

UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO SOCIAL DISRUPTIONS

BEFORE ANTI-AUTISM: COW MANIA AND THE VACCINATION DEBATES



TRAVIS CHI WING LAU

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 7 P.M. | SMITH RECITAL HALL | SILVER CENTER FOR THE ARTS

This talk will turn to the late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century debates over Edward Jenner's campaigns to nationalize vaccination in Britain. Well before Andrew Wakefield's retracted article in the *Lancet* claiming the MMR vaccine caused autism, opponents of Jenner's vaccination like Benjamin Moseley and William Rowley decried vaccination as a violent, dangerous procedure that would corrupt the vaccinated, especially children, by reducing them to a bovine state. Lau makes the case that much of the current anti-autism bent of contemporary anti-vaccination discourse draws its rhetoric and affective strategies from long-standing ableist anxieties surrounding "cow mania," a condition associated with the violation of species boundaries and with class tensions.



Travis Chi Wing Lau (he/him/his) is assistant professor of English at Kenyon College. His research and teaching focus on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British literature and culture, health humanities, and disability studies. Alongside his scholarship, Lau frequently writes for venues of public scholarship like *Synopsis: A Journal of Health Humanities*, *Public Books*, *Lapham's Quarterly*, and the *Los Angeles Review of Books*. His poetry has appeared in *Barren Magazine*, *Wordgathering*, *Glass*, *South Carolina Review*, *Foglifter*, and the *New Engagement*, as well as in two chapbooks, *The Bone Setter* (Damaged Goods Press, 2019) and *Paring* (Finishing Line Press, 2020). [travisclau.com]

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