplus* (Washington University Press, 2008) and coauthor, with Catherine Waldby, of *Clinical Labor: Human Research Subjects and Tissue Donors in the Global Bioeconomy* (Duke University Press, 2013). She is also coeditor of *The Journal of Cultural Economy*.



# Hannah Landecker

Associate Professor, Sociology, and Institute for Society and Genetics, UCLA

## On Eating Information:

### A SHORT HISTORY OF METABOLISM AND INCORPORATION

Epigenetics has turned food and its metabolism into a problem that is not just about how the body turns food its basic components—carbohydrates, fat, protein—but how food acts as a signal of the environment—both biological and political. Hannah Landecker will explore what this transformation of metabolism and epigenetics reveals about food, environmental politics, and the increased salience of metabolism as a sight for biological understanding and political and moral contestation.



HANNAH LANDECKER is the author of *Culturing Life: How Cells Became Technologies* (Harvard University Press, 2007), and numerous other engagements with cell biology, biotechnology, and the role of the moving image in life science. More recently, her research interests have centered on the historical and social study of metabolism. Her current study, *American Metabolism*, looks at what metabolism was and is becoming, in science, philosophy, political theory, and culture.



# Michelle Murphy

Associate Professor, History, University of Toronto

## Reproduction, Time, Latency

Where does reproduction begin and end? This paper offers the notion of “distributed reproduction” to rethink reproduction as a aggregate process distributed in time and space that connects and moves through bodies, ecologies, and political economies. To do this, the paper theorizes distributed reproduction through a geopolitical site of intensive petrochemical refining.

*MICHELLE MURPHY is a feminist science studies scholar and historian of the recent past. Her work focuses on environmental politics, reproduction, biopolitics, and economic rationalities through transnational and postcolonial lenses. She is the author of Sick Building Syndrome and the Politics of Uncertainty (Duke University Press, 2006) and Seizing the Means of Reproduction: Entanglements of Health, Feminism, and Technoscience (Duke University Press, forthcoming 2012). She is also co-organizer of the Technoscience Salon.*



# Diane Nelson

Associate Professor, Cultural Anthropology, Duke University

## “Yes to Life = No to Mining”: TECHNOLOGIES OF DEATH AND LIVELINESS IN POST-GENOCIDE GUATEMALA

This paper will address two sites in which Mayan indigenous people are deploying transnational “life” technologies in struggles against death. The first is through the newly opened DNA lab of the forensic anthropology organization, which is working to catalog and identify the tens of thousands of human remains of victims of (primarily) state violence during the civil war (1961–1996), one phase of which (from 1978–1983) has been recognized as genocide by the United Nations. Collecting bones from clandestine cemeteries is an on-going struggle, physically demanding, legally complex, and often entails roiling families and confronting death threats from those implicated. It is both a deeply embodied and also completely bureaucratized project—as is DNA “Identification.” The second is the efforts to close a gold mine operating through mountaintop removal, and to foreclose opening any more throughout the national territory. In these struggles technologies of health, development, risk assessment, and toxin monitoring are conjoined with legal, calculating, and political organizing techniques to safeguard human lives and life more generally, enunciated as “Madre Tierra,” Mother Earth. Women have been the energizing motors in both these sites, drawing strategically on their roles in cultivating life and their identifications as poor and racially excluded peoples. In a time and place when continuing exhumations insist that the last war over the resources necessary for life is far from over they are risking private, corporate, and state-backed violence in defense of a vision of Life that is more than the neoliberal struggle for survival: for Life Unlimited.

*DIANE NELSON is a cultural anthropologist and has worked in Guatemala since 1985. Her research addresses war and genocide, indigenous identity (including Maya-Hackers, Omniflife saleswomen, Ponzi-scheme victims and anti-mining activists), and political movements, and her theoretical interests*

*lie in subject formation, political economy, gender and sexuality, popular culture, and science and technology studies. Her means and ends are to somehow look this crazy mixed up world in the eye without falling victim to shock and awe. Her books include Aftermath: War by Other Means in Post-Genocide Guatemala (co-edited with Carlota McAllister, forthcoming), Reckoning: The Ends of War in Guatemala (Duke University Press, 2009), and A Finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala (UC Press, 1999). She also writes for Science Fiction Studies. She is thankful to the students at Duke University for paying her salary.*





# Rene Tajima-Peña

Professor, Social Documentation, Film and Digital Media, UC Santa Cruz

## Mas Bebés?

This project's foundation is an investigation of the coercive sterilization of Mexican American women at Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center during the 1960s and 1970s. The transmedia project will consist of a theatrical documentary, television broadcast, and web interactive project that connects the LAC+USC story to the growing movement for reproductive justice.

*RENEE TAJIMA-PEÑA is an Academy Award-nominated documentary filmmaker whose work focuses on Asian American and immigrant communities. Her film credits include Who Killed Vincent Chin? My America...or Honk if You Love Buddha,*

*Labor Women, Skate Manzanar and The New Americans, and Calavera Highway. She recently launched two web interactive projects, "Heart Mountain 3.0" and "Mas Bebés? Interactive." Her films have been screened at the Cannes, London, Sundance, South by Southwest, and Toronto film festivals, and broadcast around the world. Her previous honors include the Broad Fellowship from United States Artists, the Alpert Award in the Arts, a Peabody Award, a Dupont-Columbia Award, the International Documentary Association Achievement Award, and fellowships in media arts from the Rockefeller Foundation. She was a 2011 Guggenheim Fellow. At UC Santa Cruz, Tajima-Peña is also co-graduate director of Social Documentation, a program that she helped to launch in 2005.*



# Mei Zhan

Associate Professor, Anthropology, UC Irvine

## Undivided: reimagining the human and the world through transdisciplinary engagements with an experiential medicine

In the 1950s, through a process of modernization and scientization which saw the bifurcation of the empirical and the conceptual, and the human and the world, traditional Chinese medicine solidified its professional identity as an experiential medicine in need of “uplifting” by scientific experimentation and theorization. Yet, from within the modernist regime of knowledge and mode of knowing, Chinese medicine’s commitments to its own worldliness have engendered reimaginings of the oneness of the human and the world, thinking and being. This paper explores metaphorical and analogous thinking at the center of everyday pedagogical and clinical discourse and practice, especially concerning the body, illness, and “environments” of various natures and scales. Rather than relying on deductive or inductive thinking, metaphors and analogies are central to the quotidian practice of Chinese medicine. They work sideways and in the specific, requiring and encouraging practitioners to think relationally and creatively while confronted with particular clinical situations, all the while insisting on the dynamic, multiplicitous, and even disharmonious oneness of the human and the world.

Transdisciplinary engagements with STS, feminist methodology, and Chinese medicine thus allow us to unsettle the relations between the empirical and the conceptual, the concrete and the abstract, and the analytical and the analyzed. It pushes STS and feminist scholars to look at phenomena that are too often consigned to the other side of the Modern



Constitution, and habitually taken as objects of inquiry rather than analyses (of a different mode) in their own right. The goal of these transdisciplinary engagements goes well beyond the

reversal of asymmetrical binary categories and relations. The articulation of the dynamic oneness of the human and the world, and the empirical and the conceptual forces a rupture from within the Modern; in due process, it engenders a (possibly) nonmodern and feminist analytic—an alternative mode of thinking, doing and being—that resists masculine aspirations for universality and transcendence.

*MEI ZHAN* conducts research in the areas of medical anthropology, science and technology studies, globalization and transnationalism, and China studies. She conducted field research on the “worlding” of traditional Chinese medicine in Shanghai and the San Francisco Bay Area over a ten-year period (1995–2005). This multi-sited research focuses on the processes of interaction, rupture, and displacement in the translocal formation of knowledges, identities, and communities. Her writings have appeared in *Social Text*; *East Asian Science, Technology, and Society: An International Journal*; *Medical Anthropology*; *American Anthropologist*; and *Cultural Anthropology*.

# Susan Squier

Brill Professor of Women's Studies and English, Pennsylvania State University

## Unsettling, even perhaps a bit sinister: the implications of Waddington's "World Egg" for feminist thought

This essay—really an initial foray into a very new project—takes CH Waddington's discussion of "the world egg" as a provocation for feminist biomedical and environmental thinking. The "world egg" notion appears in Waddington's 1969 contribution to the IUBS symposium, *Towards a Theoretical Biology*: "The Practical consequences of metaphysical beliefs on a biologist's work: an autobiographical note." Waddington, the celebrated twentieth-century embryologist/biologist who coined the term "epigenetics," explored in that essay some of the philosophical commitments that explained his own embryological and biological research. While Waddington's embryological research provided the foundation for my discussion of twentieth century biomedicine in *Babies in Bottles* and *Liminal Lives*, this symposium gives me the opportunity to focus specifically on questions raised by this brief essay. I write mindful of Sarah Ahmed's challenge, in "Imaginary Prohibitions," that dead white male scholars receive the close attention that is denied living feminist writers. And I take Waddington's work as a jumping off point for thinking about the constitutive exclusions in biology and biomedicine that are foundational to the practices that have produced our current state of Life (Un) Ltd: exclusions of gender, species, and affect.

SUSAN MERRILL SQUIER is Julia Gregg Brill Professor of Women's Studies, English, and until June 2012, of STS (Science, Technology, and Society) at The Pennsylvania State University. She is the au-



thor or editor of eight books, including *Babies in Bottles: Twentieth Century Visions of Reproductive Technology* (1994), *Playing Dolly: Technocultural Formations, Fantasies, and Fictions of Assisted Reproduction* (1999), and *Liminal Lives: Imagining the Human at the Frontiers of Biomedicine* (2004). Her most recent book, *Poultry Science, Chicken Culture: A Partial Alphabet* (2011) was recipient of the Michelle Kendrick Prize of the SLSA. In 2002, she co-directed (with Anne Hunsaker Hawkins) a National Endowment for the Humanities Sumner Institute on "Medicine, Literature and Culture" at the Penn State College of Medicine, Hershey Medical Center. A member of the advisory board (2010-2011) and member of the jury (2011-2012) of the Lynd Ward Graphic Novel Prize, she is part of the Graphic Medicine Collective which has organized two international conferences on Comics and Medicine, "Graphic Medicine" (London June 2010), and "Comics and Medicine: Sequential Art and Illness" (Chicago June 2011), with the third conference to follow in Toronto, Canada, in July 2012.

# Allison Carruth

**Assistant Professor of English and affiliated faculty member in Environmental Studies, International Studies, and the Center for the Study of Women & Society, University of Oregon**

*ALLISON CARRUTH is Assistant Professor of English and affiliated faculty member in Environmental Studies, International Studies, and the Center for the Study of Women & Society at the University of Oregon. She has also held a postdoctoral fellowship at UC Santa Barbara and an academic research and program officer appointment at Stanford University in the Science, Technology and Society (STS) Program. Her major fields are twentieth-century American literature, contemporary fiction, science and technology studies, food studies, and environmental criticism. In her scholarship, she focuses on two developments that have shaped American literature and visual culture in the period since the Second World War: the industrialization of food systems and the commercialization of biotechnologies. Her first book is *Global Appetites, American Power and the Literature of Food* (Cambridge University Press, 2013). She has started a second project, entitled “The Transgenic Age,” which compares forms of contemporary fiction, poetry, and bioart that explore the consequences and horizons of life science research (particularly in the area of genetic engineering). Carruth argues that this emergent cultural field questions the historical investments of U.S. environmentalism in conservation and remediation while positing alternative principles of generation, re-creation, and repurposing. She is also the coorganizer of the Food Justice Conference and the Book Review Editor for *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*. Recent publications include essays in *Modern Drama*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, *Modernism/Modernity*, and *Postmodern Culture* and in book collections from Oxford University Press and Routledge. A forthcoming article will be published in *Parallax*.*

