



AMERICAN  
STUDIES  
ASSOCIATION

**SOLIDARITY: WHAT LOVE LOOKS LIKE IN PUBLIC**  
2023 ANNUAL MEETING VIRTUAL SESSION

**Kinship and Inherited Legacies:  
Queer Formations of Asian American Intimacies and Histories**

**Friday, 1/19/24, at 12:00-1:40 pm PST/3:00-4:40 pm EST**

**Live Stream: [bit.ly/kinship-panel](https://bit.ly/kinship-panel)**

***Recorded video of the panel available afterwards at the same link***

**PANELISTS**

Joanmarie Bañez, UC San Diego  
S. Moon Cassinelli, Virginia Tech  
Al Evangelista, Oberlin College  
Jay N. Shelat, Ursinus College

**CHAIR**

Joo Ok Kim, UC San Diego

Inheritance is often characterized in binary terms: either something we benefit from (especially in terms of generational wealth) or something we didn't ask to receive but must carry. Within these logics, then, kinship can be synonymous with or limited to biological family relations. While this is a panel about family, it is not invested in defining it as an essentialized or universal form. By refusing strict ideas of descent, this panel considers nonbiological genealogies of kinship and inheritance, organized by the following questions. First, "how do commitments to solidarity inform how we understand and navigate our familial relationships with one another?" How, for instance, does a recognition of incommensurable racialized difference help to denaturalize how individuals in a family might speak to one another about issues of anti-racism? And second, "how do our familial relationships with one another shape how our solidarity looks and the labor we're committed to?" As Kandice Chuh and queer scholars such as David Eng and José Esteban Muñoz have notioned toward imagining otherwise, this panel explores forms of empowerment and belonging that provide tools and non-Western ways of knowing on issues of late-stage capitalism, racism, transphobia, and misogyny.

This panel is chaired by Joo Ok Kim, whose *Warring Genealogies: Race, Kinship, and the Korean War* (Temple UP 2022) offers a comparative study of Asian American and Latinx studies, insightfully connecting race, politics, and citizenship to critique the Cold War conception of the “national family.” Through Alex Tizon’s essay “My Family’s Slave,” Joanmarie Bañez analyzes the figure of the immigrant domestic worker, whose positionality makes legible the *longue durée* of imperialism, settler colonialism, and immigration in Filipinx family formation. S. Moon Cassinelli discusses Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s experimental novel *DICTÉE* and how Cha’s aesthetic and affective experimentation constructs alternative models of history and intergenerational connections by asking readers to stay with incoherence. Even as *DICTÉE* defies genre categories, Cassinelli focuses on the interpretive potential of feeling as though one is “missing something” to examine how the text’s unorthodox features reimagine familial and national genealogies. In Al Evangelista’s performance production “somewhere good,” movement, technology, and dramaturgy confront inheritance and anti-Asian hate through the 1904 World’s Fair, using augmented reality and sound design. Evangelista explores how to choreograph and invite a literal moving with history and Pinay/x/o ancestors, communicating with words seemingly lost to colonial structures. In a turn toward what he terms *desi* millennial fiction, fiction by millennials who hail from South Asia and the diaspora, Jay Shelat examines queer kinship in Sarah Thankam Mathews’ novel *All This Could Be Different*. Shelat posits that the recent trend in contemporary literature urges for new forms of collectivity and kinship without erasing or jettisoning their inherent *desi* values and roots, namely those found in natal familial units. Ultimately, through this constellation of considerations about kinship, this panel critically examines ideas of inheritance for BIPOC scholars and artists. What does it mean to inherit both histories of oppression and possible solutions for building a better world and future?

## INDIVIDUAL PRESENTATIONS

### **The Kinship of Good Ghosts: Ersatz Kinship of “Mammy” and “Lola” Figures in Contemporary American Literature**

Joanmarie Bañez, UC San Diego

Part of a larger dissertation project that considers the *longue durée* of imperialism, settler colonialism, and immigration that continue to (re)figure normative American and Asian American kinship structures, this paper argues that narratives surrounding Filipinx domestic and reproductive labor are also narratives about Filipinx family formation. I analyze Alex Tizon’s long form essay “My Family’s Slave” to illuminate specifics of Filipina reproductive labor that situate these women to be simultaneously in excess and in loss of

clear positionalities of mother, grandmother, employee, and at times servant or slave. This paper extends considerations of what Brigitte Fielder terms ersatz kinship, kinship that is “a coerced product of slavery meant to mask slavery’s violence by perpetuating the lie of enslaved people as contented members of their enslavers’ families while also obscuring the fact of enslaved Black women’s kinship to their own biological children.” Although Fielder theorizes ersatz kinship with particular regard for Black women and kinship, specifically kinship structures contextualized by U.S. enslavement of African and African American peoples during the Transatlantic Slave Trade, I trace out ersatz kinship in Tizon’s essay to consider distinctions of Filipinx family formations shaped by varying degrees of domestic labor and servitude. Ultimately, this paper explores inherited legacies of children who are raised by Filipina domestic workers, considering how questions of inheritance concerning labor, gratitude, and freedom are made visible through queer kinship structures.

## **Staying with Incoherence: Disjointed Narratives and Queer Excess in Cha’s *DICTÉE***

S. Moon Cassinelli, Virginia Tech

My presentation discusses Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s novel *DICTÉE* and how Cha’s aesthetic and affective experimentation constructs alternative models of history and intergenerational connections by asking readers to stay with incoherence. Even as *DICTÉE* defies genre categories, scholars of Asian American studies are drawn to how the text’s unique organization, style, and form represent women’s voices in the narrative. Building on these insights, I focus on the interpretive potential of feeling as though one is “missing something” by asking, what is inherited when engaging the process of finding meaning in fragmentation and unknowability against histories of trauma, colonialism, and displacement? To that end, I assert that the practice of staying with incoherence and embracing narrative excess form a queer affective kinship structure that allows *DICTÉE* to reimagine familial and national genealogies.

## **Dancing Inherited Archives: Movement and Technology as Critical Practice**

Al Evangelista, Oberlin College

With the rise in anti-Asian hate alongside COVID-19, many Asian American historians are repeatedly finding themselves conveying a depressing fact—anti-Asian hate is not new. In fact, anti-Asian hate is part of ongoing systemic violence linked to many tragedies. From indentured workers and human zoos to hate crimes and threats against Nobel prize winners, the violence against Asians and Asian Americans continues to proliferate. Can performance address this violence? Through the lens of a dramaturgical approach, combined with queer and decolonial studies, I propose anti-Asian hate can not only be addressed, but can also be interrogated through performance. In my performance production “somewhere good,” movement, technology and dramaturgy confront

inheritance and anti-Asian hate through the 1904 World's Fair, using augmented reality (AR) and sound design. I explore how to choreograph and invite a literal moving with history and ancestors, communicating with words seemingly lost to colonial structures.

## **Kinship and Identity in Queer Desi Millennial Fiction**

Jay N. Shelat, Ursinus College

Millennial fiction, a hotly contested subgenre of contemporary fiction, considers how sociopolitical concerns shape millennial life. For example, Ottessa Moshfegh's TikTok darling novel *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* depicts millennial life on the eve of 9/11 as rooted in social ennui, and Halle Butler's *A New Me* examines the role women play in post-2008 recession office politics. Scholarship about millennial fiction remains somewhat minimal as of yet, but extant discourse overwhelmingly focuses on white writers (especially Sally Rooney) and concerns itself with major historical moments, rarely extending beyond those contextual parameters. Put another way, while numerous conference panels and articles and tweets discuss the millennial novel's emphasis on watershed events such as 9/11 and the recession, few consider the more intimate relationships that make up millennial life. For instance, scholars have yet to mine this budding subgenre in relation to its examination of radical forms of kinship.

This paper markedly shifts the discussion about millennial fiction to emphasize how these sociopolitical events and concerns that determine the contemporary era in fact call attention to the need for queer forms of solidarity to ensure survival. In this paper, I examine how queer kinships appear in what I term *desi* millennial fiction, fiction by millennials who hail from South Asia and the diaspora. Looking specifically at Sarah Thankam Mathews' *All This Could Be Different*, I posit that the recent trend in contemporary literature urges for new forms of collectivity and kinship without erasing or jettisoning their inherent *desi* values and roots, namely those found in natal familial units. Instead, the book calls for a revision of those traditions and practices. Protagonist narrator Sneha struggles to conform to her parents' heteropatriarchal expectations of marriage, and she spends a majority of the novel quietly resisting these norms through her chosen family. Yet her *desi* identity grapples with her queerness, and the millennial protagonist longs to see the two sides of her identity meld. Unlike other millennial novels, which often conclude with destruction and depression, *All This Could Be Different* ends with a hopefulness that arises from Sneha's parents' eventual acceptance of her lesbian identity. This happy ending and acceptance, I ultimately argue, demonstrate a futurity in which biological and chosen family can harmoniously coexist, thereby forging new forms of intimacy. In imagining these newfound intimate relations, Mathews' novel lives up to its title to suggest that all this could indeed be different through wayward kinships. Millennial life, stifled by incessant terror and socioeconomic malaise, can become bearable through radical acts and thought—through liberatory revisions of traditional forms of togetherness.

**Joanmarie Bañez** is a literature PhD candidate at the University of California San Diego. She is from Atlanta, Georgia, where she completed her BA and MA in English literary studies at Georgia State University. Her research interests include 19th- and 20th-century multiethnic US literature, Asian American diaspora in the US South, queer kinship, and transracial adoption narratives.

**S. Moon Cassinelli** is Assistant Professor in English and women's and gender studies at Virginia Tech. He earned his PhD in English from University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He teaches classes in Asian American studies, Ethnic American literatures, and gender and women's studies. His research focuses on the Korean diaspora, transnational adoption studies, transnational feminism, and queer kinship.

**Al Evangelista** is a performer, choreographer, and educator. Evangelista's work focuses on community-engaged practices, queer performance, social justice, and Filipina/o/x-American diaspora. He also works in theatre, documentary-based work, and improvisatory collaboration. He is Assistant Professor in Dance and an affiliate faculty member in the Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies at Oberlin College and a faculty fellow in the Center for Communicating Science at Virginia Tech.

**Jay N. Shelat** is Assistant Professor of English at Ursinus College. He received his PhD at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, and his Master's and Bachelor's degrees at Georgia State University. He was the 2021-2022 recipient of the Mildred Kates Dissertation Fellowship, and his work has appeared in *TSL*, *Post45 Contemporaries*, *CEA Critic*, and elsewhere. Dr. Shelat's current book project, tentatively titled *Ordering the Chaos*, examines how the political ideologies that fuel 9/11 and the War on Terror affect familial and domestic dynamics.