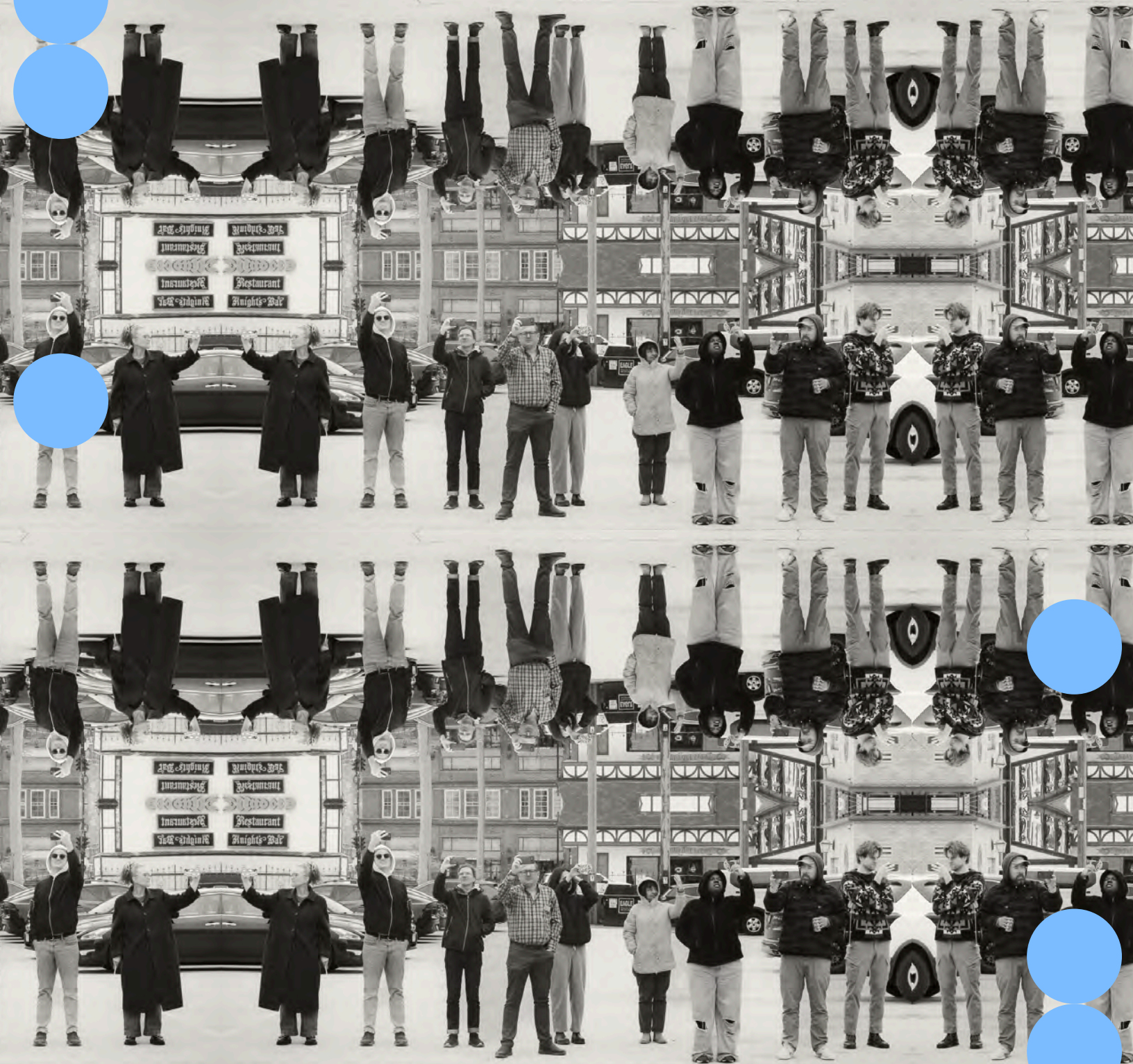


2024-25 YEAR IN REVIEW



Center for 21st Century Studies

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
MILWAUKEE

ABOUT C21

Since 1968, the Center for 21st Century Studies (C21) has worked to build a community of scholars to address the most pressing issues of our time. As one of the first humanities research centers in the United States, C21 has been at the forefront of major developments in interdisciplinary humanities for over half a century. Through collaboration and individual reflection, C21 fosters innovative research at the intersection of the humanities, arts, and sciences, supporting emerging and established scholars, publishing new research, and hosting lectures, workshops, and other events.

C21 provides multiple points of access and honors diverse ways of knowing through fellowships, project support, and programming. In recent years, the Center has expanded its focus to include public humanities, bridging the university and the community through events and oral research projects.

Explore C21

Social Media >>



C21CS



C21CS



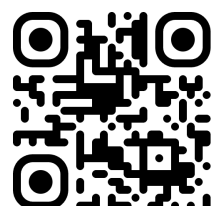
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uwm.edu/c21/



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Dear Friends,

Welcome to the start of the fall semester! It is my genuine honor to step into the directorship of C21 for the next three years, and it's especially meaningful as the first person of color to lead the Center in its 56-year history.

We have some other new folks up on the 9th floor of Curtin Hall as well. Our Managing Director, Katie Waddell, joined us mid-June, and Anna Mansson McGinty, Associate Professor of Women's and Gender Studies and Geography, is on board as Lead Faculty Advisor in liaison with our Advisory Council.

We already have a lot of exciting things in the works. But first, let's try something:

Find a comfortable seat.

Notice the natural flow of air into and out of your nose.

If you want, you can put one hand on your belly and the other on your heart.

Then, focus on your lower belly and breathe into that area and pause.

Then continue your inhalation up into your ribcage, expanding in all directions.

Finally, inhale all the way up to your collarbones – pausing again – before exhaling, slowly and completely.

Repeat as many times as you want.

I've been practicing yoga for 20 years now, and this three-part breathing is often how I begin; it sets the tone and pace for my practice and sometimes, if I'm lucky, for my day.



Fall 2024
Welcome
Letter

KEEP READING >>

This year, C21 focuses on the theme of Slow Knowing: The Pace of Being Human. Our 2024-25 programming:

- Introduces a range of slow knowing across disciplines, histories, and cultures on our “6.5 Minutes With...” podcasts ...
- Explores human pace in relation to technology and ecology through our C21 Spring Lecture with Kyle Whyte, as well as talks and events in association with two of our Collaboratory Projects: “AI and the Humanities” and “Slow Growing and the Time of Trees” in addition to our numerous Working Groups
- Engages our Milwaukee community on and off campus on issues of attention, through an experiential workshop and sidewalk study with the Strother School of Radical Attention
- Supports slow humanities research methodologies through our Fellows program, in addition to a UW System Faculty Lecture Series in collaboration with UW-Madison’s Center for the Humanities
- Presents ongoing scholarly and community-engaged research that stretches across annual programming themes through our exhibitions

Also look out for pop-up events that invite you to slow down with each other—to watch a film or do some breathwork, maybe even fit in a nap.

I hope you’ll take the time to join us!

Jennifer Johung,
C21 Director



LEADERSHIP TEAM



Jennifer Johung

C21 Director

Jennifer Johung is Professor of Contemporary Art and Architectural History. Her book, *Vital Forms: Biological Art, Architecture, and the Dependencies of Life* (University of Minnesota, 2019), focuses on the ways in which contemporary biological art and architecture actively engage in formulations of life. She is also the author of *Replacing Home: From Primordial Hut to Digital Network in Contemporary Art* (University of Minnesota, 2012) which considers modes of dwelling and belonging in an ever-changing world, and the co-editor of *Landscapes of Mobility: Culture, Politics and Placemaking* (Ashgate, 2013). She has published widely on topics across performance, visual, and urban studies as well as bio-art and biotechnology. In addition to her research, she

has curated exhibitions in Milwaukee, New York, LA, and Australia. With a background in performance studies, she teaches courses in contemporary art, new media, performance, and art museum studies.



Katie Waddell

Managing Director

Katie Waddell is a cultural program manager with experience leading program development, strategic partnerships, and community outreach in creative industries and higher education. Her public programming practice plays with gathering as form, with contemporary art and social practice as the primary point of departure. As an educator—specializing in art history, visual studies, and humanities—she applies creative thinking to traditional and digital learning environments, teaching people to draw connections between cultural artifacts and the specific social values that produce them. Katie received a dual-M.A. in Modern Art History, Theory and Criticism, and Arts Administration and Policy from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She founded and directed 2nd Floor Rear (2012-2017), an annual festival of art in

alternative spaces and experimental contexts, in Chicago, IL.



Anna Mansson
McGinty

Lead Faculty Advisor

Anna Mansson McGinty is an Associate Professor of Geography and Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She received her Ph.D. at Lund University, Sweden. Her research centers on Muslim identities and geographies, Islamic feminisms, and minority politics and representations in the United States. She is trained in ethnographic research methodologies, drawing on phenomenological and feminist approaches in understanding the complexities of personal and social worlds. Her first book, *Becoming Muslim: Western Women's Conversions to Islam* (Palgrave, 2006), is an ethnographic study on Swedish and American women who have converted to Islam with a focus on their identity formation and personal life-story and understanding of Islam. She is the author of many journal

articles on Muslim women, gendered activism, and veiling, as well as Muslim youth in Milwaukee and lived Islam. She is part of the extensive, decade-long community collaboration, the Muslim Milwaukee Project, together with colleagues Caroline Seymour-Jorn and Kristin Sziarto, as well as Muslim leaders, community members and artists. This project examines the dynamics and diversity of Muslim communities and lives in Milwaukee and confronts anti-Muslim racism.

ADVISORY COUNCIL

Faculty Advisors

Ivan Ascher
Sharity Bassett
Whitney Moon
Amy Olen
Amanda Seligman
Jocelyn Szczepaniak-Gillece
Glenn Williams
Anika Wilson

Community Advisors

Emilio De Torre
(Milwaukee Turners)
Kelly Bolter
(Milwaukee Public Libraries)
Art Derse
(Medical College Wisconsin)

Graduate Fellow Advisors

Jamee Pritchard
Russell Star-Lack

Ex-Officio

Ann Hanlon
Jennifer Johung
Jason Puskar

2024-25 FELLOWS



FROM LEFT
Marcus Allen
(History), Leslie
Bow (English and
Asian American
Studies,
UW-Madison),
Kyoung Ae Cho (Art
& Design)



FROM LEFT
Elana Levine
(English), Ermitte
Saint Jacques
(African and Africa
Diaspora Studies),
and Peter
Sands(English)



Research Fellows

LEFT
Rimi Zakaria
(Management,
UW-Whitewater)

RIGHT
Carson Pittman
(English, Rhetoric and
Professional Writing)



Graduate Fellows

FROM LEFT
Jamee Pritchard
(Africa and African
Diaspora Studies),
Russell Star-Lack
(Urban Studies and
Library and
Information
Science), Yuchen
Zhao (Urban
Studies)



2024-25 COLLABORATIVE GROUPS

Collaboratories

AI and the Humanities

The AI and the Humanities Collaboratory considered one of the most pressing questions for higher education: what is the future of humanities in the context of AI? While much of the campus has been focused on AI integration and instruction using new technology, this group explored the implications of such technology for humanities in higher education by marshaling the fundamental shared elements of the humanities and social sciences – critical thinking, ethics, language, and context – to bring a deeper and more reasoned consideration to this moment of upheaval in both higher education and culture writ large. Members: Jocelyn Szczepaniak-Gillece, Ann Hanlon, Stuart Moulthrop, Marc Tasman, and Anne Pycha.

Slow Growing in the Time of Trees

The Slow Growing in the Time of Trees Collaboratory cultivated an interdisciplinary creative space that examined: the durational nature of trees, mushrooms and humans; the symbiosis between trees and human and non-human partners; naturally occurring, as well as inoculated, living mushroom cultures that produce both blooms and invisible structures interconnected with trees; durational interactions between natural and reclaimed materials for contemplative and aesthetic purposes; bridging the space between humans, sculpture and the garden situated within a specific site: the Lynden Sculpture Garden; and the cultural connections to the natural world at the Lynden Sculpture Garden. Faculty Members: Yevgeniya Kaganovich, Lisa Moline, Lane Hall, Katharine Beutner, Jim Charles. Undergraduate Members: Pavonis Giron, Anthony Zelazoski, Sophie Rickers, Abigail Tran. Community Members: Polly Morris, Jeremy Stepian, and Robert Kaleta.



World Languages and Cultures

World Languages and Cultures promoted language learning and internationally focused education at UWM, increasing the understanding of world languages and global cultures as valuable components of both professional development and global citizenship by increasing collaboration across the world language and culture majors and undergraduate programs. The collaboratory advanced the goals of the forthcoming World Language & Culture department (Fall 2025), which will house the current programs of Arabic, Comparative Literature, French, Global Studies, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish, and Translation and Interpreting Studies. Members: Anita Alkhas, Larry Kuiper, Allison Libbey, Simonetta Milli Konewko, Kristin Pitt, Aragorn Quinn, Gabriel Rei-Doval, Nicolas Russell, M. Estrella Sotomayor, Katie Vater, and Christine Wolf.

Working Groups

Across the Premodern World: Newberry Library's Center for Renaissance Studies Consortium

Across the Premodern World aims to increase awareness of the extraordinary resources offered by the Newberry Library's Center for Renaissance Studies (CRS) Consortium. Faculty & Staff Members: William Bristow, Barrett Kalter, Leigh Mahlik, Ariana Myers, Mark Netzloff, David Pacifico, Nicolas Russell, Rebecca Shumway, Hilary Snow, Jacqueline Stuhmiller, and Tanya Tiffany. Student Members: Mark Heffron and Darren Jurmé Allumiér.

Center for Nursing History Development

The Center for Nursing History working group seeks to bring new attention to one of UWM's hidden gems: the historical galleries and collections of the Center for Nursing History. Faculty & Staff Members: Laurie Glass, Jessica Nelson, Christopher Peters, Jessica Hertig, Leigh Mahlik, and Linnea Leastadius. Student Members: Lori Martello, Samantha Danczyk, Basil J Beyreis-Heim, Sam Morgan Knight, Elsie Jo Touchstone, Gwyn Parker, Sam Knight Morgan, and Riley Koeppel.

Critical Asian Humanities Reading Group

The Critical Asian Humanities Reading Group offers scholars from a wide swath of disciplines and departments a forum in which to focus on recent scholarship concerning Asia. Members: Hilary K. Snow, David DiValerio, Xin Huang, Aragorn Quinn, Lia Wolock, and Xin Yu.

Digital Cultures

The Digital Cultures Collaboratory supports research into digital and analog games and other forms of online culture, by graduate students, staff, faculty, and alumni. Members: Jennifer Dworschack-Kinter, Nathan Humpal, Thomas Malaby, Krista-Lee Malone, and Stuart Moulthrop. Student members: Wren Dalton, Ryan House, Matthew Keracher, Evelyn Kersting, David Kocik, Luke Konkol, Laya Liebeseller, Janelle Malagon, Christopher Olson, Casey O’Ceallaigh, Robert Penner, Dave Stanley, Desiree Steele, and Brian Thomas.

Midwest Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference

The MIGC Working Group organizes the Midwest Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference—an annual graduate conference organized by graduate students that supports the sharing and collaboration of national and international graduate student research and art across disciplines. Student Members: Amber Chavez, Wren Dalton, Crystal Morgan, Kit Gorton, and Russell Star-Lack

Muslim Milwaukee Project: Palestinian American Stories

The Muslim Milwaukee Project aims to further understanding of the Muslim communities in the Milwaukee area, to challenge anti-Muslim racism, and to build networks among community members who share these goals. Members: Caroline Seymour-Jorn, Anna Mansson McGinty, and Kristin Sziarto.

Reproductive Justice

Reproductive Justice aims to create a space where researchers at UWM and reproductive justice community advocates in Milwaukee can work together to address systemic injustices. Faculty & Staff Members: Lindsey Krug, Maria Novotny, and M. Estrella Sotomayor. Student Members: Kristiana Perleberg, Amber Chavez, Teresa Ortiz, and Tara Knight.



ABOVE

Installation View, *Spatializing Reproductive Justice*, Center for Architecture, 2024.
Photo: Asya Gorovitz.

Science and Technology Studies

This working group explores a range of Science and Technology Studies perspectives on the development and consequences of science and technology in their historical, cultural, and social contexts. Faculty Members: Thomas Haigh, Nan Kim, and Jason Puskar. Student Members: Frischa Aswarini, Pratyusava Bara, Nicholas Miller, Anushmita Mohanty, and Ipsa Samaddar.

Slow Fashioning Sewing Circle

The Slow Fashion Sewing Circle is bringing together people who make, repair, and think about these fabric and fashion practices in broader cultural contexts. Faculty & Staff Members: Marc Tasman, Jennifer Jordan, Ann Hanlon, Collin Schulz, Kacie Otto, and Katie Waddell. Student Members: Christine Greco, Zoë and Lauren Brown.

PROGRAMS: Story Cart



Story Cart: Trust & the Vote

Overview

Story Cart: Trust & the Vote documented exchanges that reflect Milwaukee County's collective hopes, doubts, and ideas for transforming democracy.

With a historic U.S. presidential election on the horizon, in the summer of 2024, C21 Story Fellows interviewed over 90 people in Milwaukee County about their relative trust or distrust in the U.S. voting system. Story facilitators connected with a wide range of communities through the Center's mobile Story Cart to understand how people across diverse backgrounds experience civic engagement.



Story Cart is a mobile story collection program that travels to community spaces and engages Milwaukeeans in conversations about their lived experiences.

Our Story Fellows craft questions related to the current C21 research theme, record participant responses to those questions, and add them to our Story Cart database (forthcoming).

Summer Story Fellows

Coordinator: Jessie Thompson

Jake Clements

Sonya Green

Endika Iztueta

Russell

Star-Lack

Yuchen Zhao



uwm.edu/c21/events/story-cart/

Stats

Between April 2 and October 1, 2024, Story Cart fellows conducted **24 site visits** across **16 unique locations**, engaging 15 campus and community partners. **95 interviews** were conducted in total.

Sites

Cactus Club
Center for 21st Century Studies, UWM
Children's Learning Center, UWM
Despensa De La Paz
Ernest Spaights Plaza, UWM
Jackson Park Farmers Market
Milwaukee Central Library
Outpost Foods
Peck School of the Arts, UWM
PrideFest Milwaukee
Rooted & Rising Block Party
Student Union, UWM
Turner Hall
Urban Ecology Center Riverside
UWM at Waukesha
VIA CDC
Washington Park Media Center

Story Cart: Trust & the Vote was made possible by a grant from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, and through community collaborations with Milwaukee Public Libraries, Milwaukee Turners, the League of Women Voters, UWM's Children's Learning Center, DoSomething, MKElevate, and UWM's PSOA design instructors and students.

Exhibitions



LEFT: Exhibition at the Center for 21st Century Studies, 939 Curtin Hall, UW-Milwaukee, October 2024-May 2025

RIGHT: Traveling exhibition produced in collaboration with MKElevate (pictured here at COA Goldin Center), on display at various locations

Trust & the Vote

Story facilitators invited people to share where they fell on a sliding scale, from 0-10, between distrust and trust of the U.S. voting system.

Most stories fell on the side of trust, as many of the contributors either volunteered as poll workers or observed their family, friends, and neighbors working behind-the-scenes at polling locations on election day. For many contributors, trust in their community meant trust in the voting system. On the other side of the scale, many people expressed distrust the voting system because they felt overlooked and unheard. Some interviews unpack the perceived unfairness of the electoral college versus the popular vote, while others discuss accessibility barriers to voting in the United States.

TRUST



Joan



Adam



Regina

To hear these voters' interviews, visit uwm.edu/c21/publications/exhibits/trust-the-vote/

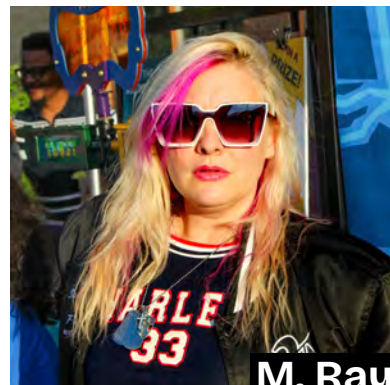
DISTRUST



Greta



Denise



M. Ray

SLOW *knowing*

The Pace of Being Human

Theme Overview

Slow movements—across food, cities, science, scholarship and more—call attention to embodied processes of building and maintaining collective life that resist the fast-paced efficiency models, rapid rewards, and short attention spans that increasingly seem to dominant human responses to 21st century social, political, and ecological challenges.

With humanities scholars, in partnership with community leaders, C21 examined how slow knowing facilitates the long-term envisioning and consistency of action required to carefully support the flourishing of diverse communities, cultures, and ecosystems. As the accelerated pace of machine and computing time collides with evolutionary, celestial, and deep time, our 2024-2025 programming worked to highlight how interdisciplinary humanities research can help us understand what humans are in time with, and how human pace is attuned.

[uwm.edu/c21/
events/slow/slow-knowing/](http://uwm.edu/c21/events/slow/slow-knowing/)

Slow Knowing: Events

Slow Film Series

Our Slow Film series, curated by Jocelyn Szczepaniak-Gillece (Associate Professor of English and Film Studies), ran during the coldest months of the year, inviting audiences chill out, cozy up, and contemplate the cinematic riches of slow-paced films.

November: *About Dry Grasses*, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Turkey, 2023

February: *Twilight*, György Fehér, Hungary, 1990

March: *Nainsukh*, Amit Dutta, India, 2010

Slow Knowing: An Immersive Podcast



This immersive podcast event featured a special extended episode of 6.5 Minutes With...C21, produced by C21 graduate fellows Jamee N. Pritchard and Yuchen Zhao.

In the episode, Mark Freeland, Director of the Electa Quinney Institute, discussed the Anishinaabe worldview, and unpacked how language and cultural specificity can shape a person's relationship to time, space, and even the moon and stars.

The event included Q&A with Dr. Freeland and an exploration of moon phases, tides, and moon gazing with Manfred Olson Planetarium Director Jean Creighton.

Slow Silencing: Panel Discussion



The Muslim Milwaukee Project facilitated a panel discussion at C21 with artists Amal Azzam and Liala Amin, who discussed their experiences of artistic censorship in Milwaukee.

Amal Azzam is a Muslim American Artist from the Midwest. Her work reflects the layers of trauma, freedom and misconceptions she carries within her identity. Amal experiments with wearables, screen printing, found objects and photography to express her ideas on the inner struggles of her identity.



Liala Amin is a multidisciplinary artist, and current artist-in-residence at Var Gallery, who focuses on themes of faith, spirituality, personal identity, and symbolism. She views her practice as healing, emphasizing art as an outlet to express personal narratives.

What Winter Did to Us: A Nature & Poetry Walk



In April, C21 joined forces with Sociocultural Programming to celebrate the work of Ada Limón, 24th Poet Laureate of the United States, with a patient, plodding ramble through Downer Woods, featuring reflective writing exercises in a custom 'zine, group poetry readings, and acts of radical attention.

Slow Growing in the Time of Trees Series

Kicking off with a Tree & Mushroom Walk in October, the Slow Growing in the Time of Trees Collaboratory organized four events that examined the durational nature of trees, mushrooms, and humans, and the symbiosis between trees and human and non-human partners. The Tree & Mushroom Walk, pictured below, led participants through Lynden Sculpture Garden to explore various species of trees and mushrooms, and view Yevgeniya Kaganovich's arboreal and fruited myceliated sculptures.



Attentive or Absentminded: Habits of Mind in the Age of AI with Meghan O’Gieblyn



Attentive or Absentminded:

Habits of Mind in the Age
of AI with Meghan
O’Gieblyn*

*Award-winning author of
God Human Animal Machine.

tinyurl.com/attentive-absent

April 10, 4-5pm
Golda Meir Library
4th Floor Conference Center

The AI and the Humanities Collaboratory organized a lecture by Meghan O’Gieblyn, author of *God Human Animal Machine*. O’Gieblyn posited, "at a moment when we are outsourcing many intellectual and creative tasks to machines, it’s worth thinking about the point of thinking itself. Is it a means to an end, or an end in itself? Are humans just 'stochastic parrots,' mindlessly producing language in a way that is not so different from AI, as some tech luminaries contend, or is there something more going on in our minds?"

While these questions may seem new, they harken back to older debates about the relationship between thought and language, freedom and necessity, and the fine line that exists between attention and automaticity. Long before the advent of digital technologies, two twentieth century philosophers, Hannah Arendt and Simone Weil, wrote about some of these questions through the lens of the technologies of their times. Their writing anticipates many of the challenges of the age of AI and calls attention to the more ordinary and insidious ways that consciousness becomes ossified by social convention, as well as the moral and political risks that arise when we fail to 'think what we are doing.'"

Kyle Whyte: Kinship, Our Experience of Time, and Environmental Responsibility

Center for 21st Century Studies Spring Lecture with *Kyle Whyte*

Kinship, Our Experience of Time, & Environmental Responsibility

Golda Meir Library 4th Floor Conference Center
Thursday, April 24, 5:30-6:30pm

Kyle Whyte, the George Willis Pack Professor of Environment and Sustainability at the University of Michigan, delivered C21's featured lecture of the 2024-25 academic year. His research addresses moral and political issues concerning climate policy and Indigenous peoples, the ethics of cooperative relationships between Indigenous peoples and science organizations, and problems of Indigenous justice in public and academic discussions of food sovereignty, environmental justice, and the anthropocene.

Dr. Whyte's lecture explored the mixed signals we often receive about the relationship between our responsibility to take action to address climate change and our sense of time. Is there a climate crisis that is so urgent that we must take whatever measures are necessary to lower carbon footprints? Or will buying too much into emotions of urgency generate hasty solutions that actually stymie progress? Some Indigenous traditions offer ethics based on responsibility and kinship that present ways in which time and ethics can be aligned, allowing us to be urgent but moral, and address the physical causes of climate change while fostering solidarity with the communities who experience climate injustice.

This event was supported by the Tommy G. Thompson Center on Public Leadership and the Electa Quinney Institute for American Indian Education.

Watch a recording of Whyte's lecture on YouTube at tinyurl.com/C21WhyteRecap

Attention Activism with the Strother School of Radical Attention

C21 partnered with the Milwaukee Turners for a day-long series of workshops led by members of the Strother School of Radical Attention (SoRA), an organization that promotes human well-being through attention activism. SoRA facilitators led participants through two of their signature attention-cultivation workshops—an Attention Lab and Sidewalk Study.

An Attention Lab is an experiential, participatory workshop curriculum dedicated to the exploration of radical human attention. Through group attention practices and guided discussions, participants created and tested tools to build sanctuaries of attention. Sidewalk Study is a form of group inquiry combining theory, practice, and public space. Participants read a selected text, wandered through public space while performing an exercise that activated questions posed by the text, and shared their experiences in an open-ended discussion after re-convening.



Kinship Time

After Kyle Powys Whyte

En route to your destination, choose a spot on the street. In silence, attend to:

I. Evidence of
“kinship relationships”
(5 min)

II. The passage of
“kinship time”
(5 min)

...then continue to your destination.
Take notes and share.

STROTHER SCHOOL OF RADICAL ATTENTION



Narcissus

After Megan O’Ghiebllyn

En route to your destination, find a reflective surface in urban space. With your partner:

I. Attend to your image
in the reflective surface

II. Take a selfie; attend to
your image onscreen

III. Attend to the dark screen
beside the reflective surface

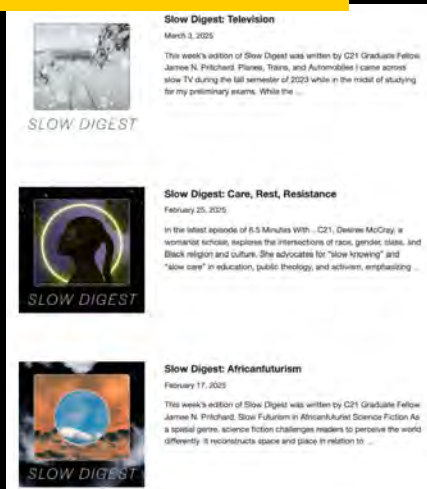
...then continue to your destination.
Take notes and share.

STROTHER SCHOOL OF RADICAL ATTENTION

LEFT: An Attention Lab in progress at Turner Hall, led by members of the Strother School of Radical Attention, May 3, 2025

Slow Knowing: Media

Slow Digest



Slow Digest is our weekly digital publication that celebrated and explored slow knowing, C21's 2024-2025 theme.

Some editions of the Slow Digest featured essays, insights, and annotations from C21 staff and stakeholders.

Others consisted of a collection of recommendations for further reading, curated around a particular slow topic.

uwm.edu/c21/category/slow-digest/

6.5 Minutes With...C21



6.5 Minutes is C21's small podcast showcasing BIG ideas, produced, edited, and hosted by C21 Graduate Fellows Jamee Pritchard and Yuchen Zhao.

2024-25 guests include: Yevgeniya Kaganovich, Mark Freeland, Desiree McCray, Charmaine Lang, Samira Payne, Robert Smith, and Jean Creighton.

uwm.edu/c21/publications/6-5-minutes-with-c21/

Slow Digest: The Humanities

Jamee N. Pritchard, C21 Graduate Fellow

Part 1: Reshaping the Humanities Through Executive Orders



In his first 100 days in office, President Trump, through the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), cut federal support to the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), effectively shutting down essential support for libraries, museums, community-centered cultural work, and research from colleges and universities.

While the Trump administration frames these moves as a broad push to reduce government spending, we can connect them to the Administration's effort to "restore sanity to American history," as stated in Executive Order 14253. The order mandates the removal of so-called "improper, divisive, or anti-American ideology" from federally funded exhibits and programs. In a press release, the NEH states that the cancellation of awards was facilitated by an evaluation of funding based on the priorities within the policy framework established by Congress, the Administration, and the head of NEH.

The agency describes those cancelled awards as not inspiring public confidence in the use of taxpayer funds and “at variance with agency priorities, including but not limited to those on diversity, equity, and inclusion (or DEI) and environmental justice” (NEH, 2025).

Going forward, all future NEH awards, according to the agency, “will be merit-based [and] awarded to projects that do not promote extreme ideologies based upon race or gender, and that help to instill an understanding of the founding principles and ideals that make America an exceptional country” (NEH, 2025). While language like “merit” and “exceptionalism” may appear neutral or even patriotic, these directives function as political instruments aimed at reshaping the intellectual and cultural landscape of the humanities. In practice, these recent executive orders and NEH’s new priorities both target and exclude cultural institutions, like the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture, that center critical approaches to history and the lived experiences of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC).

These new priorities have led to reallocating those cancelled awards to projects that align more directly with the Administration’s agenda (NEH, 2025). Nation-first narratives of American exceptionalism (e.g., research support for a biography on Nikola Tesla in the Gilded Age and new grant programs to research the American Revolution and the founding of the United States) are preferred over projects that challenge traditional Western, mainstream narratives that foreground racial, gendered, and colonial critiques. There should be space for the full range of historical and contemporary lived experiences, even those that interrogate the very power structures on which our nation was built. Falling back on comfortable historical narratives erases the complexities the humanities seek to confront. History is, and has always been, uncomfortable, and we must sit with that discomfort to become better scholars, learners, empathizers, allies, and problem solvers — everything the humanities teach us to be. It is unfortunate that, according to the current administration, any narrative that dares to include race, systemic injustice, and social critique of the United States of America, past, present, and future, is deemed unpatriotic.

The Administration’s attack on public media adds to this federal disinvestment in the humanities. On May 1, 2025, President Trump issued an executive order that directs the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to cease federal funding for National Public Radio (NPR) and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), citing accusations of political bias and divisive ideology (NPR, 2025). The loss of funding to our nation’s public broadcasting media means

reduced access to local news, educational programming, and emergency alerts, especially for rural communities. It also means silencing journalism and limiting community access to news that is without fear or favor.

Ultimately, these cuts to federal funding reflect not merely a disinvestment in the arts and humanities, but a calculated move by the Trump administration to diminish our collective freedom to think, question, critique, create, and remember. Critical inquiry, cultural memory, and intellectual freedom are under fire. History, culture, and education, as well as access to impartial information, are at risk of being co-opted by an administration that seeks to control narrative, suppress dissent, and reshape public knowledge to serve its ideological aims. While I'm always quick to compare our current climate to a science fiction novel like George Orwell's 1984 or Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451 with regards to censorship, surveillance, and our slide into dystopia, I can't help but paraphrase that quintessential line from Whoopi Goldberg in the classic film Ghost:

America...you in danger, girl.

Read the post online and review linked citations at uwm.edu/c21/slow-digest-the-humanities-i/



Part 2: The Impact of Federal Cuts on the Humanities

Federal cuts to museums, libraries, and cultural centers impact how we preserve history and support our communities' educational and cultural needs. Gibran Villalobos, a former senior program officer in the Office of Museum Services for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), focused on helping to build the federal guidelines for museum grants for American Latino history and culture. He also spearheaded a grant program called the American Latino Internship and Fellowship Initiative (ALMIFI) that was designed to provide college students studying American Latino life, art, history, and culture with opportunities for internships and fellowships at American Latino museums. With DOGE's federal cuts to IMLS that laid off staff, grant funding has been terminated and will not make it to the selected organizations this year.

“Without a staff, you have no grants, and without grants, there’s no funding that is going out to the museums,” said Villalobos. He explains that most of IMLS grants have a specific purpose. While he managed the Latino portfolio, other staff managed the Native American, Native Hawaiian, and African American history and culture programs. Other focuses included programs for museum professional development and museum leadership through Inspire! Grants for Small Museums, a program totally dedicated to small museums that are mostly rural, small town, community museums. With a chunk of their budget going to operating costs because of the loss of grants, many of these museums won’t be able to focus on building collections, or in other words, preserving history.

“Everybody’s going to get affected,” said Villalobos. “Small community organizations, organizations that support individuals of color, or as my colleague likes to say, people of the global majority...That funding has now disappeared, so I don’t know what other way of raising the red flag [than] to say this is going to be highly devastating, not just to those culturally specific organizations, but to all museums, the total museum industry.”

Why should you care about this devastating blow to the museum industry?

Museums not only preserve culture but also inspire creativity and foster learning, especially for underserved communities. In rural areas in America, where many of these small museums are located, there might not be other accessible public institutions, other than public libraries, dedicated to educating the public through exhibits, community lectures, and K-12 programming that supplement public school curricula.

Historical preservation is also crucial, and many IMLS grants funded preservation efforts for museum objects and the buildings that house them. Think HVAC systems in museums located in Louisiana, Texas, Alabama, Florida, and other humid climates that are a threat to archival material. You can’t just pack 500-year-old textiles in a cardboard box and stuff them in a storage unit if funding for your institution’s climate-controlled facility gets cut. Losing historic objects, documents, film, ephemera, and other archival material means losing information about the individuals and cultures that produced them.

The same urgency applies to public libraries. Beyond supporting lifelong learning, literacy, and intellectual freedom, libraries provide critical infrastructure for daily survival, offering reliable internet access, job search assistance, and safe spaces for individuals experiencing

homelessness, or social isolation. Defunding them through IMLS cuts is not just a blow to education, but a direct attack on the public's right to access knowledge, community, and care.

This threat to public libraries directly endangers innovative, community-centered projects like Manga in Libraries, which investigates the reading habits of BIPOC teens and addresses the knowledge gap of librarians who are undertrained and unfamiliar with manga, the fastest-growing print media format in the United States.

This work parallels my research into how and why Black teenage girls engage with science fiction, fantasy, and horror. Both projects explore cultural representation, the social and emotional significance of reading, and the role of librarians, publishers, and educators in supporting BIPOC youth, a historically underserved demographic. At a time when literacy rates in the U.S. are declining, this research is vital to understanding how to better serve the intellectual and emotional needs of our young readers.

Closer to home, UWM's Center for 21st Century Studies is also impacted by the loss of grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). A grant awarded by Wisconsin Humanities to support Story Cart, our mobile oral history collection initiative, was pulled after the NEH froze its funding pipeline.

Public-facing initiatives like C21's Story Cart, community roundtables, and public workshops exemplify the kind of publicly engaged humanities work that connects academic research to the lived experiences of everyday people. C21's Managing Director, Katie Waddell explains, "While C21 stakeholders and university leaders have lauded our public-facing endeavors, our operating budget has never been adjusted to accommodate this programmatic expansion, which the Center initiated only within the past five years. We rely almost entirely on extramural funding to bring Story Cart to Milwaukee. The loss of the Wisconsin Humanities grant jeopardizes the entire trajectory of this project, because the loss of one grant can mean the loss of many."

Waddell refers to "matching funds" in the grant application process. The applicant must provide or secure cash or goods and services rendered in-kind in a dollar amount equal to the total grant funding requested. "In C21's case, losing the Wisconsin Humanities grant meant that we were suddenly ineligible to apply for other grants for the same project because the Wisconsin Humanities grant was the source of the cash for the cash match. Getting one grant for a project also validates it for other potential funders, making them more likely to add to the

pot,” said Waddell. This process illustrates how one funding loss can create a cascading effect, derailing a single project and limiting access to future opportunities that will benefit both the university and the broader public.

The consequences of defunding IMLS and NEH-sponsored grants deliberately dismantle the public humanities. Institutions such as libraries, museums, archives, cultural centers, and interdisciplinary university centers, like C21, preserve histories, cultural memory, and knowledge systems. They enact an ethic of care in their public engagement and services. These federal cuts are more than a budgetary adjustment in the name of government efficiency; they signal that culture, history, and education are expendable unless agencies, universities, and colleges conform to a narrow ideological vision. It is a power play over who gets to tell our nation’s stories, who gets to learn from them, and whose knowledge and experiences are deemed worthy of research, documentation, interpretation, and preservation.



Read the post online and review linked citations at uwm.edu/c21/slow-digest-the-humanities-ii/

Part 3: The Humanities: Everything, Everywhere, All at Once

Although it may be difficult to define what the humanities are, we cannot deny their value and impact on society. Gibran Villalobos, a former program officer of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), puts it simply, “The humanities is inquiry into the human condition... it is telling the stories of individuals and their observations of the world in creative and meaningful ways.”

He puts the impact of the humanities into a much broader perspective, offering an example that involves one of America’s favorite pastimes: baseball.

“Imagine a world where without arts administration, you would go to a baseball game and you wouldn’t hear music; you wouldn’t see uniforms; you wouldn’t see design. The arts and humanities is embedded in so much of our everyday fabric that it’s almost imperceptible

Villalobos and Katie Waddell, C21's Managing Director, bring up a great point: We must help people understand that the humanities matter.

"We haven't done a good job, and I include myself in this unfortunate problem; [we] in the humanities have not made a good argument as to why we are essential in the everyday lives of individuals. I think the proof for that came during the pandemic. No arts, no humanities was listed as an essential service at that time, and that already tells us that we have not done a good job at making a good argument as to why we are essential to economic development, workforce development, health, [and] climate. There are many other reasons as to why we haven't had the time to do that, especially funding," said Villalobos.

Waddell explains the importance of applied humanities in C21's work with community partners and the university. "While this work can be complex and costly to produce, we insist on producing humanities programming in partnership with communities beyond the bounds of campus because we believe in meaningfully expanding access to humanities-based practices to everyone, regardless of their socioeconomic status or educational attainment. We also believe that the question of who the humanities field should serve is not just a matter of institutional ethics. It is existential."

She explains that publics that do not understand or value the humanities will support the humanities. "The consequences of this are evident across the country, where the resource pools for humanities departments evaporate year by year. But there is also evidence of reversals when publicly engaged and applied humanities practices are embraced by universities," she said.

What can we do to help museums, libraries, cultural centers, public broadcasting, and institutions like the Center for 21st Century Studies that have been affected by DOGE's cuts to humanities-centered programming?

Simply put, patronize them. Show the federal government how necessary these institutions are to our communities. If you don't have a library card, get one. Use the resources available at the library, like the Libby app, to listen to and read books. Check your local library's website for programs, lectures, book clubs, and other activities that they offer to the public. Visit a museum and learn about a culture different than your own.

Donate to your favorite public radio station or podcast and introduce your children to educational programming like Sesame Street and Daniel Tiger – make your kid a PBS Kid.



In terms of C21's future, Waddell explains that the Center will pursue grants from private sources to keep public programming going. "We're also going to examine our own assumptions about what our programs should look like and what kinds of resources are required to make them happen. That may help us make it through this period of scarcity," she said. "It's not sustainable long-term, however. Humanities work is work. It cannot continue if it has no material support."

On that note, add C21 to your list of organizations to visit and engage with. Please support us by reading our work, listening to our 6.5 Minutes With...podcast, and actively participating in our events throughout the year. Consider supporting C21 through a donation. Your gift supports student scholarships and fellowships, annual programming such as podcasts, lectures, panel discussions, interdisciplinary initiatives, and our UWM Fellows program that brings scholars together to create new knowledge. Visit <https://uwm.edu/c21/about/give/> to give to the Center for 21st Century Studies.

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Read the post online and review linked citations at uwm.edu/c21/slow-digest-the-humanities-iii/



Dear Friends,

At the end of our last event, an attention lab hosted by members of the Strother School of Radical Attention, one of the workshop facilitators asked us to imagine “the great empty cup of attention” from the 1902 Henry James novel *The Wings of the Dove*, and to think of one thing that each of us would place in that cup. What is one moment in your everyday life, big or small, in which you consistently place your attention? We all shared our individual moments of attention so that, together, we might fill the cup.

I’ve been collecting such meaningful moments scattered across this hard year, trying to hold onto some of the things that I, and maybe also you, placed attention on, and to see them together as collective practices of care in this unsteady world. Many of these moments happened at C21, as we offered events and gatherings and supported research initiatives and collaborative projects that explored the pace of being human across a slower tempo, where “slow” could mean an attentiveness to how and what we each experience, a situatedness in a specific place or body, or it could mean kinship.

Many of these moments we will carry into next year, as C21 strives to counter the unsettledness of our time by continuing to practice slow and collective care. We will be collaborating with UW-Madison’s Center for the Humanities on a series of programs on “Aesthetics, Art, and AI,” with grant support from the Consortium for Humanities Centers and Institutes. We are also very pleased to announce that we recently received a grant from the Wisconsin Institute for Citizenship and Civil Dialogue to expand our attention activism work within communities across Milwaukee.

As the resources and attitudes surrounding higher education continue to shift into the next fiscal year, C21 will turn its programmatic focus homeward, deepening our roots in Milwaukee through local events and participatory workshops that fill the collective cup and affirm our commitment to building communities of thinkers.

Take care, and we’ll see you again in September,

Jennifer Johung
Director, Center for 21st Century Studies



2024-25
Farewell
Letter



Give to the

Center for 21st Century Studies

For over five decades, the Center for 21st Century Studies (C21) has been a hub for interdisciplinary research, dialogue, and collaboration in the humanities. Our mission is to bring together students, faculty and staff, and community members to explore the pressing issues of our time and deepen our appreciation of the challenges and possibilities of human experience.

Your generosity ensures that C21 can continue to foster cutting-edge scholarship and public engagement. With your support, we are able to host dynamic programming and sustain public humanities initiatives, connecting the university to the broader Milwaukee community through partnerships, accessible programming, and opportunities for meaningful conversation.



Make your gift today:

To make a donation, scan the QR code or visit **tinyurl.com/GivetoC21**.

Common Contributions:

\$50	supports one Human Club event
\$100	supports web hosting for our student-produced 6.5 Minutes With...C21 podcast
\$250	supports one C21-produced exhibition
\$500	supports one working group for an entire academic year or one Story Cart activation
\$1,000	supports a lecture or panel that brings leading scholars and artists to our community

To make a gift by check or phone, or for more information about planned giving and corporate and foundation philanthropy, visit uwm.edu/advance/give/ways-to-give/.

