

Josh Berson

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Anthropologist, maker of experimental fictions. The still point at the center of my thinking is the relationship between skill and value — how our habits, *inter alia*, of listening, breathing, sitting, and eating inform what matters and conversely.

Edition: May 2025

Education

- 2009 PhD, History and Sociology of Science, University of Pennsylvania
- 1998–9 Postgraduate Researcher, Oxford University Computing Lab
- 1997 AB, Built Environment Studies, Harvard College

Key Roles

- Since 2019 Principal, independent advisory practice
- 2023–4 Fellow, Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin
- 2021–3 Senior Advisor, Institute for the Future, Palo Alto
- 2020–2 Visiting Researcher, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science
- 2020–1 Chief Scientist, Candle (information credibility startup)
- 2018–9 Inaugural USC Dornsife Berggruen Fellow in the Transformations of the Human, Berggruen Institute, Los Angeles
- 2014–6 Director, Remote Sensing of Experience, Hubbub (Wellcome Hub Award)
- 2013–7 Advisor, LUST (design studio), The Hague
- 2013–7 Visiting Researcher, Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences
- 2012–3 Carson Fellow, Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, Munich
- 2010–2 Postdoctoral Fellow, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science
- 2009–10 Postdoctoral Fellow, Institute for the Human Sciences, Vienna
- 2008–9 Lecturer, Health and Societies, University of Pennsylvania
- 2003–9 PhD student, University of Pennsylvania

Books

- 2021 *The Human Scaffold: How Not to Design Your Way out of a Climate Crisis*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- 2019 *The Meat Question: Animals, Humans, and the Deep History of Food*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title, 2020

- 2015 *Computable Bodies: Instrumented Life and the Human Somatic Niche*. London: Bloomsbury.

AAP PROSE Award, Language and Linguistics, 2016

Out for Sale

Representation: Salma Begum, Greyhound Literary, London

n.d. *Waking Paralysis* (novel)

n.d. *The Cost of Erasure* (novel)

Select Scholarly Essays, Research Reports, and Reviews

- 2025 Lost Selves. *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 83/84, to appear.
- 2024 The Signaling Game. *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 81/82: 257–264.
- 2020 Suparna Choudhury and Josh Berson. Liminal Brains in Uncertain Futures. In Laurence Kirmayer et al, ed, *Culture, Mind, and Brain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 2020 Artificial Intelligence. In James Stanlaw et al, ed, *International Encyclopedia of Linguistic Anthropology*. Oxford: Wiley.
- 2019 Review of Paul Kockelman, *The Art of Interpretation in the Age of Computation*. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 29(1): 138–140.
- 2016 Melissa Ellamil, Josh Berson, et al. Musical Correlates of Group Synchrony in a Real-World Club Environment. *PLoS ONE* 11: e0164783.
- 2016 Melissa Ellamil, Josh Berson, and Daniel Margulies. Influences on and Measures of Unintentional Group Synchrony. *Frontiers in Psychology* 7: 1744.
- 2014 The Dialectal Tribe and the Doctrine of Continuity. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56(2): 381–418.

Select Public Writing

- 2025 On Meaning. *Pace Layers* 002, to appear.
- 2023 Letter to Joan Didion from a Peripheral Character (fiction). *Jane* 14: 24–27.
- 2022 Review of Johanna Drucker, *Inventing the Alphabet*. アイデア / IDEA 398. idea-mag.com/en/idea_magazine/idea398/
- 2022 Deferred Maintenance. 032c, Feb 21. 032c.com/magazine/an-anthropologist-discovers-stuff-josh-berson-deferred-maintenance
- 2021 Cities that Grow Themselves. *Aeon*, Nov 9. aeon.co/essays/should-we-rein-cities-in-or-embrace-their-biomorphic-growth
- 2016 Sound and Pain. *Technosphere* (Haus der Kulturen der Welt), Nov 16. technosphere-magazine.hkw.de/p/Sound-and-Pain-cNunTfEa1zYsN4UKa4scx2

Select Scholarly Presentations and Appearances

- Mar 2024 What Is Workwear? (target paper)
Working Group on Norms, Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin
- Oct 2023 Skin Envelope (invited)
Fellows Colloquium, Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin
- Jun 2021 *The Human Scaffold* (book presentation)
Max Planck Institute for the History of Science
- May 2019 Human Enhancement (panel)
Thomas Mann House and UCLA, Los Angeles
- May 2019 Artificial Intelligence (target paper)
Fellows Colloquium, Berggruen Institute, Los Angeles
- Dec 2017 Pattern Spaces for Sound (invited)
Bren School of Information and Computer Sciences, University of California, Irvine
- May 2016 Remote Sensing of Mood (private briefing for Trust staff)
Wellcome Trust, London
- Dec 2015 Anthropogenic Space for Moving Bodies (keynote)
Design and the Anthropocene (conference)
University of California, Irvine
- May 2015 Charismatic Substances (workshop; coorganizer, with Stefanie Gänger)
University of Cologne
- Meat: Charisma and Precarity (presented at the above)

Select Public Appearances, Interviews, Installations, and Media

- Sep 2022 Listening with Intention (invited facilitator)
Bang & Olufsen, Copenhagen
- Jan 2022 Stuff (interview)
The Philosopher's Zone (ABC)
abc.net.au/listen/programs/philosopherszone/stuff/13732062
Looking Back to Look Forwards (interview)
Counterpoint (ABC)
abc.net.au/listen/programs/counterpoint/31-01-22/13731732
- Oct 2021 Moving Forward When Things Fall Apart (interview)
At a Distance (podcast)
at-a-distance.simplecast.com/episodes/josh-berson-on-moving-forward-together-when-things-fall-apart-atuA4r7M
- Aug 2021 The Politics of Breathing — in conversation with Elizabeth Chin (livestream)
Berggruen Institute
The Problems of Stuff — in conversation with Vaughn Tan (livestream)
Berggruen Institute
- Jun 2021 Gillian Tett, *Financial Times*, Jun 25
ft.com/content/5ee064db-3caf-485b-a170-8970f81a1e6f
- Dec 2019 *The Meat Question* (in conversation with Ben Wurgaft)
MIT Press bookstore, Cambridge, Massachusetts
- Oct 2019 *The Meat Question* / *Meat Planet* Publication Event (convener)
Hosted by Gemic (consultancy), New York
- Mar 2019 The Transformations of the Human (Pecha Kucha-style)
Berggruen Institute
Hosted by Creative Artists Agency, Los Angeles
The Transformations of the Human (panel)
USC Michelson Center for Convergent Biosciences
University of Southern California, Los Angeles
- Nov 2017 Controlled Combustion
A Million Random Digits (vernissage for the exhibition *Technosphere*)
Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin
- Sep 2017 Manifold: 小学校と火鉢 (audio installation)
Shiro Oni Studio, Onishi, Gunma
- Oct–Dec 2016 Participatory Experience Sampling (audio installation)
Mile End Art Pavilion, London
- Dec 2013 Registers of the Animate (closing talk)
Vernissage for *Type/Dynamics*
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

Select Service

- 2024–5 Juror and Guest Critic (Arts and Sciences), Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart
- Since 2020 Editorial Board, *American Anthropologist*

Select References

Elizabeth Chin · Editor-in-Chief, *American Anthropologist*
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Nils Gilman · President, Berggruen Institute
ngilman@berggruen.org

Geof Bowker · Chancellor's Professor Emeritus, University of California, Irvine
gbowker@uci.edu