

SEMINAR NO. 5 OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH: A CURRICULUM FOR
STUDIES INTO DARKNESS

A TIME FOR SEDITIOUS SPEECH



SATURDAY, APRIL 13, 2019
1:00-3:30 PM

Weeksville Heritage Center
158 Dr. Joan Maynard Way/Buffalo Avenue
Brooklyn

WEEKSVILLE HERITAGE CENTER

Weeksville Heritage Center is a multidisciplinary museum dedicated to preserving the history of the 19th century African American community of Weeksville, Brooklyn—one of the largest free black communities in pre-Civil War America.

Their mission is to document, preserve and interpret the history of this community, and make it relevant and resonant for contemporary audiences. They bring this history to life through innovative education, arts and civic engagement programming. www.weeksvillesociety.org

VERA LIST CENTER FOR ART AND POLITICS

The Vera List Center for Art and Politics is a research center and a public forum for art, culture, and politics. It was established at The New School in 1992—a time of rousing debates about freedom of speech, identity politics, and society's investment in the arts. A pioneer in the field, the center is a nonprofit that serves a critical mission: to foster a vibrant and diverse community of artists, scholars, and policy makers who take creative, intellectual, and political risks to bring about positive change.

We champion the arts as expressions of the political moments from which they emerge, and consider the intersection between art and politics the space where new forms of civic engagement must be developed. We are the only university-based institution committed exclusively to leading public research on this intersection. Through public programs and classes, prizes and fellowships, publications and exhibitions that probe some of the pressing issues of our time, we curate and support new roles for the arts and artists in advancing social justice. www.veralistcenter.org

FREEDOM OF SPEECH: A CURRICULUM FOR STUDIES INTO DARKNESS

A Time for Seditious Speech is the fifth seminar in a year-long examination of Freedom of Speech, and is co-presented by Weeksville Heritage Center and the Vera List Center for Art and Politics. The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States guarantees four specific freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and protest, and freedom of religion. With Indian artist Amar Kanwar's film *Such a Morning* (2017) as a point of departure, the seminar series imagines these four freedoms enshrined in the U.S. Constitution as points on the compass rose, which can be overlaid with intersectional thinking from artists, Indigenous peoples, feminists, and innumerable other perspectives, to question current circumstances, and to confront the inequities and uncertainties in our times, especially as they pertain to freedom of speech.

SEMINAR 5. SUGGESTED READINGS

Each seminar is accompanied by Suggested Readings listed on the Vera List Center website as well as a summary of the other proceedings, full video documentation, and the program booklet.

“Free Blacks Address the Enslaved: Resist, Run Away, . . . Revolt?” *The Making of African American Identity, Volume 1, 1500-1865*. National Humanities Center. <http://bit.ly/slaverevolts>

Garnet, Henry Highland. “An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America.” New York, Buffalo, August 16, 1843. <http://bit.ly/HighlandGarnet>

“Henry Highland Garnet’s “Address to the Slaves”.” *Colored Conventions, Bringing Nineteenth-Century Black Organizing to Digital Life*. <http://bit.ly/ColoredConventions>

Hunter, Crystal. “David Walkers Appeal.” *NCpedia*. NC: Government and Heritage Library. <http://bit.ly/statesuppression>

Michael Rakowitz to Leonard Cohen. August 15, 2015. <https://bit.ly/2Kd5FmW>

Morel, Junius. “On the Press and Conventions.” *Colored American*, May 3, 1838. <http://bit.ly/freeblackpress>

Thompson, Henry C., and George Hogarth. Transcript from *Long Island Star*. June 3, 1831. Brooklyn, New York. <https://bit.ly/2Uklx13>

SEMINAR 5. PROGRAM

“A Time for Seditious Speech”

1:00-2:00 pm

Guided visit with professional and student actors across Weeksville’s grounds and gardens who are enacting Henry Garnet’s historic speech from 1843.

2:00-3:30 pm

Presentations and panel discussion

3:30-4:30 pm

Reception, with closing remarks by Rob Fields

Weeksville is also the site of Seminar 1 participants **Mendi + Keith Obadike**’s installation *Utopias: Seeking for a City* that can be visited before or after Seditious Speech.

Presentations:

Kazembe Balagun, cultural historian, activist, and writer

Rob Fields, President & Executive Director, Weeksville Heritage Center

Prithi Kanakamedala, Ph.D., Bronx Community College CUNY

Michael Rakowitz, artist

Dread Scott, artist

Nabiha Syed, General Counsel, *The Markup*

As well as

Zenzelé Cooper

Alphonse Fabien

Jeremiah Hosea

Travis Raeburn

Sean C. Turner

Nana Kwame Williams

SEMINAR 5. PROGRAM NOTES

“A Time for Seditious Speech”

Free speech for African Americans has always been affected by space. These spaces are socially produced, made by people, groups, and institutions. The free Black press in the early 19th century created a national space that promoted a radical new order for society, as articulated at the Colored Conventions, where already free and once captive Black people came together between 1830 and the 1890s to strategize about political, social, and legal justice. At one such convention, in 1843 in Buffalo, New York, the Reverend Henry Highland Garnet delivered a rousing speech that shocked the delegates to the convention. Later referred to as the Call to Rebellion speech, Garnet asked his brothers to turn against their masters, affirming that “neither god, nor angels, or just men, command you to suffer for a single moment. Therefore it is your solemn and imperative duty to use every means, both moral, intellectual, and physical that promises success.” The speech entreated enslaved Africans in the South to secure liberty through resistance.

As part of the year-long seminar series *Freedom of Speech: Curriculum for Studies into Darkness*, **A Time for Seditious Speech** proposes speech as a call to direct action, perhaps even violence. The event will begin with a performative reading of Garnet’s Call to Rebellion that will lead the public on a procession through the grounds of Weeksville, where professional and student actors will read portions of the text against the background of the gardens and historic Hunterfly Road Houses.

A discussion will follow, moderated by historian and writer **Kazembe Balagun**, with curator and historian **Prithi Kanakamedala**, media and technology lawyer **Nabiha Syed**, and artists **Michael Rakowitz** and **Dread Scott**. Scott is currently developing the restaging the largest slave revolt in American history, the 1811 German Coast uprising in New Orleans.

Inspired by a more recent rebellion—Denmark Vesey’s 1822 slave uprising in Charleston, South Carolina—Garnet employed the societal mores enmeshed in the “peculiar institution of slavery” in his rebellious rhetoric, thus subverting their power and practicing free speech to expand ideas of citizenship and create equitable spaces for people of color.

Set at Weeksville, one of the first intentional communities of free Black people in New York, *A Time for Seditious Speech* will engage participants through immersive performance and dialogue around Garnet's oratorical missive and raise questions that continue to shape the national discourse.

SEMINAR 5. PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIES

Kazembe Balagun is a cultural historian, activist, writer, youngest son of Ben and Millie, and originally from Harlem, New York. From 2008 to 2013, he served as Director of Outreach and Education at the Brecht Forum in New York, where he helped bring together performance art, LGBT history, film, and jazz with Marxism and the Black Radical Tradition. He is a frequent contributor to the *Independent*, where he published the last interview of Octavia Butler (included in Consuela Francis' *Conversations with Octavia Butlers*, University Press of Mississippi). Most recently, *Finally Got the News: The Printed Legacy of the Radical Left (Common Notions)* published Balagun's essay on art and people of color communist collectives. He was a member of the Red Channels Film Collective and has presented at Metrograph, Brooklyn Academy of Art, Brooklyn Public Library, Woodbine, and Maysles Cinema. He serves as a project manager with the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung—New York and is working on a project looking at uncovering the history of the Black Commune.

Rob Fields is the President & Executive Director of Weeksville Heritage Center, a Brooklyn-based arts and culture center built on the historic site of one of the largest free black communities in pre-Civil War America. Prior to Weeksville, Fields was the marketing director for CMO Initiatives at the Association of National Advertisers, a marketing industry trade association. Over his career in marketing, he has worked for brands such as IBM, Burger King, Panasonic, and General Motors, and for arts and culture organizations such as the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute (CCCADI), the Black Rock Coalition, and the Urbanworld Film Festival. Fields has been a longtime proponent of progressive, left-of-center global black culture, which he highlighted through *Bold As Love*, an online magazine he actively published from 2007 to 2017. His writing has appeared in *Forbes*, *The Huffington Post*, *The Root*, *The Grio*, and *PSFK*, to name a few.

Prithi Kanakamedala is an Assistant Professor of History at Bronx Community College of the City University of New York. Her published work looks at the material culture of the Black Atlantic in the 19th century, racial fluidity and solidarity in 19th century New York, and print activism in Brooklyn's early free Black communities. As a public historian, she has worked for Danspace Project, Place Matters (a City Lore and Municipal Art Society project), Brooklyn

Historical Society, Weeksville Heritage Center, and Irondale Ensemble Project. Her exhibition *Brooklyn Abolitionists* recently ended its five-year run at the Brooklyn Historical Society.

Michael Rakowitz is an artist living and working in Chicago. His work has appeared in venues worldwide including dOCUMENTA (13), P.S.1, MoMA, MassMOCA, Castello di Rivoli, the 16th Biennale of Sydney, the 10th and 14th Istanbul Biennials, Sharjah Biennial 8, Tirana Biennale, National Design Triennial at the Cooper-Hewitt, and Transmediale 05. He has had solo projects and exhibitions with Creative Time, Tate Modern in London, MCA Chicago, Jane Lombard Gallery in New York, Galerie Barbara Wien, Berlin, Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago and Kunstraum Innsbruck. He is the recipient of the 2018 Herb Alpert Award in the Arts; a 2012 Tiffany Foundation Award; a 2008 Creative Capital Grant; a Sharjah Biennial Jury Award; a 2006 New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship Grant in Architecture and Environmental Structures; the 2003 Dena Foundation Award, and the 2002 Design 21 Grand Prix from UNESCO. He was awarded the Fourth Plinth commission in London's Trafalgar Square, on view through 2020. A traveling survey of his work will be shown at Whitechapel Gallery in London and Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea in Torino in 2019. Rakowitz is Professor of Art Theory and Practice at Northwestern University.

Dread Scott makes revolutionary art to propel history forward. His work is exhibited across the U.S. and internationally. For three decades he has made work that encourages viewers to re-examine unifying ideals and values of American society. In 1989, the entire U.S. Senate denounced and outlawed one of his artworks and President G.H.W. Bush declared it “disgraceful” because of its transgressive use of the American flag. His art has been exhibited or performed at the Whitney Museum, MoMA/PS1, the Walker Art Center and galleries and street corners across the country. His works can be hard-edged and poignant. Dread plays with fire—metaphorically and sometimes literally—as when he burned \$171 on Wall Street and encouraged those with money to burn to add theirs to the pyre. He presented as part of the Vera List Center's previous year-long seminar series *Assuming Boycott: Resistance, Agency and Cultural Production*.

Nabiha Syed is an American media and technology lawyer. She has been described as “one of the best emerging free speech lawyers” by *Forbes* magazine. Nabiha’s work has included successfully defending *BuzzFeed’s* publication of the Steele Dossier; representing asylum-seekers in south Texas; presenting on online misinformation at the inaugural Obama Foundation Summit; fighting for public access to NYPD disciplinary proceedings and hearings at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; and serving as the First Amendment Fellow at *The New York Times*. A Marshall Scholar, Syed also co-founded the Media Freedom and Information Access legal clinic at Yale Law School, of which she is a graduate and a visiting fellow. Starting in June, Nabiha will be the General Counsel of *The Markup*, an investigative journalism publication that focuses on the ethics and impact of technology on society.

SUMMARIES OF PREVIOUS SEMINARS

SEMINAR I. SUMMARY “Mapping the Territory” November 11, 2018

Participants

Mark Bray, political organizer, writer and historian

Abou Farman, Ass. Professor, Anthropology, The New School

Amar Kanwar, artist and filmmaker

Carin Kuoni, Director/Chief Curator, Vera List Center for Art and Politics

Mendi and Keith Obadike, artists; Vera List Center board members

Vanessa Place, artist, writer and criminal appellate attorney

Laura Raicovich, independent writer and curator

Svetlana Mintcheva, Director of Programs, National Coalition Against Censorship; moderator

This seminar sought to map the sprawling territory of what freedom of speech might mean today within the context of Amar Kanwar’s film *Such a Morning* (2017). Svetlana kicked off the discussion by framing the “value” of free speech, particularly given the uneven distribution of/unequal access to these rights, and the limits on government power that free speech in the US is meant to define. Mark opened the conversation beyond the relationship between government and the populous by questioning the right of speech in relation to harm and fascism. He questioned whether “deplatforming” is really a curtailment of free speech or rather an assertion of a particular politics and values of liberation. Mendi and Keith brought the conversation into the realm of the control of data and speech, particularly in the context of race realities in the US both in history and in the present, including the particularly disturbing right to vote as a free speech issue being impinged upon in such a way to make it look like a data error (see voter suppression in Georgia 2018 Governor’s race). Abou spoke to darkness or silence as a place of power and the determination to remove oneself from violence in the “security of darkness” (Arendt). He also discussed the importance of using people as shelter, as in people with certain privileges protecting others. Amar asked some important questions of the group including questioning how we might identify our own blind spots; how we

might retreat to reconfigure or reconstitute seemingly irresolvable conflicts; how might we question the “good guy/bad guy” duality; how might we prepare for the resolution of the fundamental questions so we are ready for the next. Vanessa finally brought us into the contentious territory of advocating for speech that is criminal and allowing the ugliness of humanity a space to exist, meaning that supporting the right to differ might come at the expense of justice and equality.

The discussion then centered on the friction between harm and safety, and the reality that freedom of speech for one person might impinge upon or curtail another’s access to those rights. This aspect of the conversation is certainly ripe for deeper exploration.

SEMINAR 2. SUMMARY
“Feminist Manifestos”
December 3, 2018

Participants

Becca Albee, visual artist and musician

Chiara Bottici, Associate Professor of Philosophy, The New School for Social Research

Silvia Federici, philosopher, scholar, writer and activist from the radical autonomist Marxist tradition

A.L. Steiner, visual artist, teacher, collaborator and co-founder of Ridykeulous and Working Artists and the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.)

Gabriela López Dena, Vera List Center Graduate Student Fellow, Art & Social Justice; moderator

At each pronouncement, speech is embodied by an individual acting at a historical moment in a specific site, all of which bring forth their own histories – that was the gist of the second seminar. Throughout the day across The New School campus, students, faculty and staff were reciting from historical and contemporary manifestos demanding equality for women. Proposed by Vera List Center Graduate Student Fellow Gabriela López Dena, the manifestos ranged from Olympe de Gouges’ *Declaration of Women’s Rights from 1791* to artist Mierle Ukeles Laderman’s *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!*, from the Zapatista Women’s Welcome at the First Indigenous Women’s Gathering in early 2018 to Nayéléni’s *Women’s Declaration on Food Sovereignty*. What made these readings so poignant is that each was read in a place where it mattered most: elevators, cafeterias, dormitories, classrooms, or the foyer to the university president’s offices. Each reading thus resonated with the distinct social and economic conditions of each site demonstrating and enacting intersectional feminism. In some cases, crowds began to gather around the person reading; in others, the student masses simply washed by the speaker, seemingly oblivious to their calls.

In the evening, we met for an exchange with people who had read manifestos during the day, our regular seminar participants as well as artist and musician **Becca Albee**, philosophers **Chiara Bottici** and **Silvia Federici**, and artist **A.L. Steiner**, a co-founder of Working Artists and the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.), moderated by **Gabriela López Dena**. Each of the four began their presentation with a manifesto.

Becca started us off by reading an expanded “manifesto,” an alternative to the traditional land acknowledgment: hers was a long list of first names of hundreds of women to whom the Federation of Feminist Women’s Health Centers had dedicated their text book from 1978, not because these women had written for the book but because its content was built on the intellectual and activist foundations they had provided in their times. The jump to labor relations and questions of visibility came easily: *Wages for Housework*, also from 1978 and presented by Silvia, positions wages as a capitalist instrument to render invisible non-waged work. At the time of the book’s publication such labor was still predominantly performed by women in their homes, a situation that has renewed relevance in today’s gig-economy. Becca then described her installation *Prismatera* where text panels only become legible in a certain light: Which conditions need to be met to make something invisible visible, or heard?

Chiara took up the issue of conditions of visibility by reading the most up-to-date version of the anarchy-feminist manifesto, an ever evolving text that gets shaped by a trans-individual process of continuously assembling fragments of other manifestos and re-phrasing its goals through an aggregational online process. Later, Chiara’s call to defy a (academic) system that oppresses women by acting as if one were in control of it raised issues of privilege: who can afford to challenge a system they are part of? How does academia relate to politics, theory to practice or activism? What agency do we have in a system that we are ourselves implicated in? A.L. Steiner, who had read Valie Export’s *Women’s Art as Manifesto* from 1972, reminded people that reality is a social construction with men as its engineers and that the notion of freedom itself was a conservative construct.

As we considered the uncomfortable contradictions we inhabit and our complicity in systems of power, some called to embrace such experiences of discomfort, to hold contradictions within us, to stay in a moment of suspension from usefulness, and that being political means to continuously engage in the labor of disentangling these conflicts and examining the blind spots. The slow work of “borderless feminism” (Spivak) could mean, some posited, that we need to embrace concepts of mobility and flux and embrace the multiplicity of historical times that are present at each moment and part of every identity and speech act.

Where does this leave us for Seminar 3? A recognition that the

individual voice can amount to a chorus of related articulations, that every pronouncement is something else at another moment, that history reverberates in all pronouncements, and that resistance is still personal.

SEMINAR 3. SUMMARY
“Pervasive and Personal”
February 11, 2019

Participants

Deborah Brown, Global Policy Advocacy Lead, Association for Progressive Communications

Molly Crabapple, artist and writer

Julia Farrington, Associate Arts Producer, Index on Censorship; member, International Arts Rights Advisors

Shawné Michaelain Holloway, artist

Nancy Schwartzman, documentary filmmaker, *Roll Red Roll*

Judy Taing, Head of Gender and Sexuality, ARTICLE19; moderator

Following a summary of the series of seminars, Carin Kuoni introduced each of the panelists and the moderator. Judy Taing began urging everyone to put forward questions throughout the panelists' remarks, and then posed a series of framing questions: Does technology advance expression for women, LGBT+ persons? Is the internet an equal space? What are the “new” risks that come with expression online? She stressed that freedom of expression online for women is a societal issue that produces complex challenges due to the specificities of culture, geography, legal frameworks, and language, among many other factors that impact the field globally. She signaled that nonetheless preserving freedom of expression for women online is crucial given the power and amplification that the internet enables. She then pointed to questions of enforcement and authority: should attacks on individuals should be handled legally, by the state, or by the companies that run the technology (like Twitter and Facebook)? Would we trust either to be the gatekeepers? What should be done in relationship to anonymity and encryption, so necessary for some and abused by others? Is it possible to grow an inclusive space online as the technology grows and changes?

Molly Crabapple read a deeply compelling and terrible story she reported on for the *New York Times* about Tara Fares, a young woman who became an Instagram celebrity based in Iraq, who was subsequently murdered for being a highly visible, outspoken woman. Judy followed up the reading by asking if the visibility provided by the internet could make us safe. Shawné suggested an important distinction that would remain central to the seminar when she questioned whether

the discussion should be centered on visibility or rather, legibility? Perhaps, she offered, if legibility were the goal then users would be truly 'seen' rather than assumptions made about their presence.

Julia Farrington recounted the story of a young, female photographer working in the Middle East named Yumna Al-Arashi, whose photography was posted on social media platforms and made her a target of threats and hate. Julia described the very real need to provide artists with protocols for interacting more safely online. She made the important point that for many, withdrawal from online platforms is a luxury and a privilege. She noted that not only was there a sense of shame amongst artists that were targeted by hate campaigns but that it often also led to self-censorship. Julia further suggested that guidelines like those created for journalists and documentary filmmakers needed to be repurposed for artists' specific needs to provide artists much-needed protocols to follow in moments of crisis, and connecting them to others and avoid the isolation these situations often promote.

Molly drew an important distinction between direct threats of violence, and coordinated smear campaigns. She noted that while certainly egregious, the former threats were often empty and that the latter could result in unemployment, isolation, and removal from the public sphere. A robust discussion ensued.

Nancy Schwartzman spoke next, introducing her documentary *Roll Red Roll*, and showed the trailer. The film is about the sexual assault of a young woman in Steubenville, Ohio, and attempts to cover up the crime(s) given the perpetrators' status on the local football team. The way the perpetrators were discovered was via their online footprint; they had talked about the assault on Twitter and via text message. A discussion followed about the ways in which bystanders and witnesses were complicit in this scenario and how this is amplified online. There were further discussions of how to maintain credibility when under attack, as both Nancy and the lead investigator became targets once their work was made public.

Deborah Brown offered examples of creating a coordinated, international, co-created methodology to combat the attacks that while contextually specific, had the pervasiveness of misogyny in common. She suggested that imagining how to "take back the tech" could create a feminist space on the internet. She described this feminist internet as being a platform for freedom of expression that should be intersectional and accessible, be supportive of movements,

provide alternative economic models, and promote a vast array of principles around consent, privacy, anonymity, and other crucial issues. She suggested feminist internet and feminist IT for further details. She and the panel also discussed alternative ways to confront attacks collectively, rather than individually, a strategy that is used by APC which provides flexibility and de-personalization.

Shawné presented several of her media-based work that are largely created explicitly for the internet. She discussed UI (user interface) as a mode of manipulation, and how her works produce a perceived 'realness' or intimacy that is both real and veiled through her costumes and efforts to otherwise disguise herself. She presented a work that is not publicly accessible other than for a fee behind a paywall. The work repurposed footage she had created for paying clients and overlaid words and images, both legible and pixelated, confounding and revealing the positionality of the artist to her audience. Shawné then read *Poetry is not a Luxury* by Audre Lorde. She emphasized the online experience as being one of transformation, as a place to make dreams, to escape judgement, to submit, concluding the conversation by pointing to the convergence of light, as in the light that comprises the internet, and also is emitted from the screen, as well as in the sense that "being in the light" relays being seen and public.

These final comments of Shawné's brought the group, in some ways, back to Molly's first presentation, to addressing the incredible power of the online world to connect and free us, while simultaneously being a location of potential patriarchal violence. Fortunately this group of powerful women, among a significant network of others, are working to create a feminist internet, as Deborah termed it, to make the publicness of our intimacies heard and safe.

SEMINAR 4. SUMMARY.
“Say It Like You Mean It”
March 11, 2019

Participants

Natalie Diaz, Mojave poet, language activist, and educator

Aruna D’Souza, writer and art historian

Suzanne Kite, Oglala Lakota composer and performance and visual artist

Stefania Pandolfo, professor and director of the UC Berkeley Medical Anthropology Program on Critical Studies in Medicine, Science, and the Body

Ross Perlin, writer and linguist; Co-Director, Endangered Language Alliance, New York

Kameelah Janan Rasheed, artist, writer, and educator

Moderators

Carin Kuoni, Director/Chief Curator, Vera List Center for Art and Politics

Laura Raicovich, independent curator and writer

Two astounding performances framed Seminar 4: “Brighter Than the Brightest Star I’ve Ever Seen” is the title of Suzanne Kite’s language class that opened the evening, to which Natalie Diaz responded with the poem “The First Water is the Body” at the closing, both offering attempts at translating Indigenous concepts. In-between, two panels were convened on translation, communication and languages, moderated by Laura and Carin respectively.

From behind the lectern, Suzanne staged her lesson as lecture, coaching the audience in the pronunciation of some Lakota words and their meaning as she shared (in English) the interlacing stories of a paranormal encounter between a girl and a ghost; the collusion of law enforcement personnel with defendants in a historical sexual assault case that happened on an Indian reservation in the 1980s; the linear orientation of both Settler colonialism westward and Christian eschatology; and peppered her lecture with examples of Indian names claimed by cities and towns throughout the U.S. As the audience gained confidence in pronouncing the Lakota words, the story unraveled, the room became awash in red light, and we lost sight – literally and metaphorically – of the narrative and its meaning.

Are translations possible, even desirable, was the key question of the first panel. Speaking about the Endangered Language Alliance of New York City, Ross Perlin discussed various paradoxes, among them how a wealth of language diversity in one location might in fact exacerbate linguistic extinction in another; how in times of political strife, environmental crises, and global migration, cities often serve as last-minute hold-outs of cultures endangered where they originated. “[The city] is where linguistic diversity comes to die.” Other paradoxes include the need to make languages visible with maps that remain inadequate to represent them. Ross’s demand for implementation of a principle of linguistic equality was taken up by Kameelah Rasheed, who spoke about her current project “Scoring the Stacks” at the Brooklyn Public Library. “Why is my stuff, my voice not in the library?” she asked, and with this project she demands the reader perform the text as they write it. It is only in this co-authored, collaborative experience, she proposes, that writing can amount to a performance of democracy. Aruna D’Souza shattered all assumptions of decorum and community by forcefully demanding that expectations of empathy, which is based on the assumption that we can understand one another if we just try hard enough. She posited that empathy be replaced by the acknowledgment that there is value in incomprehension. “As a political project, I want to think about what it means that we don’t have to understand in order to care for each other or create spaces in which people are cared for.” This first panel closed with a discussion on how to sit with incomprehension, how to defy capitalist notions of efficiency, and what that might mean for politics and engagement outside of understanding.

The second panel focused on how our bodies are implicated in language and knowledge production – in **Suzanne Kite**’s words, “you cannot not involve the body [...] It requires the body, in a space, an entire lifetime, to comprehend even a little bit of a story.” She described how she often uses a computer interface in her work, offering new forms that invite the body into conversations that are not based on facts or information. The Lakota word for “sacred,” she pointed out, refers to something that is actually incomprehensible. **Natalie Diaz** compared Western languages to data systems, in contrast to Mojave which “pulls us back into our body.” She returned to the term empathy from the first panel, explaining how it does not exist in Mojave because the energy in the stone is the same as in a person, neither is knowable. Given that only 30% of communication is verbal, can touch or other experiences account for it? This would not

necessarily be a comfortable position – referring to “discomfort,” a term from Seminar 2 – but as she said, “I’ve learned to sit in the luck of an energy of living.” **Stefania Pandolfo** read from the introduction to her book “Knot of the Soul,” describing a walk across the roof of a crumbling house that to one person seemed precarious and to another comprised a map of the world. The resemblance was uncanny to a key scene in Amar Kanwar’s film *Such a Morning* where a house gets dismantled while the heroine remains seated in what used to be the foyer, ready with a rifle on her lap. From there, Stefania arrived at incomprehension or incommensurability of language and time via references to post-colonial studies (Fanon), psychoanalysis (Freud), and her extensive engagement with notions of consciousness or “madness” in Islamic communities in the Maghreb.

In the closing discussion, comprehension and understanding were further unpacked: how it might be safer not to be legible; how literacy can be an exercise of power (for example disruptive speech (such as protest) may become illegible because it’s not recognized as associated with power); how language is an index of time spent with others, establishing conditions of possibility. Considering the conditions of language embedded in all the connotations of Freedom of Speech, the seminar came to a close with Natalie’s demand for a new shape of language that is not complacent, that demands imagination and struggle for yet-to-be-realized possibilities. Stefania reminded us that Amar’s film comes from a complete black-out, an attempt to create a space where something can again enter the world. As coda of Seminar 4, Natalie sent us off into the night with her poem to the Colorado River, spurning linguistic conventions that distinguish between body and land, internal and external energy.

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

ARTICLE 19 works for a world where all people everywhere can freely express themselves and actively engage in public life without fear of discrimination. They do this by working on two interlocking freedoms which set the foundation for all their work:

1. *The Freedom to Speak* concerns everyone's right to express and disseminate opinions, ideas and information through any means, as well as to disagree with and question power-holders.
2. *The Freedom to Know* concerns the right to demand and receive information from power-holders, for transparency, good governance and sustainable development.

When either of these freedoms comes under threat as a result of power-holders failing to adequately protect them, **ARTICLE 19**, with one voice, speaks through courts of law, through global and regional organizations, and through civil society wherever they are present.

National Coalition Against Censorship promotes freedom of thought, inquiry and expression, and opposes censorship in all its forms. The Coalition formed in response to the 1973 Supreme Court decision in *Miller v. California*, which narrowed First Amendment protections for sexual expression and in turn, opened the door to obscenity prosecutions. Over 40 years, as an alliance of more than 50 national non-profits, including literary, artistic, religious, educational, professional, labor, and civil liberties groups, the Coalition has engaged in direct advocacy and education to support First Amendment principles. NCAC is unique in that they are national in scope but often local in their approach, and they work with community members to resolve censorship controversies without the need for litigation.

New York Peace Institute provides conflict resolution services in the form of mediation, conflict coaching, restorative processes, group facilitation, and skills training. Our programs are a resource to thousands of New Yorkers facing conflict each year— whether it is between parents working out a custody agreement, a noise dispute between neighbors, diverting a misdemeanor case from court, or a conflict between a parent and school regarding a student with special needs. Our services foster listening, empathy, and communication among our clients and help them develop their own creative solutions. As the city's largest civilian peace force, our mission is to build peace and prevent violence in New York City and beyond.

We also provide vital communication and conflict management skills training to a broad range of organizations, including city agencies, non-profits, labor unions, and schools. We employ a creative, learn-by-doing approach in our trainings, drawing upon theater, visual arts, music, and kinesthetic activities.

Weeksville Heritage Center is a multidisciplinary museum dedicated to preserving the history of the 19th century African American community of Weeksville, Brooklyn - one of America's many free black communities.

Our mission is to document, preserve and interpret the history of free African American communities in Weeksville, Brooklyn and beyond and to create and inspire innovative, contemporary uses of African American history through education, the arts, and civic engagement. Using a contemporary lens, we activate this unique history through the presentation of innovative, vanguard and experimental programs.

CREDITS

The seminar series *Freedom of Speech. A Curriculum for Studies into Darkness* is organized by the Vera List Center for Art and Politics as part of the center's 2018–2020 curatorial focus *If Art Is Politics*. It is directed by Carin Kuoni, Director/Chief Curator, Vera List Center, and Laura Raicovich with assistance by Gabriela López Dena. Partner organizations for the seminars are ARTICLE 19; the National Coalition Against Censorship; New York Peace Institute; and Weeksville Heritage Center.

Seminar 5 is co-curated by Weeksville Heritage Center.

Cover image courtesy Weeksville Heritage Center

Left side: February 6, 1869 illustration from *Harper's Weekly*: The National Colored Convention in Session at Washington, D.C. sketched by Theo. R. Davis. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

Right side: Portrait of Henry Highland Garnet by James U. Stead. Courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

Insert: Excerpt from *Walker's appeal : with a brief sketch of his life by Henry Highland Garnet ; and also Garnet's address to the slaves of the United States of America*. Printed by J.H. Tobitt, 1848. Courtesy of Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

VERA LIST CENTER BOARD

The Board of the Vera List Center for Art and Politics is an integral part of the New School community. Members provide counsel to the Vera List Center, develop expertise on ways to support the academic enterprise, offer insight and guidance on programs, provide significant financial support, and serve as links to the communities in which they live and work.

James Keith (JK) Brown, Chair

Mariana Amatullo

Carlos Basualdo

Frances Beatty

Michelle Coffey

Gabriella De Ferrari

Ronald Feldman

Andrew Francis

Marilyn Greene

Susan Hapgood

Elizabeth R. Hilpman

Norman L. Kleeblatt

Carin Kuoni

Thomas Lax

Jane Lombard

Susan Meiselas

Megan E. Noh

Mendi and Keith Obadike

Nancy Delman Portnoy

Silvia Rocciolo

Ingrid Schaffner

Mary Watson

FREEDOM OF SPEECH:
A CURRICULUM FOR STUDIES INTO DARKNESS

**SEMINAR 1: MAPPING THE TERRITORY
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2018**

PARTNER ORGANIZATION: THE NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST CENSORSHIP

**SEMINAR 2: FEMINIST MANIFESTOS
MONDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2018**

**SEMINAR 3: PERVASIVE AND PERSONAL:
OBSERVATIONS ON FREE SPEECH ONLINE
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2019**

PARTNER ORGANIZATION: ARTICLE 19

**SEMINAR 4: SAY IT LIKE YOU MEAN IT:
TRANSLATION, COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGES
MONDAY, MARCH 11, 2019**

**SEMINAR 5: A TIME FOR SEDITIOUS SPEECH
SATURDAY, APRIL 13, 2019**

PARTNER ORGANIZATION: WEEKSVILLE HERITAGE CENTER

@ WEEKSVILLE HERITAGE CENTER

**SEMINAR 6: GOING TOWARDS THE HEAT: SPEAKING
ACROSS DIFFERENCES
MONDAY, JUNE 10, 2019**

PARTNER ORGANIZATION: NEW YORK PEACE INSTITUTE

**CLOSING CONVENING
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 20 &
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2019**

For information on related classes, please visit: www.newschool.edu.

Alvin Johnson-J.M.Kaplan Hall
66 West 12th Street, Room 604
New York, NY 10011
212.229.2436
vlc@newschool.edu
www.veralistcenter.org



WEEKSVILLE
HERITAGE CENTER

THE NEW SCHOOL

**VERA LIST CENTER
FOR ART AND POLITICS**