

LECTURE-PERFORMANCE

# SPECULATIVE LEGAL FUTURES AND THE POETIC TESTIMONY OF VIOLENCE



**THURSDAY, APRIL 4, 2019  
7:30-9:00 PM**

UnionDocs  
322 Union Ave  
Brooklyn

## UNIONDOCS

UnionDocs (UNDO) is a non-profit Center for Documentary Art that presents, produces, publishes, and educates.

We bring together a diverse community of activist artists, experimental media-makers, dedicated journalists, big thinkers, and local partners. We are on a search for urgent expressions of the human experience, practical perspectives on the world today, and compelling visions for the future.

### 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](http://www.veralistcenter.org)

Cover image: Helene Kazan, *Imperiled House*, still from lecture-performance, 2017. Courtesy the artist.

## PROGRAM

2018-2020 Vera List Center Fellow, artist and researcher **Helene Kazan** gives a lecture-performance introducing 'poetic testimony' as a speculative legal future, and as a feminist method for breaking asymmetric power structures in international law.

In this lecture-performance of audio/visual material from different temporal and spatial contexts encountered throughout her work, Kazan draws on contemporary feminist and queer critical legal theory, on culturally ingrained and gendered modes of voicing evidence that often exclude or render the human body invisible. Engaging the proposed speculative legal futures that question necessary modes of reform in international law, Kazan posits poetic testimony amongst such methods for empowering the subject affected by internationally perpetrated violence, experienced through armed conflict and climate disaster. Further, Kazan questions the modes of solidarity that can be engaged through poetic testimony, in connecting communities and contexts dealing with the effects of violence that fall outside of international law's conceptual frame of accountability.

Following the lecture-performance, Kazan engages in conversation with **Toby Lee**, artist, anthropologist, and Assistant Professor of Cinema Studies at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, and **Josh Guilford**, Assistant Professor of English in Film and Media Studies at Amherst College. A reception follows the discussion.

### Participants

**Josh Guilford**, Assistant Professor of English in Film and Media Studies at Amherst College

**Helene Kazan**, artist and 2018-20 Vera List Center Fellow

**Toby Lee**, artist, anthropologist, and Assistant Professor of Cinema Studies at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts

*'Speculative Legal Futures and the Poetic Testimony of Violence' is presented in collaboration with UnionDocs as part of Kazan's ongoing investigation as a 2018-2020 Vera List Center Fellow at The New School, New York. Building on Kazan's presentation in fall 2018 at the start of the fellowship, the project will culminate in an assembly event organized with the Vera List Center in the spring of 2020. The UnionDocs event is organized by Toby Lee and Josh Guilford in conjunction with World Records, a journal of documentary media published by UnionDocs. Additional support for this event is provided by Amherst College.*

## PARTICIPANTS

**Josh Guilford** is Assistant Professor of English in Film and Media Studies at Amherst College. His scholarship focuses on histories and theories of experimental film, with an emphasis on the postwar American avant-garde. Essays of his have appeared in such publications as *Alternative Projections: Experimental Film in Los Angeles, 1945-1980*; *The Global Sixties in Sound and Vision: Media, Counterculture, Revolt*; and the online journal *Flow*. Since 2009, he has curated experimental film and video, pursuing curating as a means of cultural production and an outlet for research. Programs that he curated or compiled have screened at such venues as Magic Lantern Cinema, Anthology Film Archives, Balagan, Le Petit Versailles, Pacific Film Archive, UnionDocs, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit. He makes films as well, working in 16mm. His short film *Rock Roll* (2015) screened at the Ann Arbor Film Festival, Light Field, Onion City, the Film-Makers' Cooperative, and other venues. Most recently, his dual-projection film *Circumambulations (Linear)* (2017), made collaboratively with Andrew Ranville, screened at Microscope Gallery. He also serves as an editor of *Millennium Film Journal*.

**Helene Kazan's** work engages an intersection of international law, architecture, and the human bodily experience of violence. Observed through the lived-built environment in Lebanon, Kazan distinguishes how violence can be traced through architecture as a material sensor of an evolving integrated limit condition of conflict and capitalism. Furthering an understanding of the human effects of this lived condition, Kazan questions the politics of dominant methods of producing evidence that can exclude or render the human body invisible. In response, Kazan argues for the poetic testimony of violence, as a method by which the human subject can gain further political and legal agency. Kazan has completed a PhD at the Centre for Research Architecture, Goldsmiths, University, London. She recently curated the exhibition *Points of Contact* in Lebanon, and her work's been shown at documenta(14), The Serpentine Gallery, London, Beirut Art Center, Lebanon, Mosaic Rooms, London, Ibraaz, Strelka Institute for Media, Architecture and Design, Moscow and the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin. She is a 2018-2020 Vera List Center Fellow.

**Toby Lee** is an artist, anthropologist, and Assistant Professor of Cinema Studies at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. She works across film, video, drawing, and text, and her work has been exhibited at Locarno, Ann Arbor, Camden, Thessaloniki, Flaherty NYC, Museum of the Moving Image (NYC), and the 2014 Whitney Biennial, among others. Her research interests include visual and media anthropology, the anthropology of cultural institutions, cultural citizenship, expanded documentary, and cultures of surveillance and documentation. She is currently writing a book on the politics of cultural production in contemporary Greece. She has a PhD in Anthropology and Film & Visual Studies from Harvard University, where she was a member of the Sensory Ethnography Lab. She is the recipient

of fellowships from the Fulbright Foundation, the Social Science Research Council, the Dan David Foundation, the Film Study Center at Harvard University, and the Flaherty Film Seminar. From 2012 to 2014, she was the Director of the Collaborative Studio program at UnionDocs: Center for Documentary Art in Brooklyn, NY.

## **ABOUT THE FELLOWSHIP**

The Vera List Center Fellowships support artists, curators, writers, and scholars whose exemplary work advances the discourse on art and politics. Drawing from the academic resources of The New School, the appointments provide the opportunity to develop a fellowship project in exchange with New School faculty and students and with the support of a graduate student assistant. In addition, the fellowship offers a financial stipend and a production budget to bring the project to the public through the Vera List Center's interdisciplinary program initiatives, ranging from events to installations and publications.

The 2018-2020 Vera List Center Fellows are L.A.-based visual artist Dean Erdmann and London/Beirut-based artist, curator and writer Helene Kazan. They were selected from an international pool of over 200 applicants from 35 countries by an ad hoc fellowship committee of former fellows, New School faculty, and Vera List Center staff.

Erdmann and Kazan will develop their fellowship projects within and prompted by the center's focus theme for 2018-2020, *If Art Is Politics*. Under that heading, programs at the Vera List Center will position art as a political practice, and pursue some of the following provocations: if art is politics, how is it politically viable and how does it acquire political agency? How does it shift or affect the sites, practices and participants of political processes in ways that traditional forms of political involvement might not? If art is politics, how are the institutions of art implicated in such a new political order? Can art function as a social site where poetics have the potential to transform political subjectivities?

## VERA LIST CENTER FELLOWS

<b>Lawrence Abu Hamdan</b> Beirut, Lebanon 2015-2017	<b>Helene Kazan</b> London, UK/ Beirut, Lebanon 2018-2020	<b>Alexander Provan</b> New York City 2013-2015
<b>Maurice Berger</b> New York City 1994	<b>Bouchra Khalili</b> Berlin, Germany/ Tangier, Morocco 2011-2013	<b>Walid Raad</b> New York City 2004-2005
<b>Dean Erdmann</b> Los Angeles, CA 2018-2020	<b>Lana Lin &amp; Lan Thao Lam</b> New York City 2009-2010	<b>Sarah Rothenberg</b> Houston, TX 1995
<b>Wendy T. Ewald</b> Rhinebeck, NY 2000	<b>Jill Magid</b> New York City 2013-2015	<b>Edward Rothstein</b> New York City 1999
<b>Andrea Geyer</b> New York City 2006-2007	<b>Kobena Mercer</b> New Haven, CT 1999	<b>Katya Sander</b> Copenhagen, Denmark 2006-2007
<b>Casey Gollan</b> New York City 2015-2017	<b>Lorraine O'Grady</b> New York City 1997-1998	<b>Robert Sember</b> New York City 2009-2011
<b>Margarita Gutman</b> New York City 2001	<b>Olu Oguibe</b> Storrs, CT 2000	<b>Joshua Simon</b> Philadelphia, PA 2011-2013
<b>Susan Hapgood</b> New York City 1999	<b>Silvana Paternostro</b> New York City 1997	<b>Victoria Sobel</b> New York City 2015-2017
<b>Sharon Hayes</b> Philadelphia, PA 2006-2007	<b>Wendy Perron</b> New York City 2001	<b>Elisabeth Sussman</b> New York City 1999
<b>Danny Hoch</b> New York City 2000	<b>Marjetica Potrc</b> Ljubljana, Slovenia 2007-2008	<b>David Thorne</b> Los Angeles, CA 2006-2007
<b>Ashley Hunt</b> Van Nuys, CA 2006-2007	<b>Leslie Prosterman</b> Washington, D.C. 2001	<b>Jonathan Weinberg</b> New Haven, CT 2002

## 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.

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Jane Lombard

Susan Meiselas

Megan E. Noh

Mendi and Keith Obadike

Nancy Delman Portnoy

Silvia Rocciolo

Ingrid Schaffner

Mary Watson

**UPCOMING EVENTS**  
**Vera List Center for Art and Politics**

FREEDOM OF SPEECH: A CURRICULUM FOR STUDIES INTO DARKNESS  
SEMINAR 5

**A Time for Seditious Speech**  
**Saturday, April 13, 1:00-3:30 PM**

WEEKSVILLE HERITAGE CENTER  
158 DR. JOAN MAYNARD WAY, BROOKLYN

FREEDOM OF SPEECH: A CURRICULUM FOR STUDIES INTO DARKNESS  
SEMINAR 6

**Going Towards the Heat: Speaking Across  
Differences**  
**Monday, June 10, 6:30-8:30**

THE NEW SCHOOL, THERESA LANG COMMUNITY AND STUDENT CENTER  
55 WEST 13TH STREET, ROOM 202  
NEW YORK CITY



**THE NEW SCHOOL**

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