

Friends of the

PEMBROKE CENTER

Newsletter

After 44 Years, Pembroke Center Fully Occupies a Reimagined Pembroke Hall



▲ Archivists Amanda Knox and Erin Perfect work with graduate students in the new Archives reading room. Photo by Nick Dentamaro/Brown University

Pembroke Center supporters and community members came together on Friday, October 17 to celebrate the reopening of the refurbished Pembroke Hall. The renovation, made possible by a generous gift from Shauna McKee Stark '76, P'10, was planned over the 2024–25 academic year and executed in summer 2025. This most recent transformation of the 128-year-old building was designed to meet the needs of the growing Pembroke Center, which now fully occupies the building for the first time in the Center's 44-year history.

Pembroke Hall was last renovated between 2005–2008, when what was then called the Cogut Center for the Humanities (now the Cogut Institute) moved into the building, along with many of the Pembroke Center offices. Cogut's subsequent relocation to the renovated Andrews House in 2024 provided Shauna McKee Stark '76, P'10 Director of the Pembroke Center Leela Gandhi with an opportunity to reimagine how Pembroke Hall could better serve the growing needs of the Center.

One of the most glaring areas for improvement was immediately identified: the Pembroke Center Archives had remained in Alumnae Hall, creating several problems for the expanding collection. The Archives' offices were located on the third floor, and the lack of elevator access created physical challenges for visitors, as well as for moving and processing materials. In addition, the offices were not climate controlled, meaning that many items in the collection could not safely be stored there. Today, the Archives have been relocated to Pembroke Hall, where there is a spacious workshop designed for processing archival materials, as well as a small reading room. The new location makes the collections more physically accessible for staff, students, and other visitors. It also means the space can accommodate class visits from instructors who arrange for an instructional session with the archivists.

The 2008 renovation of Pembroke Hall created modern offices and meeting rooms, but the building lacked welcoming gathering

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Pembroke Center Archivist*

Erin Perfect

Processing Archivist

Diane Straker

*Administrative and Events
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From the Director

I write to you from my office in the newly renovated Pembroke Hall. Though the start of a new academic year is always an energizing time, this fall has been particularly stirring for our Center as we fully inhabit Pembroke Hall for the first time in our 44-year history. This striking remodel, made possible by the generosity of Shauna Stark '76, P'10, has enabled the kinds of collaborations I've envisioned since becoming director. You can read more about the renovation and the history of Pembroke Hall in the cover story of this newsletter, and, of course, the next time you are near Meeting Street, please visit!

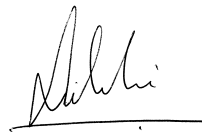
On November 5 we welcomed philosopher and gender studies scholar Judith Butler (University of California, Berkeley) to campus for a standing-room-only Pembroke Publics Lecture. While we had initially planned to host Butler's talk in the newly remodeled Pembroke Hall, demand for tickets required moving the event to a larger space (which also quickly sold out). This enthusiastic reception is a testament both to Butler's iconic status in the fields of gender and sexuality studies and literary theory and to the urgency of our political moment, which calls for the kind of rigorous, humane, and challenging thinking for which Butler is known.

This fall marks the start of my second three-year term as director, and I'm excited to announce a new research and programming direction. Building on the work the Center has conducted since its founding in 1981, the coming years will emphasize programming, scholarship, and teaching that address transnational contexts. As domestic government policies promote increasing insularity,

spaces dedicated to critical thinking and the open exchange of ideas across diverse racial, ethnic, national, and religious perspectives have become more essential than ever. This new initiative led by Lingzhen Wang (East Asian Studies) and

Nadje Al-Ali (Anthropology and Middle Eastern Studies) will focus on transnational feminisms, emphasizing the Center's commitment to transnational perspectives on gender, sexuality, and power. I look forward to sharing more about the programming we're planning.

We would not be able to undertake ambitious projects like these without the support of the Friends of the Pembroke Center, and I remain, as ever, grateful. I wish you a restful holiday season and year ahead.



Leela Gandhi
*Shauna McKee Stark '76, P'10 Director of the Pembroke Center,
John Hawkes Professor of the Humanities and English*



A Note from the Advisory Council Chairs

Pembroke Hall is abuzz. We were fortunate to be on campus in October to celebrate the building's reopening. The energy remains high as we continue working to advance the Pembroke Center's mission during this unprecedented time.

Every gift helps students engage with feminist ideas and scholarship: in classroom discussions, in the archival collections, in the pages of *differences*, through oral histories, and in the company of others at virtual or in-person events. In the newly reimagined Pembroke Hall, students can more easily access archival materials and connect with Pembroke Center faculty and staff.

As we embark on this new chapter in the history of the Pembroke Center, we ask for your support to advance teaching and research on gender and sexuality. The need for this work has never been more urgent.

Wishing you and your loved ones a peaceful end to 2025 and a joyful start to 2026.



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



Barbara Dugan
Johnson '83, P'16
*Vice-Chair, Pembroke
Center Advisory Council*

spaces. The 2025 upgrade created a spacious, light-filled kitchen for Pembroke Center staff, faculty, fellows, and affiliates, and refreshed study/lounge areas with improved seating and lighting. These informal gathering areas have been in almost constant use since the building reopened, with students studying in comfortable nooks and staff getting together for breaks. Similarly, the new first-floor library space (formerly an office) now plays host to small class discussion sessions, as well as serving as a meeting room. The library features the personal book collection of Ann duCille MFA'73, A.M.'88, PhD'91, founder of the Black Feminist Theory Project at the Pembroke Center.

The final, most noticeable changes to Pembroke Hall are to the large third-floor multipurpose event room. Designed in 1897 to house student activities, physical education classes, and once-mandatory Pembroke College chapel services, the room has served many purposes in the years since. Post-renovation enhanced acoustics, upgraded audiovisual systems and lighting, and new furnishings have significantly improved the experience of attending an event in the room. The space is now in high demand by departments across campus for events such as lectures and book talks.



▲ One of the lounge areas in Pembroke Hall



▲ The third floor event space has updated soundproofing, A/V, and furnishings.

“At a time when the work that’s being done at places like the Pembroke Center is under attack, we are doubling down. It’s more important than ever that we at Brown continue to demonstrate and elevate how important this scholarship is. This renovation is a reflection of Brown’s enduring commitment to inquiry that is bold and transformative. This space will be a new home for the next generation of scholars who will ask the hard questions and imagine new possibilities.”

– Brown University President Christina H. Paxson, on the occasion of the reopening of Pembroke Hall

This Year’s Student Fellows, Teaching Assistants, and Proctors

Introducing the students working with the Pembroke Center this academic year.

differences Editorial Assistant



Betsy Archelus
PhD candidate, History
Interdisciplinary
Opportunity Fellow

Introduction to Gender and Sexuality Studies Teaching Assistants



Karen Akilah Marks
PhD candidate,
American Studies



Mohadeseh Salari Sardari
PhD candidate,
History of Art and Architecture
Interdisciplinary
Opportunity Fellow



Yilmaz Yeniler
PhD candidate, Joukowsky
Institute for Archaeology and
the Ancient World

Graduate Curatorial Proctors



Martina Lancia
PhD candidate, Italian Studies



Semilore Sobande
PhD candidate, English

A Richly Earned Retirement: Donna Goodnow and Diane Straker

In January, the Pembroke Center will say goodbye to two beloved, long-serving staff members as they each retire. Center Manager Donna Goodnow and Events and Administrative Coordinator Diane Straker are familiar, friendly faces to anyone who has attended a Pembroke Center event. Goodnow has been at Brown for 30 years, and at Pembroke for 20. Straker has been at Brown for 23 years, and at the Center for 9. Their long histories with the campus and Center are only the beginning of their stories, though; as Black Feminist Theory Project founder Ann duCille notes, “There has never been a more dynamic duo than the Two D’s – Donna and Diane,” whose “charm and kindness as well as know-how” have helped make the Pembroke Center “a warm and welcoming intellectual home.”

Keeping a busy academic center running smoothly can be a challenging task. Goodnow’s colleagues praise her indefatigable, can-do spirit and ability to problem solve in even the most trying situations. Associate Teaching Professor Denise Davis notes that “Donna’s sober, often wry assessment of unexpected situations is usually the first step to getting us to a satisfactory outcome.” And Professor Lynne Joyrich, director of the Center’s LGBTQIA+ Thinking Initiative and architect of some of the Center’s most inspiring and provocative events, attributes the success of its programming to Goodnow’s and Straker’s “amazing ability to resolve difficulties, improve situations, offer fresh approaches, and make things happen.”

Goodnow and Straker also share a sense of humor and perspective that their coworkers find invaluable. Archivist Mary Murphy recalls sitting with the patient Goodnow as they laboriously tracked FedEx deliveries of archival materials. Though the process was maddening, Murphy recalls, “we had a lot of laughs. It was really good teamwork that I will miss.” That collegial spirit has been a noted highlight of working with Goodnow and Straker. As the primary contact with campus guests (such as invited speakers), Straker is legendary for her warmth and hospitality. Program Coordinator Carin Algava describes Straker as always acting with “kindness, patience, and generosity of spirit. That is who Diane is, day in and day out.”

Goodnow and Straker are each looking forward to their next chapters. Both are planning to travel and relax. Goodnow’s first order of business will be going on a cruise with her husband, while Straker is looking forward to the perks of sleeping in and being able to stay at home on cold winter days.



▲ Donna Goodnow



▲ Diane Straker

LGBTQIA+ Thinking Initiative, BAI Host John Cameron Mitchell

Professor of Modern Culture and Media and Director of the LGBTQIA+ Thinking Initiative Lynne Joyrich collaborated with the Brown Arts Initiative to bring acclaimed actor, director, writer, and producer John Cameron Mitchell to campus for a short guest residency. Mitchell, whose Broadway musical-turned-film *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001) occupies an iconic place in queer film, came to campus for a screening and discussion of *Hedwig*, to share his current work-in-progress on French Surrealist Claude Cahun, and for smaller discussion events with students.



▲ John Cameron Mitchell (left) in conversation with Brown Arts Institute’s guest curator Raja Feather Kelly

2025-26 Pembroke Publics Lecture Given by Judith Butler

Judith Butler delivered their talk “Variations of Legal Violence” to a packed audience in MacMillan Hall on November 5, 2025. Invited as the 2025–26 Pembroke Publics speaker, Butler, a feminist philosopher and gender and sexuality studies scholar, used Franz Kafka’s 1925 novel *The Trial* (about a man prosecuted for breaking an unidentifiable law) to bore into questions about how the law works, “if it works at all.” Butler considered how and when the law not only excludes people from legal protections but subjects them to such legally sanctioned cruelty as indefinite detention. When an appeal to the law brings not justice but humiliation, Butler asked, where are we to seek justice? In the face of thwarted narrative expectations that would offer any legal rationale, Butler called for a broader political understanding of justice arising from collective action. The recording of this talk is available on the Pembroke Center [YouTube playlist](#).



▲ Judith Butler delivers the 2025 Pembroke Publics Lecture.

Spring 2026 at the Pembroke Center



▲ Li’s 2024 book, *Anime’s Knowledge Cultures*

Jinying Li to Deliver Sherman Lecture

Assistant Professor of Modern Culture and Media Jinying Li will deliver the 2026 Elizabeth Munves Sherman ’77, P’06 ’09 Lecture in Gender and Sexuality Studies on Tuesday, February 24, 2026 at 4:00 p.m. in Pembroke Hall 305. Li focuses her teaching and research on media theory, animation, and digital culture in East Asia. Her first book, *Anime’s Knowledge Cultures* (University of Minnesota Press, 2024), explores the connection between the anime boom and global geekdom.



▲ Assistant Professor of Modern Culture and Media Jinying Li

Limits of Legibility: History under Siege

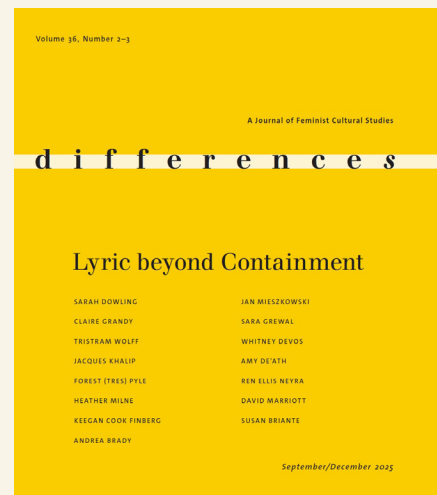
differences will host its third annual Limits of Legibility colloquium on March 6. Work presented will address questions such as: How does critical history address the impasse between conventional history, on the one hand, and aggressive authoritarian rewriting of history, on the other? Given critical history’s theoretical critique of the positivist understanding of facts, what is its response to the assertion of “alternative facts”? And what impact, if any, can it have on current battles as to what counts as history?

Guest speakers will include:

- Joan Wallach Scott (Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton University)
- Omnia El Shakry (Yale University)
- Korey Williams (University of Chicago)
- Gary Wilder (City University of New York)

Rounding Out the Year with a Special Issue of *differences*

The Pembroke Center's in-house journal of feminist cultural studies, *differences*, wrapped up 2025 with the publication of a special issue on lyric poetry. Titled *Lyric beyond Containment*, this issue expands on debates in lyric theory by reconsidering the boundaries of poetic and lyric forms. Volume 36, issue 2–3 was guest edited by Sarah Dowling (University of Toronto) and Claire Grandy PhD'21 (Baruch College, CUNY). Grandy has a long history with the Pembroke Center, having completed the Graduate Certificate in Gender and Sexuality Studies and served as a graduate student proctor for *differences*, a Dean's Faculty Fellow, and a Visiting Assistant Professor of Gender and Sexuality Studies. Selections from *Lyric beyond Containment* are available on the Duke University Press [differences page](#).



Spotlight: Semilore Sobande

Semilore Sobande is a doctoral candidate in English serving this year as the Graduate Curatorial Proctor for the Black Feminist Theory Project. Her research on the role of race, gender, and memory in shaping the literature of the Atlantic world is grounded in a Black feminist theoretical tradition, making her work in the Archives especially meaningful. Sobande is working with the Archives to plan an oral history of Black Feminist Theory Project founder Ann duCille; a conversation with scholar of 20th- and 21st-century African American literature Mary Helen Washington (University of Maryland College Park); and a new round of solicitations for papers to the Black Feminist Theory collection.

Given how her own research dovetails with the archival collections anchoring the Black Feminist Theory Project, Sobande noted, “Archiving the work of Black feminist thinkers, writers, and artists is a wonderful privilege, and I’m glad to help share it.”



▲ Semilore Sobande

News from the Pembroke Center Archives

The Pembroke Center Archives collaborated with the Friends to create “Power Pieces: Fashion as Armor and the Politics of Dress,” a pop-up exhibit and panel discussion for Family Weekend 2025. Nancy L. Buc ’65 LLD’94 hon. Pembroke Center Archivist Mary Murphy curated five wardrobe pieces from the Archives’ collections that exemplify the idea of “battle dress” to offer a lens onto how individuals confront hostility, assert presence, and shape identity with clothing. Panelists for the discussion included artist Liz Collins RISD BFA’91, MFA’99; Karen Akilah Marks, PhD candidate in American Studies; and madison moore, John Atwater and Diana Nelson Assistant Professor of the Arts. The panel was moderated by Denise Davis A.M.’97, PhD’11, associate teaching professor of gender and sexuality studies.

The Archives curate and make available collections that center women and gender at Brown University; feminist activism in Rhode Island; and feminist theorists in the academy. Here are collections and oral histories that have recently been made available.

Manuscript Collections Available for Research

- [Ann duCille MFA’73, A.M.’88, PhD’91 papers \(addenda\)](#)
- [Leopoldina Fortunati papers](#)
- [Donna M. Hughes papers](#)
- [Miranda Summers Lowe A.M.’09](#)

Newly Available Oral Histories

- [Kloey Albertson ’27](#)
- [Martha Banks ’73](#)
- [Premal Dharia ’00](#)
- [Becky Scheusner ’18](#)
- [Women’s Leadership Council](#)



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Questions? Contact Shelley Roth at shelley_roth@brown.edu.

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Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women

differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies

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