

Friends of the

# PEMBROKE CENTER

Newsletter

DECEMBER 2023 / BROWN UNIVERSITY



## Q&A with Lynne Joyrich, Director of the LGBTQIA+ Thinking Initiative

Joyrich reflects on TV's fascinations, drag panic, and the Initiative's first three years.

Since 2021-22, the Pembroke Center's LGBTQIA+ Thinking Initiative has fostered thinking with and about LGBTQIA+ subjects, communities, and histories through a dynamic combination of research, pedagogical, and social events. Instituted by Leela Gandhi, Shauna McKee Stark '76 P'10 Director of the Pembroke Center, this initiative is directed by Professor of Modern Culture and Media Lynne Joyrich '84 AM, '90 PhD. Here we talk with Joyrich about her history with the Pembroke Center, her research, the LGBTQIA+ Thinking Initiative, and her thoughts on the current political/cultural landscape. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

**You originally came to Brown as a graduate student. Can you tell us about that?**

I was a PhD student in what was then the Department of American Civilization [now American Studies]. I was interested in American pop culture and media. I was the first graduate student affiliated with the Pembroke Center. They had just started the Pembroke Seminar, and I got in with a project proposal about gendered spectatorship and soap operas. The seminar was such an amazing experience, because it is not only interdisciplinary, but also inter-level. It was fantastic to be a grad student in a seminar that had postdoctoral fellows and distinguished faculty members. The Center became my intellectual home in grad school.

I graduated, left Brown and had a faculty job at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee for twelve years. I remained in close touch with the Pembroke Center. I was invited back to speak. I did a visiting professor gig. Then when a job in my area opened up in 1998, I jumped at the chance. I was thrilled because I loved Rhode Island—still do so much—and I loved Brown and the Pembroke Center. So, I got the job, came back, and have been here since.

**How did you end up discovering your research interest in the intersection of TV, film, and gender and sexuality studies?**

I didn't do work in media studies as an undergraduate. I was a double major in philosophy and women's studies. I was always

*Continued on page 4*

## The Pembroke Center Oral History Project

Longtime Pembroke Center Advisory Council member Bernicestine Elizabeth McLeod Bailey '68, P'99 '03 received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters at the 2023 Commencement. Following her career as an IBM systems engineer, she established McLeod Associates, a pioneering minority-owned IT consulting firm. The Pembroke Center is one of the many beneficiaries of her dedication to community service.

### PEMBROKE CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



"I think the spirit of feeling that you could do things... was something that just became inbred. And so I still find myself being very active in social movements around town. And then still pushing for anti-racism and all kinds of "isms" to make the world a better place. And I think that was all born here."

- Bernicestine Bailey '68 LHD'23 hon., P'99, P'03

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## From the Director

I am delighted to write to you as the interim director of the Pembroke Center. The scholarship and intellectual community at the Pembroke Center have been integral to my own academic path, from my year as a Pembroke postdoctoral fellow, to more recently serving as the Associate Director before becoming a faculty member in American Studies. It has been thrilling to see the vibrant teaching, research, and programming that have occurred this fall.

The Pembroke Seminar is full steam ahead; Patricia Ybarra, W. Duncan MacMillan Family Professor of the Humanities and Seminar Leader, brought Kadji Amin (Emory University) to Pembroke Hall in September to talk about trans materialism, and is planning talks by Sayak Valencia and Dylan Rodriguez in spring. Faculty fellows, postdoctoral scholars, graduate and undergraduate students meet each week to discuss the year's theme, "De-Colonial Retro-Speculation." Participants in the seminar look backward to liberationist movements, practices, art works, and theories of the recent past, in order to better understand and intervene in our contemporary moment.

This semester, Pembroke Center programming has also engaged with current, often contentious, cultural conversations about incarceration and the rights of transgender and non-binary young people. The Voices of Mass Incarceration symposium featured an opening panel curated by Nancy L. Buc '65 LLD'94 hon. Pembroke Center Archivist Mary Murphy. 450 people attended in person and several hundred more online, honoring the work of feminist activists engaged in the prison abolition movement. This symposium also heralded the official opening of the Mumia



Abu-Jamal papers for research—a collection that the Pembroke Archives staff spent much of last year processing. "Trans Youth Now," a series of online talks by prominent thinkers in trans studies and trans health, stimulated important conversations about how to understand the current anti-trans zeitgeist within its historical and political contexts. The series, and the Voices of Mass Incarceration panel, are available to view on our [YouTube playlist](#).

The editorial staff of *differences* has had a busy summer and fall. In early summer, the journal published a special issue focused on the importance of the aesthetic in the work of the late queer theorist Leo Bersani. Guest editors Jacques Khalip and John Paul Ricco asked the issue's contributors to focus on a sentence or brief passage from Bersani's writings that had been "theoretically vital" for them, and the result is a truly remarkable collection of close readings and critical essays. In October *differences* released the second issue of the year (volume 34), featuring the work of Elizabeth Freeman, Patrick Teed, Lucia Hulsether, Steven Swarbrick, and Akrish Adhikari among others.

As we begin to wind down the semester and look forward to the winter break, I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your ongoing support of the Center's work. We are truly lucky to have not only a terrific, dedicated staff here at Pembroke, but a strong foundation of supporters in you, the Friends. I am enormously grateful for all that you have done and continue to do on behalf of the Pembroke community.

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## A Note from the Advisory Council Chairs

It has been a lively fall at the Pembroke Center. Due to the support of Friends like you, we have acquired new collections for the Pembroke Center Archives, continued to help fund the postdoctoral fellows program, and provided grants and prizes for students and faculty.

The Center hosted several programs including the [opening panel](#) of the [Voices of Mass Incarceration symposium](#) featuring Angela Davis, Johanna Fernández '93, and Julia Wright and a webinar series: "[Trans Youth Now](#)," sponsored by the Public Health Collaborative. In collaboration with the Office of the President, the Pembroke Center co-sponsored the talk "[Making History](#)" with Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Kate Zernike, author of *The Exceptions: Nancy Hopkins, MIT, and the Fight for Women in Science*.

As you read through this newsletter, we hope you will be reminded of the Pembroke Center's impact as a research destination for students, faculty, scholars, and anyone seeking to explore

critical questions around gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, citizenship and class—and how these categories intersect.

If you haven't yet renewed your support this year, please consider doing so today. Wishing you and your loved ones a peaceful end to 2023.



Sophie Waskow Rifkin '07  
Chair, Pembroke Center  
Advisory Council



Emily Coe-Sullivan '99  
Vice-Chair, Pembroke Center  
Advisory Council





“TV is fascinating because it is this enormous, massive presence in our lives, but it is often totally ignored .... TV is the taken-for-granted, the overly familiar. TV defines the normal for people even as it pushes the edge. A lot of my research is exactly about the border of the inside and outside, the familiar and strange. Those are the borders where we define sexuality, too .... TV is the place where we define the mainstream and the marginal.”

interested in feminist theory and theories of sexuality. Then, in graduate school, I started work in film and television studies.

Film studies was already established, but television studies less so. I was interested in that as a burgeoning field—in things like daytime soap operas, which have an interesting relationship to gender and sexuality. For a disparaged form, the soap opera had such an interesting narrative structure—these long, ongoing narratives, with multiple intersecting stories. As I started doing more of my own research, I started focusing more on questions of sexuality in television.

TV is fascinating because it is this enormous, massive presence in our lives, but it is often totally ignored. Film now has a status where it can be treated as art. Digital media and new media forms have the excitement of the new, the innovative. Yet TV is the taken-for-granted, the overly familiar. TV defines the normal for people even as it pushes the edge. A lot of my research is exactly about the border of the inside and outside, the familiar and strange. Those are the borders where we define sexuality, too. TV gives us the very modes of thinking with which we operate. TV is the place where we define the mainstream and the marginal.



#### What was it like working in queer studies in the early 1990s, as compared to today?

During the 1990s, I was privileged to be at a place like Brown. At that point, queer communities had been devastated by AIDS and also anti-gay and anti-trans violence. That was difficult and devastating, and also motivating. I felt like I was in a place where,

relatively speaking, I was privileged, and there were not the institutional barriers that many others faced. I did not have people here telling me that queer studies was not a legitimate field.

UWM was an interesting place to teach—much more class mixed, much more generationally mixed. It was a great place to teach, but you were more likely to face active homophobia. I had some person from an anti-gay group who tried to sneak into my class to write an exposé. It was more fraught, but also people were more thrilled to get courses in gender and sexuality studies; they didn't take it for granted.

In the last few years, a lot of LGBT things have become mainstream within certain normative limits—marriage, the military. However, there's also been this total turnaround to a vicious moral panic, framed in terms of a panic about influence—a kind of paranoia. The panic around drag shocked me. Of all the things for people to get so flipped out about, I thought; drag has become so mainstream! Then it occurred to me that that's why—it's because it's touristic, drawing people to LGBTQ culture, so it can feed into a logic of contagion in a way. There's this simplistic notion of representation as direct meaning shot into your arm, as if it doesn't involve mediated structures and as if people don't make any distinction between fantasy and reality. So there are horrific renewed attacks on representations as well as, of course, on people.

#### What is the origin story of the LGBTQIA+ Thinking Initiative?

It was Leela who had the idea for the Initiative. She called me up in September 2021 and said I have this idea for an LGBTQIA+ initiative with a focus on Brown community needs, outreach, and programming, and I'd love to hear your thoughts. I was delighted, and wrote a proposal. The Pembroke Center is a feminist research center, so I suggested that it should be LGBTQIA+ \*thinking\*. The thinking part is important: we want to think from a particular position yet never take that position for granted. We talked about wanting it to be multifaceted—having a way people would connect, plus obviously have an intellectual and a pedagogical component. Which for me goes along with my own history at the Pembroke Center. The Center for me was all those things. Hopefully that's what we've done—brought people together.

### What can we expect this year from the Initiative?

This year so far we've held a social mixer with the University Rainbow Staff Alliance, which was a big hit. After last year's successful pedagogy workshop, we are doing another pedagogy workshop for instructors this year, "Addressing the Subject: Complexities of Identity in the Classroom." The need for this arose from the current moment: on the one hand, we are at a time when diversity initiatives are being attacked and need to be defended; and on the other hand, we recognize that bureaucratic ways of expressing identity are limited. How do we address these complicated subjectivities in ways that make students feel seen and that respect people but don't reduce them to institutional categories?



In the spring, Patti Ybarra, this year's Pembroke Seminar leader, and I are collaborating on an event for the Brown Arts Initiative's IGNITE series. IGNITE is a series that engages with campus and local communities to produce and/or exhibit creative pieces and ignite critical dialogue. Our IGNITE project ties in with this year's seminar theme, "De-Colonial Retro-Speculation." We came up with an idea on "retrospection"—looking back on media against AIDS. There will be a film screening and a video installation. We are thinking about this historical moment both because of COVID and because we are in another of these times when there are murderous impulses towards queer people. Thinking back to AIDS and AIDS media could be useful and important. ■

In its first three years, the LGBTQIA+ Thinking Initiative has fostered community bonds at Brown through its range of intellectual, pedagogical, and social components and programming—including research symposia, exhibitions, film screenings, and artist talks.

To learn more about this project, past events, and what's coming next, visit the [LGBTQIA+ Thinking Initiative web page](#).



← Zed Zha



Lisa K. Gabriel →

## Researchers Awarded Funds to Visit Pembroke Archives

Two scholars were awarded 2023-24 [New England Regional Fellowship Consortium](#) stipends to conduct research at the John Hay Library using Pembroke Center collections. Zed Zha is a physician who will conduct research in the archives for a book project entitled "Consented: Medical Rape Culture and What We Can Do About It." Lisa K. Gabriel is a doctoral candidate in American Studies at Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany. Gabriel will use the fellowship to work on her dissertation. The project, according to Gabriel, "reconsiders the intellectual history of radical women's activism against sexual violence in the U.S. It focuses especially on the importance and influence of African American women's historical experience, political resistance and organizing against sexual violence as well as on their intellectual work in the field."

The NERFC, a collaboration of 31 major cultural agencies, provides stipends of \$5,000 for a minimum of eight weeks of research at participating institutions, including Brown's John Hay Library and Pembroke Center Archives. Mary Murphy, Nancy L. Buc '65 LLD'94 hon. Pembroke Center Archivist, notes that "The NERFC Fellowship is a wonderful tool that helps scholars use our collections. I am always amazed at the rigorous nature of the topics explored by Fellows who choose to research within the Pembroke Center Archives. These Fellows' award-winning research further centers the Pembroke Center Archive as a repository of excellence."

*The next application deadline for the NERFC Fellowship is February 1, 2024.*





## Successful Fall Collaborations with the Office of the President, University Library, and Simmons Center

This fall Pembroke Center programming featured two successful, high profile campus collaborations: one with the Office of the President and the other with the Brown University Library and the Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice.

Pembroke Archives staff organized “[The Feminist Fight to Bring Mumia Home](#),” the opening keynote panel for the Voices of Mass Incarceration Symposium in September. Over 450 in-person attendees and several hundred online listeners heard Angela Y. Davis, Julia Wright, and Johanna Fernández ’93 speak about their advocacy for the release of incarcerated journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal and for prison abolition more broadly. This symposium marked the opening of the Abu-Jamal papers for research, a collection identified and brought to the University Library largely through the efforts of Mary Murphy, the Nancy L. Buc ’65 LLD’94 hon. Pembroke Center Archivist, and Fernández.

When the Office of the President approached the Pembroke Center about co-sponsoring “[Making History: the Fight for Fairness at MIT](#)” with author and *New York Times* reporter Kate Zernike, Center leadership was excited by the opportunity to bring an important and timely story to campus. Addressing a packed house, Zernike spoke from her recently published book, *The Exceptions: Nancy Hopkins, MIT, and the Fight for Women in Science*. *The Exceptions* tells the story of how a group of determined, brilliant women used the power of the collective and the tools of science to inspire ongoing radical change. Following Zernike’s presentation, Diane Lipscombe, Thomas J. Watson Sr. Professor of Science, Professor of Neuroscience and Director of the Carney Institute for Brain Science, and chair of Brown’s Task Force on the Status of Women Faculty, joined a conversation moderated by President Christina H. Paxson.

# Spring Will Bring Shirin Neshat, Kevin Quashie to Pembroke Hall

The Pembroke Center hosts two annual lectures featuring distinguished speakers whose work engages with gender and sexuality studies. On February 27, Royce Family Professor of Teaching Excellence in English Kevin Quashie will deliver the 2024 Elizabeth Munves Sherman '77, P'06 '09 Lecture in Gender and Sexuality Studies. This lecture features a prominent Brown faculty member presenting research that considers the impact of gender and sexuality across fields.

Quashie teaches Black cultural and literary studies with a primary focus on black feminism, queer studies, and aesthetics, especially poetics. He is the author or editor of four books, most recently *Black Aliveness, or A Poetics of Being* (2021). *Black Aliveness* has been awarded two prizes: the James Russell Lowell Prize from the Modern Language Association (2022) and the Pegasus Award for Poetry Criticism from the Poetry Foundation (2022).

On April 18, Shirin Neshat will deliver the annual Pembroke Publics Lecture. This series features speakers whose work exemplifies breakthrough creativity in attending to questions of the struggles faced by people nationally and transnationally whose gender identity or sexual orientation make them targets of violence.

Shirin Neshat is an Iranian-born artist and filmmaker living in New York. Neshat works and continues to experiment with the mediums of photography, video and film, which she imbues with highly poetic and politically charged images and narratives that question issues of power, religion, race, gender and the relationship between the past and present, East and West, individual and collective through the lens of her personal experiences as an Iranian woman living in exile.



← Kevin Quashie



Shirin Neshat →

Neshat has held numerous solo exhibitions at museums internationally and has directed three feature-length films, *Women Without Men* (2009), which received the Silver Lion Award for Best Director at the 66th Venice International Film Festival, *Looking For Oum Kulthum* (2017), and most recently *Land of Dreams*, which premiered at the Venice Film Festival (2021).

Neshat was awarded the Golden Lion Award, the First International Prize at the 48th Biennale di Venezia (1999), the Hiroshima Freedom Prize (2005), the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize (2006) and in 2017, she received the Praemium Imperiale Award in Tokyo.

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## *differences* to Host Colloquium on Blackness and Sexuality; Plans for Winter Launch of Online Forum

On March 15, 2024 Pembroke-housed journal *differences* plans to host a colloquium called “Limits of Legibility: The Questions of Blackness and Sexuality,” which will take as its backdrop the ways much progressive Black, feminist, and decolonial critical scholarship seeks to dismantle prevailing discourses in order to open up new modes of legibility. The five interlocutors at the colloquium—Joan Copjec, Lee Edelman, David Marriott, and Selamawit Terrefe along with Elizabeth Wilson, who will moderate—will discuss the illegibility at work in Lacanian-inflected readings of Blackness and sexuality.

This winter *differences* will also launch an online forum for critical prose, including short essays, commentaries, provocations, reviews, works-in-progress, dialogues, experiments, and roundtables. This new platform is expected to complement efforts on social media to reach a broader audience of young and international scholars.





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172 Meeting Street  
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