

Celebration of Authors and Awards Ceremony followed by Presidential Addresses

Mon, October 11, 6:00 to 9:00pm, (Eastern Standard Time), Webinar

2021 Presidential Address by Cathy Schlund-Vials, "Love and Resistance in a Time of COVID: American Studies and Utopic Critique"

Abstract: Indicative of noncompliance, suggestive of opposition, and connotative of defiance, "resistance" is a seemingly aspirational, out-of-reach idea in the face of contemporary pandemic polemics, present-day white supremacist politics, and ongoing rights violations. Congruently, these dystopic actualities, dishearteningly experienced and rendered overwhelmingly visible in daily reports of "Covid-related deaths," "January 6th arrests," "big lie" recounts, "election integrity" disenfranchisement, and border-enforced catastrophe, render ostensibly impossible an affective turn to love. To pessimistically surmise and depressingly summarize, the start of the second decade in the second millennium corresponds to what sixteenth-century social philosopher Sir Thomas More characterized in his fictional satire, *Utopia*, which begins in a counter-utopic present. Published in 1516, *Utopia* uses as primary context U.S. namesake Amerigo Vespucci's "New World" travel accounts as the basis for its fictive figurations of an isolated, uncharted island west of Europe. In an exchange concerning the recently encountered Americas, More writes, "We did not ask if he had seen any monsters, for monsters have ceased to be news. There is never any shortage of horrible creatures who prey on human beings, snatch away their food, or devour whole populations; but examples of wise planning are not so easy to find."

More's allusion to "horrible creatures who prey on human beings" unintentionally yet pointedly encapsulates the contemporaneous institutionalization of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and regimented settler colonialism in the Americas. Furthermore, despite the passage of almost five centuries and notwithstanding More's non-U.S. nationality, *Utopia*'s overt acknowledgment of presentist monstrosity and concomitant imagining of a non-monstrous place encapsulates the vexed dimensions of twenty-first century U.S. nationhood while engendering alternative visions of love and resistance. Such utopic visions, dialogically connected to this year's "Creativity within Revolt" conference theme, serve as a "present is prologue" foundation for this address's overall consideration of American Studies as critical interdiscipline and multivalent site of utopic critique.