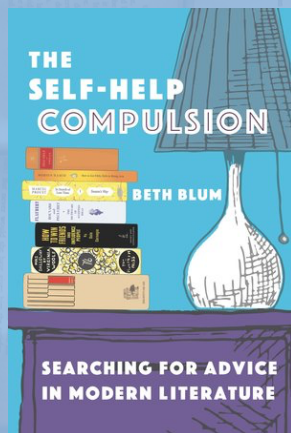


The Comparative Literature Luncheon Series presents:

“Unlearning’ Culture”

Beth Blum

Harvard University



Monday, October 16

12:30–1:30 p.m.

102 Kern Building

*Beth Blum teaches modern and contemporary literature at Harvard University, where she is the Harris K Weston Associate Professor of the Humanities. Her book, *The Self-Help Compulsion: Searching for Advice in Modern Literature* was published in 2020 with Columbia University Press. She has published academic articles in PMLA, MLQ, Modernism/modernity, and American Literary History, and public-facing essays in Aeon Magazine, The New Yorker, and The Chronicle of Higher Education, among other places. She is the British and Anglophone Book Reviews editor for the journal Comparative Literature.*

*In the past decade, calls for “unlearning” have reached unprecedented prominence in both public and academic spheres. In the field of American self-help, “intentional unlearning” has become almost a subgenre unto itself with publications such as *Unlearn: Let Go of Past Success to Achieve* (2018); *Relational Reset: Unlearning the Habits that Hold You Back* (2019); *Unlearning the Ropes: The Benefits of Rethinking what School Teaches You* (2021), and too many others to list. The trend also informs literary criticism. Jack Halberstam, in a 2012 MLA address, exhorts us to “unlearn the wisdom of the past and substitute wild forms of experimentation for domesticated tried-and-true traditions of thought.” Franco Moretti maintains that “unlearning” is what his “distant reading” enables, while post-critique manifestoes hinge on the trope of “unlearning” professional reading habits. This talk traces the discourse of unlearning—and its concomitant undermining of scholarly forms of education and attention—from Buddhist ideals of “deconditioning” that gained American traction in the 1960s, through to academic satires of DH Lawrence and Zadie Smith, and up to the contemporary phenomenon of YouTube reaction videos. I suggest that the concept’s contemporary vogueishness obfuscates the role that unlearning has always played in humanist methods and thought.*

Fall 2023 Upcoming Events:

Monday, October 23

Hil Malatino

Penn State

"The Work of Trans Affect"

Monday, October 30

Gabeba Baderoon

Penn State

"Looking Sideways"

Monday, November 6

Christopher Lowy

Carnegie Mellon University

"What We (Don't) Talk about When Talk
about Literature: The Visual
Representation of Language and Why it
Matters"

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