

THE RENAISSANCE STUDIES PROGRAM PRESENTS
NEW APPROACHES to the **SENSES**
in the **RENAISSANCE**



TRANSATLANTIC TOUCHING
in the **EARLY MODERN WORLD**
A Lecture by Whitney Sperrazza

This talk will probe the curious intersections of touch and scale that facilitate the early English colonial project. In the early modern period, touch was increasingly understood as an epistemological tool—a means by and through which to know—and anatomists classified it as an immediate rather than mediated sense. How then to employ the epistemological immediacy and intimacy of touch across oceans and unfamiliar lands? To answer this question, this talk turns to the poetry of Andrew Marvell and John Donne, scaffolded by sixteenth and seventeenth century theories on skin, optics, and cosmography. With this interdisciplinary archive in hand, we will confront the destabilizing sense of scale constantly at work in colonial accounts—the scoping effect of micro and macro, near and far, graspable and intangible that infuses early modern English colonial texts. Extending critical work on colonial sites of contact, this talk situates poetry as a colonial technology particularly attuned to the complexities of immediacy and intimacy at a distance.

WHITNEY SPERRAZZA is Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Texas A&M University. Her work sits at the intersections of early modern literary studies, histories of science, book history, and intersectional feminist theory. She takes a highly interdisciplinary approach to both her research and teaching, always interested in the questions that form in disciplinary contact zones. Her forthcoming book, *Anatomical Forms* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2025), argues for poetry as a tool for scientific work, wielded by early modern women writers to explore and challenge rapid developments in anatomy and physiology. Through close formal analysis and original research into the hands-on techniques of early modern anatomy, the book challenges readers to rethink what counts as science and, in the process, brings into focus a feminist history of poetic form centered on material practice.

DH Coffee Hour, 3-4PM, Thursday, January 30, 2025
MAXWELL HALL, ROOM 122

Lecture, 4-6PM, Friday, January 31, 2025
GAYLE KARCH COOK CENTER AT MAXWELL HALL

The lecture will be followed by a roundtable of IU scholars, Q&A, and a reception. The event has received generous support from the College of Arts and Sciences, the Department of English, the Department of Gender Studies, and the Department of History and Philosophy of Science and Medicine.