

Monday

29 October 2012

7:30 pm

In English

Contemporary accounts in diaspora studies continue to contrast diaspora to the "center," insist on a moment of (forced or voluntary) dispersion and continued longing for "home," and the oppressiveness of the diasporic situation. In this lecture, Boyarin lays out a different notion of diaspora as a synchronic condition from which the conditions of its emergence have no significance. It is, moreover, a productive condition, not necessarily at all unwelcome to its participants. The Babylonian Talmud will provide the case study.

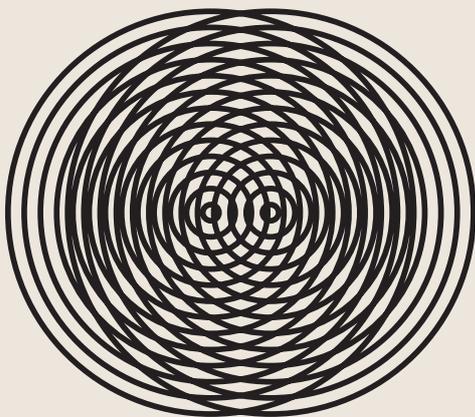
**Daniel Boyarin** is Taubman Professor of Talmudic Culture at UC Berkeley in the Departments of Near Eastern Studies and Rhetoric, and currently a fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin where the above topic is his subject for the year's research.

### **Constituting Wholes**

Wholes are said to be more than the sum of their parts. This 'more' contains both a promise and a threat. When different elements – disciplines, methods, cultures, individuals – form a whole, they not only join forces, but also generate effects of synergy and a surplus from which also the parts can benefit. Being part of a whole is a way to acquire meaning and to extend oneself beyond one's limited existence; and having a part in the whole is to have an enlarged agency. But wholes are also more powerful than the sum of their parts. Wholes constitute their parts, determining what is a part and what is apart, what has a part and what is deprived of agency. Becoming a part requires submission and although parts may not pre-exist the whole, there may still be something in the elements that exceeds being a part – even if only the possibility of being part of a different whole. While a desire for being whole or part of a whole seems all-too-natural, organic metaphors, which are often used to think part-whole relationships, have been criticized precisely for naturalizing relations of hierarchy and power. Yet, entirely abandoning the whole in favour of the part(icular) is also problematic. After the disenchantments of the postmodern post-cold-war period and in the face of global crises – be they financial, economic, political, or ecological – the critical need to include a holistic perspective is felt with renewed urgency, as is the concern that the situatedness of any such perspective and the multiple, incommensurable ways of constituting wholes may be forgotten.

The lecture is part of the **ICI Lecture Series Constituting Wholes**, which will explore the double, both active and passive, aspect of "Constituting Wholes" within the framework of the multi-disciplinary ICI Research Focus **Complementarity and Wholes Which Are Not One**.

An ICI Berlin Lecture in collaboration with the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin.



# Daniel Boyarin

## Decentering Diaspora

