

Faculty Commons Graduate Student Research Conference

June 9, 2021

Presentation Abstracts

“Narratives for Healing and Justice” Panel

Evan Duncan, English (Performing Difference)

‘You’re Not Ready to Be—’: Lorraine Hansberry and Les Blancs

Abstract: This essay explores the dynamic between Hansberry’s status as a monumental or mythic black political figure, the role of her former husband and collaborator, Robert Nemiroff, in our access to her archive, and the idea of a “visionary” Lorraine that drives contemporary literature on her life and work. Through a focus on her posthumously produced play, *Les Blancs*, I highlight a critique of cis-heteronormativity that is played out through the character, Eric, who I see as central to a discussion of the anti-colonial discourse that is dramatized in the play. Eric is considered by his brothers to be unfit for manhood, and his particular inhabitation of gender and sexuality are seen as evidence of this; however, Eric is the only brother of the three who is able to inhabit a revolutionary position in relation to the colonial situation. While his presence is acknowledged in the critical literature about the play, his implications for the meaning of the play as a whole are often considered tangential. Imani Perry likens Eric to James Baldwin and makes the argument that the elaboration of Eric’s character features “thinly veiled references to Jimmy’s struggles, as is his beautiful moral imagination” (*Looking for Lorraine* 143). I further develop this observation by analyzing the play in a way that centers Eric. At stake in Hansberry’s allusions to Baldwin in *Les Blancs* is a deeper understanding of a black and queer ethics of care in Hansberry’s work that is only made legible through attention to this ostensibly minor character.

Rosalia Lerner, Dance (Performing Difference)

When “Get Well Soon!” is Not an Option: Sick-bodied Performance as an Alternative Ontology in Johanna Hedva’s “Sick Witch”

Abstract: As someone who has a chronic disease, I have long wondered what people mean when they say, “Get well soon!” Without health as the endpoint, chronically sick bodies enact an alternative ontology, one whose temporality creates difficult relationships with the pace of neoliberal wellness and productivity. Closely examining the performance of “Sick Witch” by chronically ill, body-based artist Johanna Hedva, I explore how the crisis of sickness demands a reframing of wellness when one cannot get themselves “well.” As such, I ask what place do sick individuals have in an ontology predicated upon wellness? And what alternative ontologies does chronic sickness enact, especially in self-referential performances such as Hedva’s? Filmed in a living room for a private audience, Hedva grunts, gags, seizes, and screams their way through a list of advice to get well, which vary from “Have you tried yoga?” to “Ahh! but you’re too young to be sick!” Using Donna Haraway’s term “information malfunction” to illustrate the bodily noncompliance that frames of the immune system in relation to neoliberal capitalism, I focus on the physicality of vomiting in

Hedva's performance. Next, thinking with Walter Benjamin's notion of catastrophe, I explore how Hedva's performance reframes the crisis of sickness as ongoing rather than a temporary bodily state. Ultimately, I argue that "Sick Witch," which frames sick bodies as political, undoes temporary relationships to crisis, and takes seriously the vulnerable state of sick bodies, to create systems of care through radical interdependence.

Nancy Naranjo Garcia, Hispanic Studies (Latinx and Latin American Studies)

Critical soundscapes in Contemporary Filmmaking by women in Mexico

Abstract: The audibility of social struggle in Mexico constitutes the soundscapes of the film *Los reyes del pueblo que no existe* (2015), directed by Betzabé García, and *Tempestad* (2016), directed by Tatiana Huezo Sánchez. Conversations between the nonprofessional actors in these documentaries outline the influence of violence and corruption on the stories they tell. The effect of State hegemony on marginalized individuals meets resistance in the critical dialogue in the films. In *Los reyes* few families have remained in a town that has been flooded for the construction of a dam. Gun violence linked to the selling of illegal drugs to the United States further causes fear in the community. The disappearing of a daughter and a case of kidnapping establish narratives that call attention to problems regarding impunity in *Tempestad*. García and Huezo Sánchez films bring injustice felt by women to the screen and soundwaves to call out the shortcomings of Mexican institutions. Diegetic sound and voiceover serve as main points for my argument. The audio in the films suggest strategies to emphasize language sounded out by women. Juan A. Suárez indicates that queer life in film is largely represented through visibility, not audibility. I argue the approach by Suárez emphasizes filmic language that empowers queer communities. This statement points to arguments for a new focus on the experience of identifying as a woman in Mexico. I underline the supportive relationship between women's studies and queer studies in contemporary film analysis.