

I M A

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SPECULATION

IN THE AMERICAS

O T H

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I S E

Imagining Otherwise: Speculation in the Americas

2022-2023



A University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
Humanities Research Institute
Interseminars Project

with contributions by

Kofi Bazzell-Smith, D. Nicole Campbell, Josue David
Cisneros, Daniela Morales Fredes, Adanya Gilmore,
Patrick Earl Hammie, Beatriz Jiménez, Jorge Lucero,
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Special thanks to our home units at the University of Illinois: Department of Communication, School of Art & Design, Urban and Regional Planning, Department of Dance, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Department of English, Department of Educational Psychology, and Department of Theatre.

Shout out to the Interseminars Steering Committee, Jenny Davis, Erik S. McDuffie, Anke Pinkert, Sandra Ruiz, and Siobhan Sommerville; The Humanities Research Institute's Antoinette Burton, Nancy Castro, Stephanie Uebelhoer, Olivia Kiser, Jenna Ziemann, Erin Ciciora, Bridget Sullivan, Alaina Pincus, and Lydia Allen; and our Interseminars' visiting scholars and artists Deke Weaver, Angela Aguayo, Lin Hixson, Matthew Goulish, Eve Ewing, Stacey Robinson, Amber Johnson, Macarena Gómez-Barris, David Shrobe, Carolyn Fornoff, Natalie Loveless, and Zachary Nicol.



The original Interseminars Working Group* (aka the speculators!) were Antoinette Burton, Gabriel Solis, Siobhan Somerville, Mike Atienza, Ruth Nicole Brown, Jenny Davis, Cara Finnegan, Daniel Gilbert, Tara Hatfield, Dan Shao, Nora Stoppino, Terri Weissman, Debora Tienou, and Sean Ettinger.

**This group spent the 2018-19 academic year researching and designing the Interseminars project and writing a proposal to the Mellon Foundation.*

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Imagining Otherwise: Speculation in the Americas is the first Interseminars project, developed by J. David Cisneros, Carolyn Fornoff and Patrick Earl Hammie. Referencing examples from TV's "Lovecraft Country" to recent anti-racist activist efforts, the theme centers speculation as a method for looking differently at the world—both to critically assess its status quo and to reimagine how it could be different. Studying speculative forms in art and activism, they propose, can help guide scholarly and creative inquiry about crises ranging from climate change to systemic violence and immigration policy. The project's work was foregrounded in the knowledge and experiences of historically marginalized communities throughout the Americas, exploring how speculation has been and can be used to reframe the past, present and future.

Interseminars Fellows, 2022-23

Kofi Bazzell-Smith, School of Art & Design

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Daniela Morales Fredes, Department of Urbana & Regional Planning

Adanya Gilmore, Department of Dance

Beatriz Jiménez, Department of Spanish & Portuguese

Ramón E. Martínez (Ray), Department of Spanish & Portuguese

Emerson Parker Pehl, Department of English

María B. Serrano-Abreu, Department of Educational Psychology

Toyosi Tejumade-Morgan, Department of Theatre

Faculty Coveners

J. David Cisneros, Department of Communication

Patrick Earl Hammie, School of Art & Design

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Contributor Bios

Kofi Bazzell-Smith is an artist, educator, and professional boxer, currently pursuing an MFA in New Media at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, specializes in Japanese manga, and creates works in English and Japanese. He actively travels to teach about manga, Japanese language, and cultural exchange, aiming to broaden the horizons of art education, challenging its current parochial focus on predominantly Western-European art forms, and fostering a more diverse and inclusive artistic landscape.



D. Nicole Campbell is a PhD student in the department of communication. She is a Texas native, who received her B.A. in English from the University of North Texas (2019) and M.A. in Communication from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (2021). As a scholar of rhetoric and public address, her research investigates U.S. prison discourses, including the prison abolition movement.



Josue David Cisneros, an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication, and affiliate faculty in Latina/o Studies and the Unit for Criticism, specializes in social movement communication and activist rhetorics, especially as they pertain to struggles for racial justice and immigrant rights. His focus on activist communication and social movement culture draws attention to the explicitly political and contestatory role of speculative and futurist work as a part of struggles for policy change and broader social transformation.



Daniela Morales Fredes is a doctoral student from the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. She holds a BA in Law from the University of Chile and a Minor in Philosophy and Aesthetics from the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. She has more than ten years of experience working in Chilean public institutions such as the National Monuments Council and the Ministry of Culture, Arts, and Heritage and as a private practitioner supporting grassroots



organizations and local communities. Her main areas of interest are cultural heritage, human rights, and environmental planning.



Adanya Gilmore (they/her) is a movement-based artist and performer. Born and raised partially in D.C., and partially in the Midwest, they consider themselves always in transit or a drifter.

The beginning of her career and her love for dance was cultivated by just a few of her teachers Sandra Fortune-Green, Devi C. Ramey, and Brandye Lee at the Jones-Haywood Dance School. She graduated cum laude from Beloit College in 2021 with a BA in Theatre and Dance. Now as an MFA candidate and teaching assistant at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, her current work focuses on the gender experiences of Black people, particularly Black femmes, and their hopes, dreams, and creativity. She is a recipient of the Humanities Research Institute's Inaugural Interseminars Fellowship. As a Fellow and onward, she hopes to integrate her work into larger community spaces and make dances that give her joy.



Patrick Earl Hammie is an interdisciplinary visual artist, and Associate Professor and Chair of Studio Art in the School of Art & Design.

Hammie specializes in portraiture, storytelling, and the body in visual culture. He examines personal and shared Black experiences, systems of knowledge production, and the politics of representation as a visual artist. His practice includes oil painting, printmaking, sculpture, installation, illustration, and curation. He engages these topics through representation, abstraction, pastiche, and narrative, using techniques informed by critical theory and postcolonialism. As a Blerd (a Black nerd), he draws upon history, mythologies, music, and speculative fiction.



Beatriz Jiménez (she/ella), born and raised in Chicago, is a PhD Mexican American student in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. She received her



Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Spanish at Knox College and then continued her graduate studies in Spanish Literatures and Cultures at the University of

Illinois. She received her Master's in 2021 and went on to pursue a PhD in the same field. Her current research interests are in Mexican and Latinx cinema and the representations of marginalized communities.



Jorge Lucero is an artist born, raised and mostly educated in Chicago. Two recent bookworks are *Teacher as Artist-in-Residence: The Most Radical Form of Expression to Ever Exist* (with the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts), and *What Happens at the Intersection of Conceptual Art and Teaching?* co-edited with Catalina Hernández-Cabal (through the Amsterdam University of the Arts). He received his degrees from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and Penn State University. Lucero was named the Higher Education Art Educator of the Year by the National Art Education Association in 2023. He currently serves as Associate Professor in the School of Art & Design and as Associate Dean for Research in the College of Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

Ramón E. Martínez (Ray) Originally from the island of Puerto Rico. Holds a bachelor's degree in Theater & Literature from the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus, a master's in creative writing in Spanish from University of Sacred Heart of Puerto Rico and in Spanish Literature and Linguistics from the Ohio University, Athens Campus. Recently pursuing a Ph.D. in Spanish Literature and Culture at the University of Illinois, Urbana- Champaign. Ramón considers himself an eclectic researcher and curious mind on a variety topic, going from the socio-political situation of Puerto Rico as a colony to gender and performance. His interest of research it's focused on XVI-XVII centuries in Spain and the New World, specifically on the performance of women dressed as men in Spain and the New World. He enjoys long walks on the beach, fry chicken and big joys.



Emerson Parker Pehl (Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma) (they/ them) is a PhD student in literary studies through the department of English at the University of Illinois. They earned their

Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Gender Studies from Mount Holyoke College, Master of Arts in Gender/Cultural Studies from Simmons College, and a dual MSW/MEd from Widener University in sex therapy. Their current cultural studies scholarship primarily focuses on Indigenous and Indigiqueer critiques of U.S. settler coloniality/ colonialism and its logics. Their work has appeared in *Transmotion*, *Gender Forum*, *Body Studies Journal*, *Transgender Health*, and (soon, in 2024,) *Transgender Studies Quarterly*. Emerson is also a clinical sexologist and is a licensed social worker (LSW) in the state of Illinois.



María B. Serrano-Abreu, born and raised in Puerto Rican is a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Psychology at the College of Education at UIUC. She earned her master's degree in Educational Research and Evaluation from the University of Puerto Rico at Rio Piedras campus. Currently, she collaborates in research projects that aim to explore and implement racial equity as a core value in elemental education, STEM pathways and education, and program evaluation in the US. Her research interests focus on

the closure of public schools in Puerto Rico as neoliberal reforms and territorial displacement policies. In addition, she is interested in exploring creative research, arts-based research, and visual methodologies. As a headwrap artist, she has collaborated with grassroots efforts mostly in Puerto Rico, with the aim of promoting racial awareness, Black and Afro-Caribbean racial affirmation, and cultural resistance.



Toyosi Tejumade-Morgan is a Ph.D. student and GTA at the Department of Theatre Arts, UIUC. Toyosi studied and taught theatre arts at the University of Lagos, Nigeria. She specializes in Directing, Theatre Historiography, Documentary Theatre, and Performance Studies. Toyosi's background in Journalism heavily informs her academic pursuits and interests around gender-based violence and the use of tactic media. Her works and publications include *Banking Hall of Gomorrah, Trucks or Driver, Who is Guilty? I Won't Mind My Business, Black Hair, and Casting Trends in Nigerian Theatre*. 2019 Toyosi founded "Theatre Maniacs" and adopts a mix of African Total Theatre with Western aesthetics for community advocacy.





Preface

Antoinette Burton
Director
Humanities Research Institute

Dear Readers,

What these overflowing pages hold is a kind of testimonio: evidence, if any were needed, of the kinds of collective labor required, desired, by those of us who want to realize different worlds. This Interseminars cohort – which comprises the fellows and conveners and the various audiences they have drawn into their work – offers a myriad of perspectives on what they have brought to fruition after eighteen months of imagining otherwise through speculative practices which take the Americas as their inspiration and their canvas.

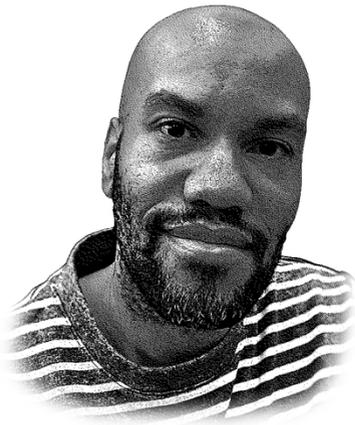
Of all the possibilities speculation offers, its root in the Latin “specula,” or mirror, is the one that strikes me as particularly generative from where I sit as the director of the Humanities Research Institute, the host for the Mellon Foundation grant that funds this project and the home of this first Interseminars experiment. And of course, in Spanish espejo (mirror) is also connection to especulación (speculation). I’ve watched faculty and students hold up a mirror, whether in play or critique or anguish or joy or witness, to the university complex,

to their fields and departments, to each other and, ultimately, to those of us who've been lucky enough to be in their company since the summer of 2022.

That mirror has been polished and broken many times over, its pieces composing and recomposing the vision of interdisciplinary thinking, knowing, and doing that has emerged in and through this unique collaboratory. It's been a privilege to see glimpses of this work. Yet while much of it has happened in public spaces, some of it has taken place off-center, in the summer intensives and the yearlong course, and in less formal spaces well beyond the reach of syllabi and other forms of designing and testing and experiencing.

What follows, then, is a powerful but partial archive of the speculative inventiveness growing up out of the loamy subsoil this collective has been immersed in. With admiration for all the reflections they have shared, and in eager anticipation of all those desiderata yet to materialize from the depths they've surfaced for us here....

Yours,
Antoinette



Thoughts on interdisciplinarity, speculation, and the reimagining of graduate education

J. David Cisneros, Department of Communication
Patrick Earl Hammie, School of Art & Design
Jorge Lucero, School of Art & Design

The Interseminars *Imagining Otherwise* experience was an eighteen-month collaboration across disciplines and difference that took place between 2022 and 2023. The project was sponsored and administered by the industrious and hyper-supportive crew in the Humanities Research Institute at the University of Illinois, and funded by the Mellon Foundation. Immediately the project went beyond the resource-affordances of institutional space, time, money, and the charge to connect across areas of study through our theme “Speculation in the Americas.” As a learning cohort, we decided early to see ourselves—both conveners (faculty) and fellows (graduate students)—as mutual contributors, co-creators, if you will. Of course, that never means that every person brings the same thing to the table; rather it is an understanding that *everything* anyone brings is equally received as material for inquiry and expression. We started from the assumption that we all had some expertise and some gaps in knowledge and that these dynamic differences in the “room” would become a chance to mutually rethink our scholarly approaches, pedagogies, and creative works. We expected the time together to be both challenging and revealing in educative ways and that something new—albeit indeterminate—would come from it.

We can now confirm that this happened, even though we do not see the culminating symposium held in September of 2023 and this publication of the same year as “the end”. It is a portal where we have been able to practice patience, generosity—even—some faith

in the process, to see emerge trust, persistence, attunement, and an embracing of the fragments, the seedlings, the first findings of a lifelong process, which we know will reverberate throughout multiple scholarly/creative/educational endeavors for the near future.

How do we know this?

Our imagination about what interdisciplinarity and collaboration could mean, and about the imperatives and possibilities of collaborative interdisciplinarity in the humanities, has been expanded—maybe even exploded! We—the conveners—came into this time together as experienced advocates of interdisciplinary humanities work, with a sense of what the jamming and overlapping of our fields could and should do: it was about finding connections across our disciplinary traditions and areas of expertise—a process of translation and cooperation for collective benefit. But this Interseminars project proved to be radically different, even “alien” to our past experiences in interdisciplinarity. Rather than finding connections across our traditional disciplines, we broke these apart into pieces, purposefully finding ways that they fit together smoothly, incongruously, or uncannily. We’ve held loosely the idea of “disciplines” to talk instead about theory, methodology, methods, tools, concepts, histories, audience, institutions, and purposes. It is new—a different model of interdisciplinary collaboration in the humanities—and perhaps even new imaginings of what our disciplines and what the academy could be.

In the last eighteen months—both in and out of the classroom—we aimed to honor and share what each collaborator brought to the group, but in this process, we were always moving the way we do things and constantly exploring new possibilities. Week in and week out we experimented and deliberately moved across registers – movement and performance exercises, readings, drawings, dialogues and debates, data analysis, making collages, field trips, curricular experiments, event planning and guest hosting, exhibitions, and manuscript preparation. We worked together to explore and play with and across these elements to find out what is profoundly important about our disciplinary traditions and what we want our work to become in this expanded rethinking of what graduate education could be in the academy. We pursued this even though sometimes it came with an unsettled feeling and/or disoriented—precarity—like the whole experience was balancing on a knife’s edge. Still, everyone was exceedingly adventurous. Whenever the anxiety crept up in any one of us, we reached out; sometimes to hold hands and be encouraged by each other, but many other times to accept the nudge—or even push—of a colleague to leap into our own surprising daring.

In the end, we felt that the risk was interwoven with care, humility, grace, and a willingness to fail, and this kept us working together and committed to each other and to what we have been making together (much of which is hinted to in this book). In other words, the

Interseminar, purposefully horizontalized—yet admittedly fragile—experience was first and foremost a deeply humane collaboration in teaching/learning—one that honors each of us as scholars and humans but also gave us the opportunity to enact the institution as a place where people do life together: a forum for kinship, deliberation, democracy, love, and the permission to keep asking “what if?” as a primary mode of robust scholarly practice.

We also asked, “*what if* our institutional work mattered beyond the matriculation of schooling?”

At the risk of this potentially being a flattening statement, we would like to highlight the fact that uniformly—across the twelve of us—there has been a persistent urgency for our work (whatever it may be) within the academy, to matter in the world. For the work to have a significant social impact, if not in actual scale, in profundity across geography and time. No one in the group is making and thinking, writing and reporting, disconnected from the civic realm. This is one of the reasons why the collaboration went has been so generative. Of course, we had disagreements—after all one of the key positives of our coming together was our differences—but no matter our protruding intersectionalities (in form and content), we recognized our participation in the group as a public move that fused through our “individual” work away from the group, back into the group. It seems minor, but this collegiality and horizontality between the twelve participants became one of the pillars of everything we

have done. It has allowed us to be all the things we are alluding to in this introduction, but which you will discover through the next three hundred plus pages, as experimental, playful (in the most serious way possible), encouraging of one another, patient and yielding, and most importantly, a never-ending journey always at the expectative.

We are always expecting.

Expecting to see what else. Expecting to see what's up. Expecting to hear others or include more of each other, or—even—to hear/see/uncover another version of oneself. As “the academy,” we entered this process wide-eyed, wanting to see how much the institution would bend and fold. How much could we test its pliability for our own lines of inquiry? This book is a paused point, a moment in time where we have gathered many of the frayed threads we started to pull on over the last eighteen months and some of which we began to braid together. We are presenting these threads here incomplete for two reasons. One, so you can take them, reconfigure them, and make new iterations of them. We are also putting them here so that we can come back to them! We want to return to this collection next year or decades from now, and we want to find newness in this volume which at the moment of its publication was a “culmination,” but which we all accept is merely a bracket, a collection, a time-capsule of speculations, unanswered and sometimes unanswerable questions, and therefore so many possibilities.

For us three, the experience was nothing short of life changing. We are indebted to our friends and colleagues in the Humanities Research Institute, particularly those who made the Interseminars possible, those who helped to select our theme/project, and those who helped us execute it! We are also thankful to our home units, particularly our unit executive officers and Deans who facilitated our participation in this year and a half long project. In the end, our gratitude and affection is strongest for the nine spectacular Interseminar Fellows who are the breath of this whole endeavor: Kofi, Daniela, Maria, Ray, Emerson, Nicole, Adanya, Toyosi, and Beatriz. Can we tell the entire story of how you have been our main teachers since our very first summer intensive in the early summer of 2022? We cannot. What we will do then is to always recount the stories, each time remembering further details of how we came alongside each other to make a work together, a work that we know is being made in every stop each one of us makes from here forward.



Defining Speculation: Working Definitions

Each member of our cohort offers a “working definition” of what speculation could mean, how we thought about it, or how it could be used.

A.

Knowing and living in the future and deciding to create from a place rooted in futurity and unknown as a method for survival, innovation or abolition. Speculation does not have to result in the creation of something but is a method that can lead to creation

B.

A creative process, that open space for new theoretical developments, but in an inapprehensible way (hard to pin down, ephemeral). To be speculative is to have the ability to play the game of mirrors: it is not a utopia, is a different self-reflection.

C.

The provocation of thinking, space/place-making, and/or otherworld building (ephemeral otherwise) that diverges from what is seemingly “apparently evident¹” of “the”/ (read, this) past, present, and future.

D.

Creating from nothing/something/ or emptiness.-
Change directions or perspectives to make things
accessible for everyone.-Transform reality into an
alternate reality imagining the possibility of becoming
real.

E.

Imagining beyond real and perceived barriers and thinking through ideas by invoking different perspectives (medium, method, methodology, field) leading to innovation, which ultimately leads to developing new knowledge or technology.

F.

A mechanism that allows us to imagine what is outside the norm. It is a process of thinking of what has not occurred yet and how we can imagine a more inclusive space.

G.

Speculation is a tool or process of imagining that which is beyond the real or that which you cannot know; it relies on imagination and involves risk

H.

Speculation. Practice of thinking that invites the intuition to guide the design, shape, and manifestation of worlds that exist in the realm of the probable and that are generated in response to social urgencies without being a direct product of the conditions or circumstances that shape these urgencies.

I.

Speculation is a critical lens from which to probe socioeconomics, race, and retribution, and highlight how diverse audiences differently access and engage culturally distant or frightening subjects.

J.

Speculation is the rhetoric and practice of shaping a future. It is the re-imagining of what is into what it could or should be. Speculation is about the “what if” moment. Examples of speculation: playing the lottery, science fiction, activist art

K.

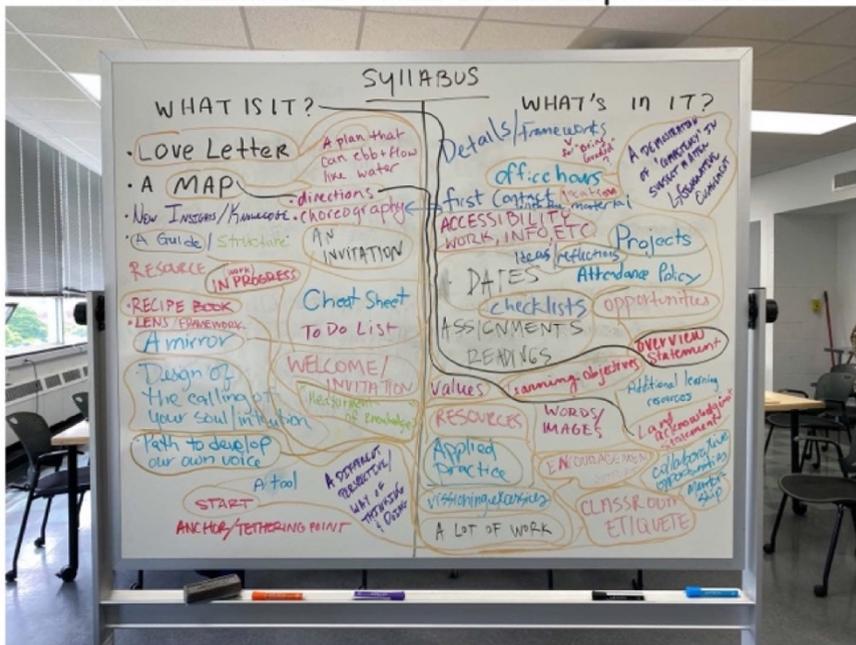
Speculation is an elastic permission to make pairings. What happens if I take this and put it next to that? The pairing(s) and me (or you) become a new (some)thing. We take it or leave it; and sometimes we come back to it, but even when we come back to it, it's now something else (because all the parts are not what they once were).

L.

Speculation is a radical intervention—an alternative approach to creating new habits, beliefs, and actions. It is an experiment for a better society.

Fall Syllabus

INTERSEMINARS FALL COURSE | FALL 2022



INTERDISCIPLINARY METHODS | SYLLABUS

Class times:

Wednesdays, 3 to 5:50 pm, with additional times in weeks 9 and 15

Location:

Siebel Center for Design, Room 0060

Instructors:

Josue David Cisneros, Associate Professor, Department of Communication

jdcisnrns@illinois.edu

Patrick E. Hammie, Associate Professor and Chair of Studio Arts

phammie@illinois.edu

Jorge Lucero, Associate Professor and Chair of Art Education

jlucero@illinois.edu

Course Description:

This class will introduce Interseminars fellows to interdisciplinary methods and practices in the arts and humanities. Students will learn about the history of interdisciplinarity, discuss the potentials and pitfalls of interdisciplinary work, and put interdisciplinarity into practice. Much of this work will be done horizontally with fellows contributing to the emergent curriculum alongside the leading faculty; and every aspect of weekly meetings remaining tentative, depending on the needs and contributions of the nine fellows and three faculty members. Renowned interdisciplinary scholars will be invited to intimately engage and expand our cohort's lines of inquiry and proposals. This course is connected to the Spring semester Interseminar's course on Speculation, so there will be overlap and even co-construction of the plans for the Spring during this semester.

Learning Outcomes:

Understand the history of interdisciplinary work in the arts and humanities and why interdisciplinarity is important at this moment.

Critically evaluate and interpret the strengths and weaknesses of interdisciplinary work.

Explore or play with multiple interdisciplinary methods and practices.

Engage with texts and employ various forms of disciplinary inquiry to expand approaches.

Articulate one's practice and aspirations within the framework of interdisciplinarity.

Produce an interdisciplinary project.

Build a cohort of inquiry around interdisciplinary method and thought.

Course Materials:

All course materials will be available in our collaborative Box.com folder [found here](#), or they will be distributed ahead of time.

Asynchronous discussion and collaboration will take place through our Slack chat server, [available here](#). You can use Slack to discuss class materials, ask questions, schedule meetings with the instructors, collaborate, and share resources.

There will be a few required events outside of class time, including the two guest speakers, as well as several optional opportunities for out-of-class engagement. These will be announced in class, on Slack, and through the Imagining Otherwise Google Calendar, which you can subscribe to [with this link](#).

All assignments will be turned in via Box.com or in class.



Assignments

Besides studying the texts and artworks connected to this semester's visitors, we will make a deep dive into some of the materials that the cohort suggested during the summer intensive. The instructors will also contribute various texts to situate some of the larger questions around interdisciplinarity and its place in humanities practice. We have also taken ideas about expertise sharing and ways to thread the Fellows interests into each other's practice, based on the planning work we did during the intensive. Some of these assignments are found in the course schedule, while others will be discussed and added accordingly, where appropriate, throughout the semester.

A sample of what we will do together this semester:

Peer-to-peer teaching. Each fellow will lead the class for fifteen-minutes to teach us some specific skill that they use in their research/practice. Fellows should not only be teaching us how to do this specific practice but, in doing so, teach us about the methodological approach of their discipline.

Fellow-led “readings” on “Interdisciplinarity as speculative practice”. Fellows in groups of three will curate and manage one day of class, selecting materials for engagement and guiding class discussion and participation, all under a specific theme of their choice.

Spring semester syllabus construction. Groups of three fellows will work together throughout the semester to construct a (part of a) draft Spring 23 “Speculation” syllabus and present these at the end of the term. These will collectively become the basis of the spring course.

“Uncanny juxtaposition” interdisciplinary project. Fellows will organize into groups of three and work together in a collaborative experiment in interdisciplinary making. These projects will be built around an uncanny juxtaposition, in other words, bringing together two or more very different objects/ideas/traditions into conversation to create unexpected realizations and resonances.

Accommodations

To obtain disability-related academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities should contact the course instructor and the Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) as soon as possible. To contact DRES, you may visit 1207 S. Oak St., Champaign, call (217) 333-4603, e-mail disability@illinois.edu or go to the [DRES website](#)

Please schedule a private meeting with the course instructors to discuss your accessibility needs and requirements. Also let us know if your accessibility needs change over the course of the semester so we can work to meet those. If you have challenges that you feel may affect your performance in this course, such as lack of stable housing, food, security, or technology, please contact us as soon as you can, and contact the **Student Assistance Center (SAC)** in the Office of the Dean of Students for support and referrals to campus and/or community resources. <https://odos.illinois.edu/community-of-care/student-assistance-center/> For mental health emergencies, you can call 911 or contact the Counseling Center. You can find more Student Support Services here <https://studentaffairs.illinois.edu/node/11962>.

All students have a right to reasonable accommodations for their religious observances, practices, and beliefs. If you have a particular religious observance that affects your class work, let us know as soon as possible, before the date in question if possible.



(Tentative) Schedule

Week and Meeting Date	What is happening? The themes, text, or guest we will focus on this week	What is due? What you should have read, watched, studied, or done prior to this class meeting	Additional Notes. Unusual conditions or expectations for a given week, visitor, or project.
Week 1, August 24	Interdisciplinarity and the Humanities & Arts	Read: Condee, W. (2016), <i>The Interdisciplinary Turn in the Arts and Humanities</i> . Skim (in class): Chettiparamb, A. (2007),	

		Interdisciplinarity: A Literature Review	
Week 2, August 31	What is research? Paradigms, epistemologies, methods, methodologies ...	Have read: Abdul Rehman and Alharthi (2016), An Introduction to Research Paradigms AND Griffin (2011), “Writing about Research Methods in the Arts and Humanities”	
Week 3, September 7	What is “creative practice”? Spring Syllabus Project Intro	Have read: Loveless, N. (2019), Art in the Expanded Field AND Augsburg, T. (2017) Interdisciplinary Arts.	
Week 4, September 14	Here’s what I do... (Peer to peer, method demonstrations) Part 1	Have read: TBD Presentations: Emerson Maria Nicole Toyosi Kofi	
Week 5, September 21	Here’s what I do... (Peer to peer, method demonstrations) Part 2	Have read: TBD Presentations: Beatriz Ray Adanya Daniela	

Week 6, September 28	Interdisciplinary Practice, example 1 – Deke Weaver’s visit	Check out Deke Weaver’s “ Bear ”. Deke asks each person in the class to bring 6 used, washed, dry, plastic water bottles with the tops on, any size.	
Week 7, October 5	The academy as interdisciplinary material: Ask me anything (nuts and bolts). Tentative panel (guest expected)	Have read: TBD	
Week 8, October 12	Reading, viewings, and discussion of Every House has a Door (Lin Hixson & Matthew Goulish) materials ---- Visit by Dr. Kelli Morgan	Matthew Goulish and Lin Hixson’s writing. Some videos to watch. A podcast to listen to (Bad at Sports).	
Week 9, October 19	Every House has a Door workshop with Interseminar Fellows	Bring notes and questions from pervious class.	Attend Every House has a Door Lecture on October 18, 7:30pm at HRI (optional) Attend 12pm lunch at Levis 3 rd floor
Week 10, October 26	Fellow-led “readings”, from the summer-intensive discussions. Part 1	Have read: See Box Kofi, Maria, Daniela	

Week 11, November 2	Fellow-led “readings”, from the summer-intensive discussions. Part 2	Have read: See Box Emerson, Bea, Nicole	
Week 12, November 9	Interdisciplinary practice, example 2 -- Angela Aguayo, Media & Cinema Studies Uncanny Juxtapositions/Syllabus Project workshop	Have read: Intro and Conclusion to <i>Documentary Resistance</i> . Have listened to: Radical Media Lab, episode 1. Have watched: 778 bullets.	
Week 13, November 16	Fellow-led “readings”, from the summer-intensive discussions. Part 3	Have read: See Box Ray, Toyosi, Adanya	
FALL BREAK, Week of November 23	NO CLASS	NO CLASS	NO CLASS
Week 14, November 30	Reading, viewings, and discussion of Dr. Eve Ewing’s materials Present Uncanny Juxtapositions/Syllabus Project	<i>Ghost in the Schoolyard</i> , selected chapters; selections from <i>Electric Arches</i> , selections from <i>Ironheart</i> . Watch Dr. Ewing’s interview on the Daily Show with Trevor Noah.	
Week 15, December 7	Dr. Eve Ewing workshop with Interseminar Fellows	Bring notes and questions from previous class.	Attend Eve Ewing Lecture on December 6 at HRI (via zoom)

Writing Assistance

The University of Illinois Writers Workshop provides free one-on-one consulting by trained teachers on virtually any writing project. Located in the southeast corner of the first floor of the Undergraduate Library (room 251), the Writers Workshop staff can help you in every stage of the writing process, from overcoming writers block to editing a final draft.

For more information call (217) 333-8796 or (217) 333-7014.

The Center for Writing Studies: Contact Information: <http://www.cws.illinois.edu/workshop/>

Speculative Syllabi



December 12, 2022

Dear reader,

Welcome! We are delighted to invite you to join us for 'Speculation through Body, Space and Time,' an Interseminars class hosted in Spring 2023. In this class, we will explore speculation theory and methods. We hope that participants will gain theoretical and practical strategies for finding, thinking, creating, epistemic alternatives for overcoming fixation, linearity, and exclusions implicit in the traditional academy. Our intention for the class is to look at speculation as a method and object of study, aiming to understand it as a liberatory but also oppressive practice. We encourage students to think critically about speculation in a capitalist context.

To do so, we will use games! The games will allow randomness and fortuitousness to assign weekly readings/resources, activities, field trips, etc. We have organized the course thematically around three core topics: body, space, and time. These will help us rethink, reimagine, and reconceptualize our understanding of ourselves and the power relations that embody us. Rather than fixed modules, these themes serve as perspectives to provoke uncanny juxta positions of readings, knowledges, and resources, as we play – leaving space for participants to work, learn, and discover collaboratively and co-construct the class.

If you decide to join us, and we hope that you will, you will need a few things for class. First, we ask that you bring self-awareness and a willingness to reflect critically on your own positionality. We also ask that you practice deep listening and creative thinking. Finally, we request that you bring respect and intentional consideration for your fellow learners.

It is important to note that your class is an anti-racist space committed to Black, Indigenous, and people of color human rights, and we acknowledge that structural racism is real and must be dismantled. We respect indigenous knowledge and sovereignty, and we recognize the colonial legacies, dispossession, and violence that indigenous people suffer and our commitment to creating knowledge that makes visible their claim for justice and restoration. If interested in joining us, please see the following attachment for more information.

Warm Regards,

Daniela, Adanya, & Nicole

What will you learn in this class?

We hope that those who choose to join this class with us will learn what it means to be speculative, and that they will practice the act of being speculative continuously in the class and beyond. We hope that people will learn how to work through speculation. “Work” in this case is understood broadly, to whatever your craft may entail: drawing, painting, writing, acting, etc. During your time with us we also hope that you will experience learning through experimentation and failure. Also, we hope you will develop a sense of what you have not yet learned. Finally, we ask that you come up with your own learning intention for the class. What do you want to come away with?

What will you ‘do’?

We have a few ideas for collective practice during the semester. One is that we ask you to start the class by outlining your intentions for learning. This can include goals or outcomes and the “grade” you hope you achieve as a result of your time and effort. During each ‘module’ we ask you to provide some content reflection, individually or collaboratively. And finally, at the conclusion of our time together, we ask you to write an open letter on what is left to be learned. In this letter you can explore what you have not yet learned and areas you want to dig in and explore more on. Outside of this, play games and have fun!

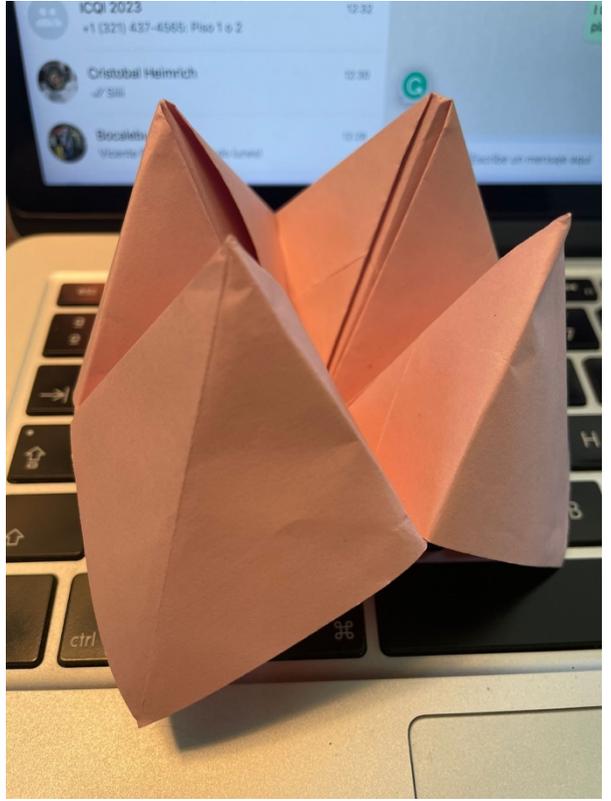




Our 'Texts'

Here is a comprehensive list of all the "texts" we have collaboratively generated for this class. Feel free to add additional materials.

- De la Cadena, M. (2015). Uncommoning Nature. *E-Flux*, 1–8. <http://supercommunity.e-flux.com/texts/uncommoning-nature/>
- Kohn, E. (2014). How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human. *In Choice Reviews Online* (Vol. 51, Issue 05). <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.51-2744>
- Ingold, T. (2012). Toward an ecology of materials. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 41, 427–442. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-081309-145920>
- Ingold, T. (2020). Epilogue: Towards a Politics of Dwelling. *Conservation & Society*, 3(2), 501–508.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315565125-7>
- Tsing, A. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015.
- Wilson Gilmore, R. (2022). "Abolition Geography and The Problem of Innocence". *In Abolition Geography*.
- Netflix Show, Kaleidoscope
- Spider-Man No Way Home
- Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness
- "The gap between past and future: the nunc stans" in *The Life of the Mind* by Hannah Arendt
- Electric Arches by Eve L. Ewing
- "Afrofuturism Imagination and Humanity" by Ytasha Womack <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLF90sXVfKk>
- News from Nowhere and Other Writings by William Morris
- Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture by Ytasha Womack
- Captivating Technology: Race, Carceral Technoscience, and Liberatory Imagination in Everyday Life Edited by Ruha Benjamin
- 1919 by Eve L. Ewing
- Timebox by Janelle Monae & Eve L. Ewing in "The Memory Librarian by Janelle Monae
- Four Futures: Life After Capitalism by Peter Frase
- The Abolitionist Imagination by Andrew Delbanco
- Utopias and Utopian Thought Edited by Frank E. Manuel
- Excerpt from *Speculative Geographies: Ethics, Technologies, Aesthetics* Edited by Nina Williams and Thomas Keating
- Space, Knowledge, and Power by Michel Foucault
- The Prison Abolitionist Imagination: A Conversation in Carceral Capitalism by Jackie Wang
- Too Like the Lighting by Ada Palmer
- "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination* by M.M. Bakhtin
- I Want To Be Ready: Improvisation As A Practice of Freedom by Danielle Goldman
- Swallow The Fish by Gabrielle Civil
- *How Can You Stay In The House All Day And Not Go Anywhere* (2010) by Ralph Lemon
- *Blur* (2021) by Leslie Cuyjet
- Arthur Jara, varied works, Black body through film



Interseminars Initiative

Uncanny Juxtapositions Curriculum Design

Spring 2023

Design by: Beatriz Jiménez, Toyosi Morgan, María B. Serrano-Abreu,

- I. Statement of purpose:** The course _____ rethinks the practice of doing research while positioning art, creation, and speculation as methods to evoke feelings and utopias, express social problems, and propose solutions that respond to collective well-being.
- II. Objectives:** As designed, the course proposes to
- 1) question and criticize the practice of research as well as its role in perpetuating systemic violence through colonial and racist research practices. In this first part, the course presents art, creation, and design as methodological tools to promote an ethical, reparative, and committed research praxis with populations that have been marginalized and exploited by research.
 - 2) promote an ethical creative research practice through interdisciplinary collaboration, the democratization of creative experiences and activities, as well as the accessible dissemination and scope of these experiences
 - 3) explore different media to produce creative artifacts and materials based on individual and collective research, sensorial and embodied experiences

Activities mentioned in the outline:

- **Immersive guided experience** > Guided meditation that invites the participant to a sensory experience in which it is hoped that they can identify an inherited interest, talent or passion with which they will work throughout the course. The activity is carried out in a closed and wide space, which will be set with dim lights, music to meditate, and smells that promote stillness.
 - **What do you want to accomplish for this course?**
- **Art Installation visit (TBD)**
- **Guest speaker and craft practice guided by speakers:**
 - Sasha Constanza-Chock and IMC
 - Aishah Shahidah Simmons
- Craft practice: Creating a Manifesto
- Film screening: Dash, J. (1991). *Daughters of the Dust* [Film].
- Essay on immersive theatre
- Creating a performance

III. Plan for collective practice (units, themes, readings, texts, materials, activities, assignments)

UNIT 1: FOUNDATIONS FOR A CRITICAL PRAXIS

A. Week 1: Immersive experience

- **(CLASS WILL BE TAKEN AT A DANCE STUDIO OR IMC)**

- Guided meditation and visualization
- Introduction & syllabus discussion

B. Week 2: Art as Method: The politics of creation & design

- **(CLASS WILL BE TAKEN ON MAKERS SPACE)**
- Art Installation visit TBD “A Site of Struggle: American Art against Anti-Black Violence” Northwestern University
 - Camaro-Borges, C. (2018). Creativity and imagination: Research as Worldmaking! In P. Leavy (Ed.) *Handbook of Arts-Based Research* (pp. 88-100). Guilford
 - Center for Craft. (2022). Craft Can. Retrieved from https://issuu.com/centerforcraft/docs/craftcan_report_final_20220818_pages
 - Gergen, K. J., & Gergen, M. (2018). The Performative Movement in Social Sciences. In P. Leavy (Ed.) *Handbook of Arts-Based Research* (pp. 54-67). Guilford

C. Decolonizing Method

i. Week 3: (Part 1) Interrogating colonialism, racism, and data

Readings:

- Coulthard, G. S. (2014). *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. University of Minnesota Press.
 - ✓ Introduction: Subjects of Empire
 - ✓ Chapter 1: The Politics of Recognition in Colonial Contexts
- Fanon, F. (1967). *Black Skin White Masks*. Grove Press

ii. Week 4 (Part 2):

- hooks, b. (2014). *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (2nd ed.). Routledge
 - ✓ Chapter 1: loving blackness as political resistance
 - ✓ Chapter 12: revolutionary “renegades” Native Americans, African Americans, and black Indians
- Mehta, R., & Henriksen, D. A. (2022). To Democratize, First Decolonize: Approaches Beyond Eurocentric and Colonial Epistemologies in Creativity. *Review of Research in Education*, 46, 105-133
- Pickens, T. A. (2019). *Black Madness: Mad Blackness*. Duke University Press.

iii. Week 5 (Part 3): Ethics, values, and justice

Readings:

- Constanza-Chock, S. (2020). Design Values: Hard Coding Liberation? In *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to build the worlds we need* (pp.31-68). MIT Press
- Design Justice Network (2018). Design Justice Network Principles. Retrieved from <https://designjustice.org/read-the-principles>

Guest speaker and craft practice: Sasha Constanza-Chock and IMC

UNIT 2: INQUIRY, ACTION, AND SCOPE

D. Week 6: Weaving agency and action through creative inquiry

Readings:

- Karwowski, M., Zielinska, A., & Jankowska, D. M. (2022). Democratizing creativity by enhancing imaginary and agency: A review and meta-analysis. *Review of Research in Education*, 46, 229-263
- Koro, M., & Tanggaard, L. (2022). Creative methods for creative research(ers)? Speculation. *Review of Research in Education*, 46, 324-344
- Tompkins, K. W. (2016). "We Aren't Here to Learn What We Already Know". *Avidly*. Retrieved from <https://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/2016/09/13/we-arent-here-to-learn-what-we-know-we-already-know/>
- Recommended reading: De Sousa Santos, B. (2019). Hacia una sociología de las ausencias y una sociología de las emergencias. In J. G. Gandarilla Salgado (Ed.), *Una epistemología del Sur* (pp. 98-159).

E. Week 7: Accessible dissemination

- (CLASS WILL BE TAKEN ON MAKERS SPACE)

- Readings:

- Gergen, K. J., & Gergen, M. (2018). The Performative Movement in Social Sciences. In P. Leavy (Ed.) *Handbook of Arts-Based Research* (pp. 54-67). Guilford
- Postlewait, T. (2009). Introduction. *Theatre Historiography*. Cambridge University Press
- Wall, S. (2008). Easier Said than Done: Writing an Autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 7(1), 38-53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690800700103>
- Guest speaker and craft practice: Aishah Shahidah Simmons

F. Week 8: Creating a Manifesto for transformational change and activism

Readings:

- Denzin, N. K. (2010). *The Qualitative manifesto: A call to arms*. Left Coast Press. Chapter 7 & 8 (102-116)
- Futurestage Research Group: *A Manifesto for the Future Stage: Performance is a Human Right*. Meta at Harvard. <https://www.americantheatre.org/2021/11/05/a-manifesto-for-the-future-stage-performance-is-a-human-right/>
- We See You, White American Theatre. (n.d.) *Principles for Building Anti-Racist Theatre Systems*. Retrieved from <https://www.weseeyouwat.com/>: Realizing a New Theatre.
- Nottage L., Harris J. These Truths: Podcast <https://pen.org/these-truths-lynn-nottage-jeremy-o-harris/>

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Week 9: SPRING BREAK

G. Week 10: Craft practice/workshop: Creating a Manifesto

UNIT 3: CRAFTING CREATIVE INQUIRY

H. Week 11: Film Screening: Dash, J. (1991). *Daughters of the Dust* [Film].

- (CLASS WILL BE TAKEN AT SPURLOCK THEATER)

I. Week 12: Afro-Speculations and alternative endings

Readings

Commander, M. (2017). *Afro-Atlantic Flight: Speculative Returns & the Black Fantastic*. Duke University Press. Introduction (1-24)

Koro, M., & Tanggaard, L. (2022). Creative methods for creative research(ers)? Speculation. *Review of Research in Education*, 46, 324-344

Mins, L. C., Rubenstein, L. D., & Thomas, J. (2022). Black Brilliance and Creative Problem Solving in Fugitive Spaces: Advancing the BlackCreate Framework Through a Systematic Review. *Review of Research in Education*, 46, 134-165

Nyong'o, T. (2018). *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life*. NYU Press.

Olufemi, L. (2021). *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise*.

J. Week 13: Self-reflecting, autoethnography and non-traditional ways of producing knowledges

Denzin, N. (2018). *Performance autoethnography: Critical Pedagogy and the politics of culture*. Introduction & Chapter 1 Autoethnography as research redux (1-32)

Ehn, B. Lofgren, O. Wilk, R. (2016). *Exploring Everyday Life: Strategies for Ethnography and Cultural Analysis*. Crafting Wood and Words. (99-113).

Assignment: TBA

Madison D. Soyini. (2019) *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*. Writing as Performance and Performance as Writing. (189-200)

K. Week 14: Immersive practices, embodied performances, and multimedia

McMillan, Uri. Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance. *Performing Objects* (1-21).

Machamer J. (2017). Immersive Theater: Engaging the Audience.

Somers J.W. Interactive Theatre: Drama as a Social Intervention. Vol 1 Issue 1 June 2008.

YouTube Videos

- CC as a Vehicle for Social Change in Emerging & Immersive Media <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4e482oZgdU>
- Immersive Art Inspiring Change <https://www.pbs.org/video/immersive-art-inspiring-change-sw3jrq/>
- [Natasha Tsakos' multimedia theatrical adventure](#)

L. Week 15: Creative collaborative production/presentation

M. Week 16: Closing Remarks

Tentative Title: SPECULATING OTHERWISE
Kofi Bazzell-Smith, Ray Martinez, and Emerson Parker Pehl

Purpose of the seminar:

This seminar is project-based and task-based design. Through the interchange of ideas and the integration of speculation, fellows will change, unveil or reinforce their research interests, bringing an open scope in terms of humanities/cultural aspects, literature and art research.

Fellows will:

- Recognize and identify new resources to add or advance their research
- By Interdisciplinarity the student will create an important network to help themselves or others by working in unison to develop research projects.
- Identify new interconnections that could decentered or decolonized their work to create a more inclusive scholarship

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES:

Transparency Hour: At least twice during the semester (Week One and Week Eight), the graduate fellows and faculty conveners will discuss the structure and progression of the Spring semester, in addition to the summer intersessions, and culminating event(s). This is a time to address questions, concerns, and constraints (of funding, time, etc.) to develop concrete plans that meet the hopes (within the realm of what is possible) of all.

BOX SHARING:

Texts:

Before the beginning of the semester, fellows will create Box folders with texts (readings, music, films, music, etc.) that they find interesting, canonical, and/or generative (at least ten) for themselves as well as for the others in the class. Please include a brief description of the artifact for others to gain more context (beyond a title and abstract). Throughout the semester, fellows are invited to select readings from their peers' Box bibliographies. For the online zine, fellows will be asked to complete one response to a peer's reading (e.g. a 300-1000 word response, a video of a performance response, a visual art response, etc.).

Minutes for Transparency Hour: During the transparency hour, there will be a Google Doc for fellows to take notes in to compile into meeting minutes to be uploaded into Box.

Online Zine:

An online collection of materials (i.e. writing, performances, film, art, etc.) generated by fellows and collaborations between fellows in response to texts, in-class activities, invited lecturers, community engagement (amongst other activities) that pertains to the Speculation Seminar that will be published at the conclusion of the semester.

Final Project- Inconceivable Speculation

Tentative: At the beginning of the semester, there will be an idea-generating activity for research topics that pertain to speculation in the Americas. From there, fellows are asked to create research projects (in triads, dyads, or individuality) that they will work on, outside of class time, for the rest of the semester. At the end of the semester, fellows will be asked to present their research (as a performance, art installation, art exhibition, paper presentation, etc.) where a copy (of the fellows' choice) will be added to the Online Zine.
(example of a triadic "Inconceivable Speculation" at the end of the syllabus).

	Assignments Due	In Class
WEEK ZERO (between 12/17 to 1/17)	Compile Boxes for Literature Sharing	
WEEK ONE January 18th, 2023	Course Presentation/Syllabus discussion	Transparency Hour: Addressing the Summer Intersession and the Fall Culminating Event(s) Share HRI statements Generate ideas for speculative research
WEEK TWO January 25th, 2023	Rachel Storm (Possible Resource)	Grant Writing Workshop
WEEK THREE February 1st, 2023	"Resource to be Announced"	Tentative: "Workshop on How to plan and event..."
WEEK FOUR February 8th, 2023	Suggestion: Watch a video performance from the Box Folder	"Territoriality in practice" Creative Writing Workshop (Poetry, Short Stories, Memoir, etc)
WEEK FIVE February 15th, 2023		
WEEK SIX February 22nd, 2023	Suggestion: Watch a video performance from the Box Folder	"The Body as Speculation" Character Construction Workshop
WEEK SEVEN March 1st, 2023	Presentations	Presentations
WEEK EIGHT March 8th, 2023		Transparency Hour: Mid Semester Evaluation
WEEK NINE March 15th, 2023	Spring Break!	Spring Break!

WEEK TEN March 22nd, 2023 (Kofi's Mentor)	Watch a film(fiction) for analysis-exercise in visual literacy and communication through metaphor and subtext.	Discuss film. Break down analysis into content (character, theme, setting, plot) and form (shots, timing, composition, color).
WEEK ELEVEN March 29th, 2023 (Kofi's Mentor)	Lecture on Formal Composition	Discuss some work. Analysis of content- themes, metaphor etc. Formal analysis of how images and text were structured to communicate ideas.
WEEK TWELVE April 5th, 2023		Workshop on how to plan public-facing/community events. And then actually do it. (Suggestions in comment)
WEEK THIRTEEN April 12th, 2023	Work in Research (if any at this point)	Work in Final Presentation
WEEK FOURTEEN April 19th, 2023		Work on Final Presentation
WEEK FIFTEEN April 26th, 2023		Work on Final Presentation
WEEK SIXTEEN May 3rd, 2023		Final Inconceivable Speculation Presentations
WEEK SEVENTEEN (FINALS) May 10th, 2023		Publishing Online Zine of Spring Semester Speculations

Inconceivable Speculation (A Group Project):

During the first week of class, fellows will come up with interests, questions, topics, etc. that they are interested in researching for the semester (i.e. abolitionism, how can the Danville Correctional Center be abolished, what are the aesthetics of gender abolitionism, etc.). After generating an expansive web, fellows will determine three primary themes from these interests and negotiate the three groups of three that will research that theme over the course of the semester.

In addition to creating a substantial collaborative final group project, the Inconceivable Speculation Groups will be asked to give 30-minute presentations about their research thus far in class during Week Seven. The following week (Week Eight), the Inconceivable Speculation Groups will then present two 15-minute responses to the other two groups' presentations. The purpose of the presentations and responses is for the Inconceivable Speculation Groups to receive feedback about their research process and trajectory as well as to challenge them to

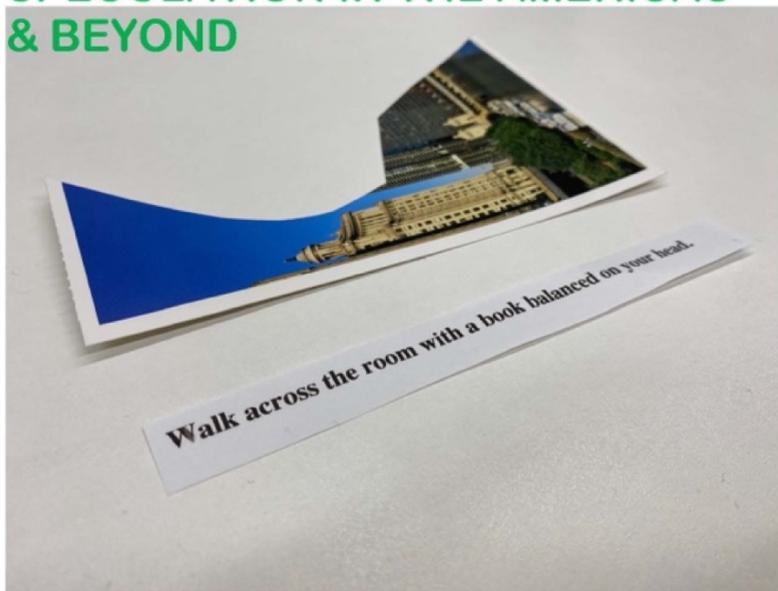
incorporate interesting and generative aspects of the other two groups' response presentations into the final project itself.

Final presentations of the Inconceivable Speculation Groups' research projects will happen in class during Week 16 with an expectation that versions of the final research project (and research process) will be uploaded into the Interseminars Online Zine by the end of finals to be published publicly.

Spring Syllabus

INTERSEMINARS COURSE SYLLABUS #2 | SPRING 2023

SPECULATION IN THE AMERICAS & BEYOND



The Basics

Class times: Wednesdays, 3 to 5:50 pm, with additional times in weeks 4, 12, and 13

Location: Siebel Center for Design, Room 0060

Instructors:

Josue David Cisneros, Associate Professor, Department of Communication

jdcisnrs@illinois.edu

Patrick E. Hammie, Associate Professor and Chair of Studio Arts

phammie@illinois.edu

Jorge Lucero, Associate Professor and Chair of Art Education

jlucero@illinois.edu

Course Description:

This is the second course in the inaugural Interseminars year (2022-23). After spending the Fall 2022 semester investigating various interdisciplinary methods, the group of nine Interseminar Fellows, along with the three convening faculty members, conceptualized, deliberated, and organized this Spring 2023 syllabus. The Spring Interseminars course takes up the theme of Speculation in the Americas, while still grappling with and examining the material on interdisciplinary methods and practices that were presented in the Fall of 2022. The individual and collaborative forays into the variety of takes on “speculation” are explicitly being conducted for the sake of furthering the nine fellows research trajectories and portfolios. As such, even though the objectives of the course are defined and agreed upon by the cohort, how the objectives are achieved is purposefully tentative and modular. In this course, we will do what needs to be done to engage the material and leverage it for our existing and emergent projects. Fellows and conveners will contribute to its shaping equally.

A note on the construction of this syllabus

In the final days of the Fall 2022 semester the Interseminar Fellows were given a prompt by the faculty conveners to develop a full semester syllabus based on—what was termed—an “uncanny juxtaposition” of research interests and styles. The Fellows were put into purposefully disparate groups of three and each of those groups developed exemplary and thorough syllabi, which could—in fact—be taught as robust courses in the UIUC humanities curriculum. Approximately forty-five weeks of curricular content, enabling-parameters, and structures were devised by the Fellows and then presented to their fellow Fellows and the three conveners on the final day of the semester. Each team also turned in a digital Box folder containing materials that could be used in the teaching of these courses (e.g. exemplars, readings, links to media, etc.). During the subsequent winter break the three faculty conveners examined the Fellows’ syllabi proposals and their accompanying materials. These materials were analyzed for similarities, entanglements, and complimentary threads to produce an aggregate document, which could help the Interseminars group organize their Spring semester. Right before the Spring semester started the faculty conveners showed their analysis and notes to the Fellows. The hope was to agree on what the Fellows wanted/needed for the Spring semester in general terms, and then to devise a handful of pedagogical rhythms and permissions to strive towards those objectives.

The following three parts capture the collaborative work of the Fellows with the convening faculty: Course Objectives, Course Activities, and a Tentative (work-in-progress) Calendar.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

(What do the Interseminar Fellows (IFs) want to accomplish during the Spring 2023 semester?)

- IFs would like structured support in individual or collective projects.
- IFs would like to develop skills towards these projects (possibly through optional workshops)
- IFs would like more opportunities to build networks (in and out of the University).

- IFs would like to participate in both professor and peer-guided opportunities to engage with speculation (as a construct) and speculative texts (with *texts* being defined broadly to include art and literary forms, so long as they propose “legibility” in some way or another).
- The IFs want the learning in this course to be playful and fun. They proposed this seriously with play being understood as a rigorous method of approaching research and learning by offering levels of indeterminacy, collage, chance, re-search, study, prolonging the investigation, discovery, and staying with a particular text, problem, or proposition.
- IFs want to *show and tell* about what they are up to in their own work and in the Interseminars cohort? Who do they want to show and tell to? Home units, their peers, the wider world (both correlated to and not to the academy; e.g. the world, their fields, public groups, “community”, HRI, future interseminars, etc.). Most IFs want their work to be public facing, but this means different things to different Fellows: Could be exhibitions, public workshops, performances, manifesto or other types of writings, event planning, presenting at conferences, etc.
- IFs value their role as active agents in the processes, not only in the development of this initial syllabus/guide, but also as partakers and shapers of the emergent curriculum of the Spring semester and beyond. They want to co-construct the course with the Conveners.
- IFs want to work towards the Fall Interseminars Culminating Event.



Course Activities

Unlike the Fall 2022 semester, the Spring semester more fully recognizes the need for Fellows to work on their scholarship and projects. Therefore, the time of the course will be split into two possible types of activities: Seminar and Lab.

Seminar time

- Seminar might be a space where "texts" are studied in a conventional sense. Text, of course, is understood as anything that can be made legible (e.g., art, film, writing, performances, design, archives, etc. etc.).
- The Seminar time frequently will look like "together" time, meaning this may be time that is set aside for coming together to perform activities that appear like conventional schooling (examining materials, presenting to each other, collaborating on experiments, invited speakers, etc.)
- Seminar time may be most prevalent towards the beginning of the semester as the cohort figures out individual or group trajectories for the rest of the semester, and as more planning is needed—even—for the Fall 2023 culminating event.
- See Appendix A for some ideas for seminar time

Lab time

- Lab can be understood as time spent working collaboratively or individually on projects with peer and faculty support, engagement, and discourse as needed.
- Lab time could also be a time for workshops on specific skills or topics, methods, professional development time, etc. Many of these will be optional and as needed. What skill building workshops do we need to build into the semester?
- Critique and presentation for the furthering of individual or collective projects. During Lab time we may find ourselves practicing formal critiques of each other's art, lectures, performances, writing, works-in-progress, etc.
- Lab time may increase towards the end of the semester when projects are coming up and preparations for the Fall 2023 culminating event are underway.
- See Appendix B for some ideas for lab time

On the objective to engage with speculative texts outside of class: The "chip" activity.

As a cohort it was deemed necessary to expose each other to texts of interests, while simultaneously understanding that there may be too many things for everyone in the class to attend to all of the time. As a means to more deliberately "give attention" to each other and the things we want to show to each other, we propose that the group respond to call for "attention" with a game of sorts.

Every Fellow is in the game and they each receive 2 "Please Pay Attention" (PPA) chips and 9 "No, Thank You" (NTY) chips.

- A “Please Pay Attention” (PPA) chip represents a request for the class’s attention and time. Playing a PPA chip is requesting everyone's attention & time to some *thing* -- a reading, a performance, a text, an event.
- Potentially, every Fellow uses their 2 PPA chips, 18 “things” will be called to everyone’s attention. This is a lot of out of class commitment. So...
- Every student will receive 9 NTY chips that a Fellow can “play” when they are unable to comply for whatever reason. This means that everyone will still need to potentially give their attention to 9 requests made by their fellow Fellows.
- Whoever is then requesting the class's attention by using one of their PPA chips will then determine the means of engagement by those who gave their attention to the request. This can be done in any number of ways including using Seminar time for all class activities (use of Seminar time must not exceed half hour by any one Fellow’s request and cannot involve more than three of these half hours in any one session. Of course, using Seminar time is only one way for the Fellows to engage in discourse around the thing that was called to everyone’s attention. Fellows may request asynchronous responses, for example, or creative responses, or discussion over meals, etc. The options here are limitless. We would only ask that relationships amongst the Fellows be foregrounded and that you take care of each other even in the assignments you give to each other.

Building an archive of speculative texts

- A Box folder where people put in "texts" around speculation that are important groundings/jumping off points has been created.
- When materials are put into the Box folder, we need to come up with a system where the materials are “tagged” e.g @adanya, so the person for whom the contributor intends the material to be seen by, will do so.
- Fellows have asked for a quota or journaling where people record their engagements with the texts and bring them into the collective.

Course Project: Fall 2023 Symposium

- The IFs will produce a solo or team speculative work that would be presented at the fall event.
- The IFs, with the conveners will formulate and plan for the Fall 2023 symposium, including schedule, panels, budget, promotions, and publication (potentially)
 - Fall event ideas (*written in sand*)
 - a "symposium" on imagining otherwise
 - series of panels of fellows' work/projects, including invited guests from each fellow -- roughly 3 panels of 3 each with invited guests in each panel, or a panel of all guests, or some other permutation
 - taking over Levis center & surrounding area
 - culminating panel with all 12 that launches our Interseminars public-facing project/publication/manifesto

- Faculty needs to help the students to bring their respondents in the Fall (strategies and logistics)
 - Potentially an opening speaker to kick-off the event
- an imagining otherwise "publication"
 - could be a book, an online zine, a digital archive, videos, photographs, a manifesto, etc.
 - each fellow contributes & group contributions
 - document & publicize what we have done and what others should take from it
 - other ideas: video documentary, a video art piece
 - Write or construct a collective manifesto (this could be boomeranged towards conference presentations but also the forthcoming publication that will accompany the fall event)
- Final Summer 2023 Summer Intensive in August to prepare and plan for "symposium"
- Possibly a dress rehearsal symposium during the Summer Intensive #2 to prepare for the Fall 2023 culminating event.

Course Reflections

In anticipation of the Fall 2023 and its possible publication/yearbook, we need to write. Some of this writing may be published, but some of it may be done merely to “think” through what we’ve done, what we will do and what we think about it all.

Possible activities:

- Regular journaling or writing in response to the texts.
- Opportunities for formal self reflection on their process of how it is going in the class and maybe what they expect and final reflection.
- Collective critique also about the class. (Presentations/reporting, or something written or recorded, or artistic response)



Tentative (work-in-progress) Calendar

Week and Meeting Date	What is happening? The themes, text, or guest we will focus on this week	What is due? What you should have read, watched, studied, or done prior to this class meeting.	Additional Notes. Unusual conditions or expectations for a given week, visitor, or project.
Week 1, Jan. 18	Seminar (S): Speculative Threads Presentations & Discussion Lab (L): Discuss syllabus & refine schedule	Present 2-3 speculative threads in work	

Week 2, Jan. 25	S: Discussing speculation through body, space, and time L: Planning for Fall 2023		
Week 3, Feb. 1	S: Study & Discuss Amber Johnson’s materials L: Speculative project proposal and/or Guest speaker discussion, TBD	Read two out of the following (your choice): “Radical Imagination via Play”; “Practicing Radical Forgiveness in the Now”; or “Beauty in the Intersections”. Watch: Video on the Justice Fleet & explore one of the exhibits	
Week 4, Feb. 8	In-Class workshop with Dr. Amber Johnson		Amber’s lecture is Tuesday, Feb. 7 @ 7:30 pm in Levis Faculty Center, Room 300
Week 5, Feb. 15	S: What is speculation, part I L: Spring & Fall planning		
Week 6, Feb. 22	L: Levis tour & fall planning S: What is speculation, part II	Meet at Levis!! (Re)Think about Fall 23 visitors! Peer-review proposals! Put a “text” in the Box folder that gives your “working definition” of speculation. Come ready to briefly(!) describe your definition	

Week 7, March 1	S: L:		
Week 8, March 8	S: Semester “check-in” about the class structure and progression L:	Read/Watch TBD	Visit by Profs. Siobhan Somerville & Ryan Shosted to talk about interdisciplinary, speculation, and/or remaking the academy
Week 9, March 15	NO CLASS – Spring Break	NO CLASS	
Week 10, March 22			Possible: visit with Sandra Ruiz (La Estacion service as potential chip activity?) and maybe BlackMau
Week 11, March 29	S: Study materials from Gómez-Barris and Shrobe L: Communicating your work to the rest of campus	Read/watch/view: TBD Panelists: Antoinette Burton, Jenny Davis	
Week 12, April 5	In-Class workshop with Dr. Macarena Gómez-Barris		Lecture Tuesday, April 4, @ 7:30 in Levis 300
Week 13, April 12	In-Class workshop with David Shrobe		Lecture Tuesday, April 11, @ 7:30 in Levis 208
Week 14, April 19			

Week 15, April 26		Visit from Jenny Davis	
Week 16, May 3			

Course Materials:

All course materials will be available in our collaborative Box.com folder [found here](#), or they will be distributed ahead of time.

Asynchronous discussion and collaboration will take place through our Slack chat server, [available here](#). You can use Slack to discuss class materials, ask questions, schedule meetings with the instructors, collaborate, and share resources.

There will be a few required events outside of class time, including the two guest speakers, as well as several optional opportunities for out-of-class engagement. These will be announced in class, on Slack, and through the Imagining Otherwise Google Calendar, which you can subscribe to [with this link](#).

All assignments will be turned in via Box.com or in class.



Accommodations

To obtain disability-related academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities should contact the course instructor and the Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) as soon as possible. To contact DRES, you may visit 1207 S. Oak St., Champaign, call (217) 333-4603, e-mail disability@illinois.edu or go to the [DRES website](#)

Please schedule a private meeting with the course instructors to discuss your accessibility needs and requirements. Also let us know if your accessibility needs change over the course of the semester so we can work to meet those. If you have challenges that you feel may affect your performance in this course, such as lack of stable housing, food, security, or technology, please contact us as soon as you can, and contact the **Student Assistance Center (SAC)** in the Office of the Dean of Students for support and referrals to campus and/or community resources. <https://odos.illinois.edu/community-of-care/student-assistance-center/> For mental health emergencies, you can call 911 or contact the Counseling Center. You can find more Student Support Services here <https://studentaffairs.illinois.edu/node/11962>.

All students have a right to reasonable accommodations for their religious observances, practices, and beliefs. If you have a particular religious observance that affects your class work, let us know as soon as possible, before the date in question if possible.

Writing Assistance

The University of Illinois Writers Workshop provides free one-on-one consulting by trained teachers on virtually any writing project. Located in the southeast corner of the first floor of the Undergraduate Library (room 251), the Writers Workshop staff can help you in every stage of the writing process, from overcoming writers block to editing a final draft.

For more information call (217) 333-8796 or (217) 333-7014.

The Center for Writing Studies: Contact Information: <http://www.cws.illinois.edu/workshop/>

Appendix A

Possible seminar topics (taken from Fellows' syllabi)

- Art & Creative inquiry as method
- Interrogating colonialism and racism
- Ethics, values and justice in design
- Afro-speculation/afro-futurism
- Autoethnography
- Indigenous knowledges
- Embodied performance and multimedia
- Science fiction and fantasy

Appendix B

Possible topics for labs (taken from the Fellows' syllabi)

- Critiques
- Grant writing
- Event planning
- Creative writing
- Character construction
- Film screening & analysis
- Formal analysis
- Accessibility



Q&A:
Speculating Graduate Education

Q1:

After the yearlong experiment of Interseminars, how might we imagine graduate education in the humanities otherwise?

Interseminar Fellow Answer (IF A): With a more open mind to engaged into collaborations between different fields in the Humanities.

IF A: After the yearlong experiment of Interseminars, we can imagine a graduate education in the humanities with opportunities for collaboration across disciplines. We can imagine collaboration to consist of designing courses with others, creating work together, and building spaces where this thinking can occur. We can imagine a graduate education that gives you the flexibility to take courses outside your department across the humanities and the arts to then create an interdisciplinary approach.

IF A: The biggest thing that stood out for me in this program was trust. Trust in our unique approaches to research and scholarship and trust that we were capable enough to figure things out. I think that too many graduate programs funnel students into a specific way of thinking and doing things. It's nice to

have the freedom to work and think outside of the canonical framework.

IF A: We can imagine graduate study as fun and inquisitive. We can balance professionalization with play and curiosity.

IF A: As a dancer and choreographer as well as a performer, movement has been my vehicle for attempting to understand having a body and what it means to create something that is envisioned. Over my yearlong experiment in Interseminars, I've concluded that dance and movement is the answer. Do I think it's the only answer? No. Do I think dance can fix anything and everything? Pretty much, yes. So many innovative frameworks for my research has come from considering different ways to think, talk and move. We use our bodies to understand new things. If graduate education is to be reconsidered, people's bodies and how they move also must be taken into that consideration. We need to be using the Interseminars initiative as an opportunity to become even more inclusive and understanding of the rapidly changing world through our bodies.

IF A: In this program, my recurring question is how to make materials and research in graduate education in the humanities accessible, readable, and legible for

everyone. The 5 Ws and H in the humanities should constantly be revisited. Who are we catering to? Fellow academics or the people whose stories we are telling? IF A: How do we create a version of Jstor, Taylor, and Francis Proquest that caters to those, not in the academic but willing to access information about their communities? Likewise, Imagining otherwise should not be restricted to territories; rather, it should be an all-inclusive practice.

Q2:

What have you learned this year from being with the other nine fellows of the inaugural Interseminars year?

IF A: I've learned to listen with an open heart, and more importantly, to considered other literatures or investigations that could seem further from my investigation in the Humanities, but at the end, it could be helpful to expand and enriched it.

IF A: I've learned so much this past year from the other fellows and professors. Before this opportunity, I had been in classes with students from other disciplines but never had the chance to co-create. Interseminars provided us an opportunity to teach and learn from

each other about our own interests and methods. Interseminars provided me with the discourse to be able to articulate my research in a way that I had never before due to the fact that we all came from different departments. I've learned the importance of collaboration and the importance of having an open mind in ways we can approach our work. Working with the other fellows has helped me think about my research in different ways and I think it is crucial to come in contact with folks from different disciplines to reflect on our work and ways we can continue to expand it.

IF A: I learned that I need to spend a lot more time with people in other departments. The academy is segregated due to the focus on disciplinarity, and we tend to miss amazing things happening right around us in other fields.

IF A: Having a space to be honest about what you know/do not know or understand is invaluable. I think successful learning is about trust, and while that takes time and effort to cultivate, it makes a big difference.

IF A: I've learned that much of the time in big institutions like the University of Illinois, the business of the institution can actually afford to bring people who are already together in community to have meaningful

and sometimes completely mundane conversation and commit to finding brilliant, committed, dedicated people to do important work and compensate them for it. I have been incredibly grateful for the opportunity. If I'm being honest, it's not new information to me that universities can afford me. It is just all too common for a colonial structure to overlook people who have things to say and action to offer. I have learned how to be more open about talking about the experience of feeling like I need to justify why I'm taking up space and I'm ready to apply it to being an artist.

IF A: The most crucial lesson I picked is to do it. Several experimental exercises were carried out right on the spot in class, creating meaningful and sustainable outcomes: a testifiable proof that improvisation and interdisciplinarity combined will make the change will like to see in the world today. Improvisation is one of the techniques in the theatre, and the humanities need to adopt and adapt this model more often for (un)imaginable outcomes. I also learned that great collaboration happens outside comfort zones. Lastly, I learned interdisciplinary methodologies and methods for formulating ideas and investigating data; my favorite is mapping and collating with keywords.

Q3:

Speak to how your thoughts about speculation have changed over the year? What's next in this area of study for you?

IF A: As Puerto Ricans (considering that this title could enclosed many ways of identities) we tent to speculate with our identity as a collective. Our political situation and relationship with the United States of America, for more than one hundred and twenty-five years, and the fact that we are an island, has given us the opportunity to create with the Spanish language and our own thrive culture and folklore an idea of a better and free country. The word "country" for most of us it's a symbol of resistance against the Anglo-American identity. This speculative action indeed has and evolve in an identity that, although it cannot be called solid and definitive, it's in fact a richer and defining one. I could relate this Puerto Rican speculation to my investigation, as the individuals, in this case women who cross-dressed as man, to one extent with their actions speculate (in this case a vision of a social aspect -gender- of a better future) appropriating and commanding their identity as they pleased and as a resistance to the patriarchy,

IF A: When Interseminars began I had a very limited understanding of what speculation meant. It wasn't

until discussing speculation with the other fellows and professors where I started thinking about all the possible definitions and the ways that it could be applied in my research. I learned that speculation could serve not only as a method to imagine the future but a way of reflection towards the past. Speculation allows you to think about different alternatives that aren't already established and it is a method I still want to incorporate in my future research.

IF A: Over the past several years, I have dedicated myself to researching and defining the parameters of Japanese manga practice, aiming to establish unequivocal definitions. Building upon this foundation, my upcoming projects will venture into uncharted territory by merging traditional craftsmanship with new technologies. I'm interested in what arises from a meticulous adherence to artistic tradition and the application of prescriptive principles in the making process, and then using that material as a springboard to innovate. I want to play the line between tradition and innovation and see what kind of art I end up creating. Language-wise, I am going to learn French next, and most likely Mandarin afterward to expand my bridgebuilding work beyond just the US and Japan. Eventually, I aim to facilitate international artistic collaborations on a larger scale.

IF A: My thoughts on speculation have certainly expanded and deepened over the year. I'm looking forward to learning more about historical moments of speculation, where we question the status quo and wonder about a different future.

IF A: In the next year, I want for my creative ideas on speculation to go in more than one direction. There are so many little things that inspire me day to day. Being a part of Interseminars gave me the room to think about how I want to approach creating space to delve into inspirations that are either unconventional or not within my current practice. Speculating can be thoughtful and inactive. It can also be active and practical. I have changed my ideas on speculation meaning one particular thing, or for speculation to only mean science fiction or technology or just meaning theory. Next in my studying I'm leaving room for ideas to overlap and maybe have nothing to do with each other, and that being okay.

IF A: Before the interseminars, I had never considered speculation as a critical experiential word. However, I have practiced the action all my life. For instance, Theatre of the Oppressed by Augusto Boal engages the audience to reimagine alternatives to problems affecting their communities. My gender-based violence project, I Won't Mind My Business, uses the forum

theatre of Boal and speculates how women and girls can use their voices to stop or support a person in need of help. My idea of speculation has evolved to focus more on the materiality and pedagogy of resistance with conscious attention to care. For instance, how do I ensure that addressing the issue of sexual violence will not reopen trauma for victims? The next phase is to test some of the methodologies and methods of the interseminar guest speakers as I continue to find my rhythm. I intend to activate scenes through community engagements and document the experience for learning.

Yearbook

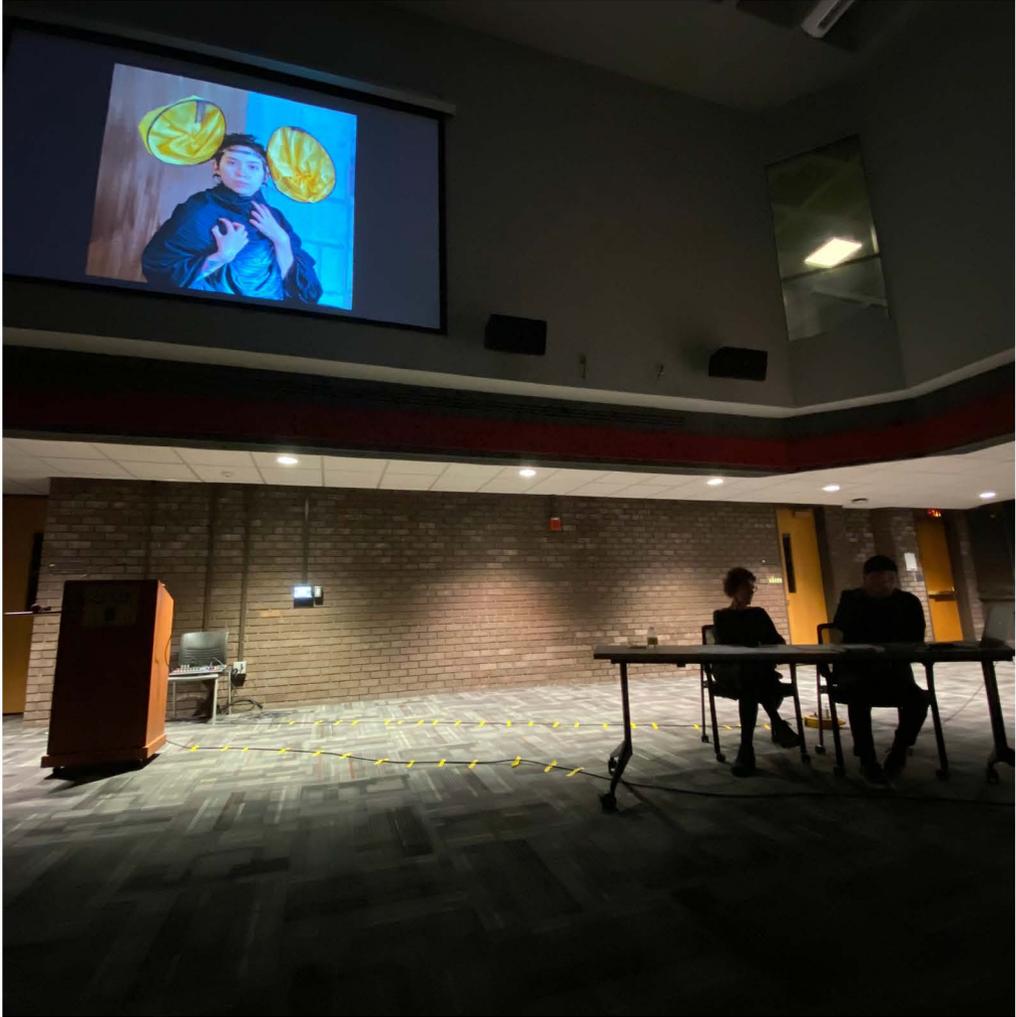
The Interseminars Fellowship Captured in Pictures























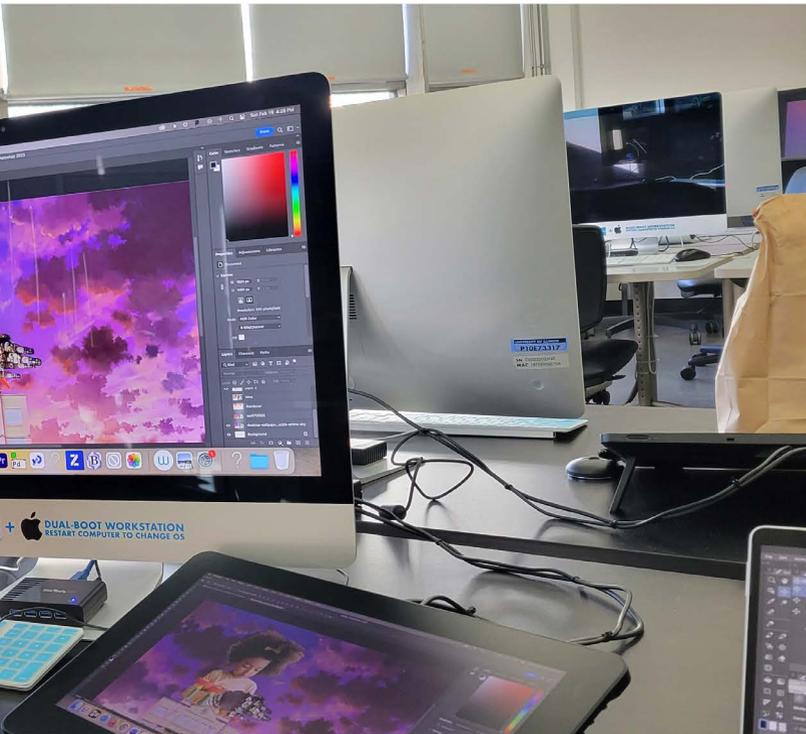










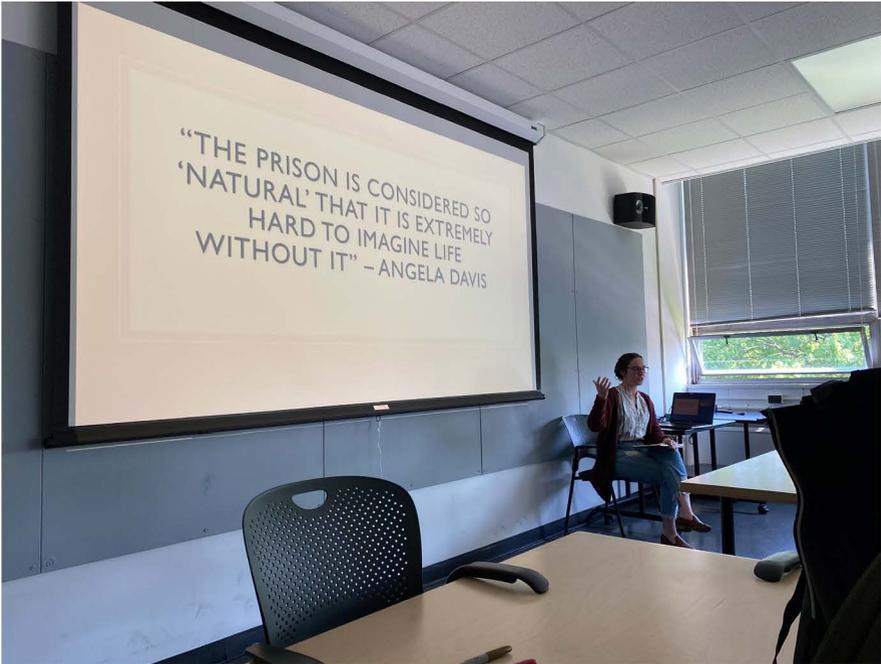




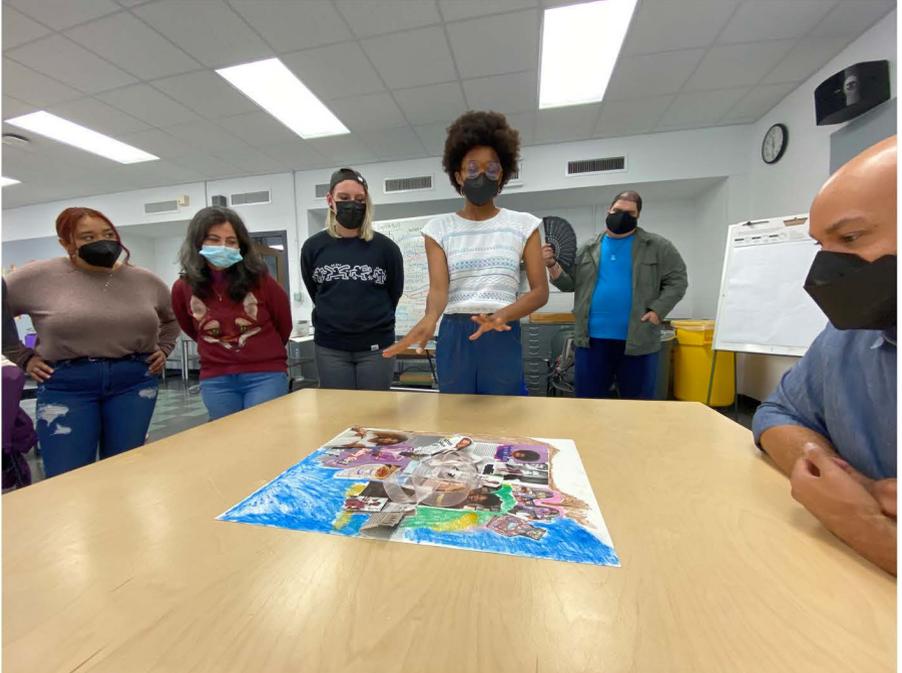
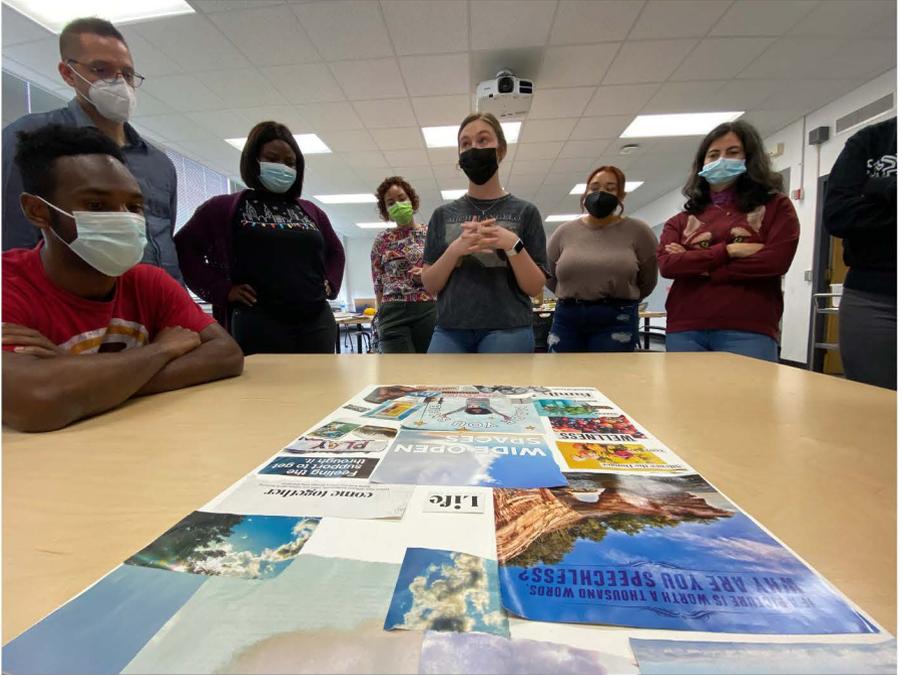






















SIGNATURES | NOTES | SPECULATIONS

SIGNATURES | NOTES | SPECULATIONS

Epilogue, sort of...

Advice to the next generation of interdisciplinary scholars, creative practitioners and speculators, based on 18 months of imagining otherwise...

Interdisciplinary inquiry is about finding new connections in unexpected places. A bit of aimless exploration can lead to some interesting discoveries. It's nice to work outside the confines of needing to provide a precise definition for things, and to do things your own way.

Speculation and risk go hand in hand, so take it! Engage in revolutionary projects, those ones that scare you and let care be at the center when working with people and their stories.

I encourage all scholars who want to engage in interdisciplinary practice to approach collaborative work with an open mind. Try activities outside of your comfort zone and they will automatically begin a dialogue with your own work. Asking questions and ending with more questions is totally acceptable.

Maybe interventions should be made on the ways that "the future" has been conceptualized as an abstracted temporality that can be effectively prepared for all while divorced from the context of the present moment(s) that might seem inconsequential to that future visioning(s). Said another way, the only way to make sense of the future, or the end (if one even exists) of Interseminars, is to deeply commit yourself to the process of Interseminars. Deeply trust in this process.

And then continue to trust how that process becomes various, interrelated processes—beyond the summer and into the Fall and Spring semesters—and how these processes also continue to interface overtime to become the experience that is Interseminars that augments the rest of your professional career.

You may not want unsolicited advice, but I'd suggest you dream big! In a whole year, I don't believe we have ever been told no, or that something couldn't be done. This is a unique space in that way.

Take advantage of this time! Don't overwhelm yourself with pressure to do too much. Spend this next year devoted to the thing that gets you out of bed in the morning. Whatever it is that you want to do, this is the time.

Building truly interdisciplinary thinking or practice needs collaborative work. Create pedagogical spaces where collaboration develops organically, where people can make linkages and connections respectfully and creatively differently from "receiving" knowledge from someone else. And it also requires a second dimension: having time to truly open the limits of a discipline and let itself be impacted by other ways of thinking. That demands time to reflect, to let yourself be permeated. Give yourself permission to process the

influences of your colleagues. It is not obvious, and it is going to take some time for you to feel confident in this new perspective.

Interseminars has given me the opportunity to dream with my research project and elaborate on ideas to leverage my graduate student/researcher experience. As an educational laboratory, Interseminars gave me the permission to grow, change, test and modify my ideas. Use this lab space to experiment on your potential academic/research/creative/artistic pathways and who you want to become on your future path.

Interdisciplinary is the future of research and creative/scholarly work in general. I have learn and appreciate the value of collaborative research as a means to bridge knowledges and methods that can propel alternate worlds and probable responses to pressing issues that urge our social intervention. Interdisciplinary practice reveals techniques and strategies to forward and issue and potentiate its understanding, meaning and scope. I encourage you to come with an idea, gave yourself time to dream about that, always remembering that dreams also require actions plans. Ideate. Plan. Act.

Original Contributions/ Works in Progress

As individual scholars/creative practitioners each of the Interseminar Fellows contributed a work or work-in-progress, demonstrating—not only the breadth—of the fields that made up our interdisciplinary efforts, but showing how the time-spent-together of the Interseminars has begun to thread throughout their continued projects.



D. Nicole Campbell
Department of Communication

*Abolitionist Speculations:
Imagining the Prison and Beyond*

.....

In the late summer of 2020, while on an intense lockdown for the coronavirus, I spent a great deal of time scrolling on social media. As many of us probably did. Patrisse Cullors, then co-leader of the Black Lives Matter movement, shared a post promoting the idea of prison abolition. The post was a comic created by Flynn Nicholls showcasing the work of Mariame Kaba, a well-known prison abolitionist and author. One panel illustrated prison walls and read “the prison system is a recent development and not as permanent as people think.” This comic made me question the institution that I had always taken for granted. Growing up with incarcerated family members, I had always known how it felt to interact with such a brutal and frustrating prison system, but never questioned it.

As I read more, I stumbled upon Angela Davis, one of the founders and probably the most infamous prison abolitionist. I read this discourse alongside my own research into the history of US prisons. While I found the movement to abolish prisons compelling, I needed to know more. I agreed with many of its principles, but I felt conflicted about its utopian-feel.

Thus, I have spent the last year studying the work of Angela Davis and other abolitionists to understand this movement. I find it invaluable for shifting people’s perspectives on criminality, the use of imprisonment as a punishment, and the underlying punitive principles that justify much of our behavior. Prison abolition is gaining

mainstream attention in our contemporary moment, but I found myself interested in how the movement started. According to historians, people have always questioned prisons, but the 1970s is a moment when these ideas manifested into an anti-prison movement.

In 1971, Angela Davis was arrested under false pretenses, and by 1972 she was acquitted and released, after a long and arduous trial. During her time incarcerated, a massive movement formed advocating for her freedom. She launched a speaking tour in 1972, delivering addresses across the nation and internationally to thank her supporters and galvanize a prison movement. She delivered the first speech at the Embassy Auditorium in Los Angeles in 1972. In what follows you will see an analysis of this address. I argue that Davis constructs a carceral imaginary, or a particular vision of what carcerality means in our culture, with various rhetorical strategies.

Now, I know what you are thinking - Angela Davis is an abolitionist, why would she construct a *carceral* imaginary rather than an abolitionist one, considering that abolitionists desire a world without prisons. Well, in my next draft of this essay, I argue that the carceral imaginary is actually one part of the abolitionist imagination. I am working on this piece currently, and it builds on the ideas from this essay to make a more robust argument about abolitionist discourse.



On June 4, 1972, in San Jose California, Angela Davis sat in a courtroom holding her breath. She was on trial for murder, kidnapping, and conspiracy. After a 13 week-long trial, and 13 hours of deliberation, the jury was ready to deliver their verdict. The court clerk announced the decision. “We the jury find the defendant Angela Y. Davis not guilty” for all three counts. The courtroom erupted in screaming and crying, as Judge Arnason clamored for order. A usually stoic Davis sobbed as she hugged her friend, Kendra Alexander.¹ After spending 16 months imprisoned for a crime she did not commit, she was free. Simultaneously, in Los Angeles, a crowd had gathered in and around the office that hosted the “Free Angela Davis” Committee. Cramming around a radio, her supporters also anxiously waited. When the announcement of her acquittal rang out, they too celebrated. As they spilled into the streets, a chorus of chants filled the air, “The Power of the People has Freed Angela! The Power of the People has freed Angela!”²

Five days later, on June 9, 1972, more than 1,500 people filled the Embassy Auditorium in Los Angeles to hear

¹ Angela Davis Acquitted on All Charges: Angela Davis Found Not Guilty By White Jury on All. By Earl Caldwell. Special to The New York Times New York Times (1923-); Jun 5, 1972; Black Studies Center pg. 1

² Angela Davis Freed by 'Power of the People' Gibson, Emily F Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-); Jun 8, 1972; Black Studies Center pg. A1.

Davis's first major speech since gaining her freedom.³ This speech was one of many that year, as she launched an international speaking tour. The tour was intended to thank her organizers, celebrate their victory, and transform the Free Angela Davis movement into a prison movement writ large.⁴ Davis hoped "to maintain the momentum that gathered around her freedom and use the energy to further the struggle on behalf of all prisoners."⁵ In this essay, I argue that through this speech Davis builds a carceral imagination. This carceral imagination constructs a new worldview for her audience – one that necessitates a prison movement. Davis uses three strategies to craft the carceral imagination: a prison(er) synecdoche, mythic time, and a conceptualization of freedom as collective action.

Angela Davis is a renowned prison abolitionist and one of the most prominent thinkers on the American criminal justice system. She is known for being a prolific writer, scholar, and activist.⁶ She was born to a middle-class family in Birmingham, Alabama in 1944, one of the

³ Angela Calls for the Transformation of Society Mazique, Robert J Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-); Jun 15, 1972; Black Studies Center pg. A2.

⁴ Angela Davis Launches U.S. Tour of Thanks: Strict Security in Effect ... Los Angeles Times (1923-1995); Jun 10, 1972; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times pg. A24.

⁵ Angela Davis, "Gates to Freedom." Transcript of speech delivered at the Embassy Auditorium in Los Angeles, June 9, 1972, <https://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/blackspeech/adavis.html>.

⁶ Alexander, Amy. *Fifty Black Women Who Changed America*. Kensington Publishing Corp., 1999.

most racially segregated cities in the country at the time. She grew up in Dynamite Hill - a neighborhood nicknamed for being a frequent target of Ku Klux Klan attacks - with her parents, Sallye and Frank Davis, and her three siblings. Both her parents were educators, and Angela's mother was an organizer in the Southern Negro Youth Congress, a Black civil rights organization with communist ideals.

Davis won a scholarship to study French at Brandeis University in Massachusetts. It was here that she first encountered Herbert Marcuse, the Frankfurt School philosopher who would come to be her mentor.⁷ She continued her education studying philosophy at the University of Frankfurt in Germany. In 1963, while abroad, Davis heard about the two young girls murdered by the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in her hometown; this marked an "important moment in Angela's political awakening, and she promptly returned to the United States to join the Civil Rights Movement."⁸ During this time, she earned her master's degree at the University of California San Diego and eventually returned to Germany to earn her Ph.D. at Humboldt University.

In 1969, Davis started teaching philosophy at the University of California-Los Angeles. Her appointment

⁷ <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/individuals/angela-davis>

⁸ Alexander, Amy. *Fifty Black Women Who Changed America*. Kensington Publishing Corp., 1999, 259.

as an assistant professor, however, was short lived. Her affiliation with the Communist Party had caught the eye of the Governor of California, Ronald Reagan. He issued a memorandum to the Board of Regents demanding she be fired. A court ruled the dismissal illegal, but Davis was again fired in 1970 for using “inflammatory rhetoric” in public speeches. By this time, she was an active member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Black Panther Party, and the American Communist Party. The press labeled her a “radical.” In 1970, her activist work took a turn as her affiliation with the Soledad Brothers led to her arrest. After being fired Davis joined the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee and became good friends with activist and writer George Jackson. The Soledad Brothers included three Black inmates, George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo, and John Clutchette. Their nickname stems from being charged with the murder of a white prison guard in Soledad Prison.

In August of 1970, when the brothers stood trial, Jonathan Jackson, George’s younger brother, launched an armed takeover of the Marin County courtroom in an attempt to free them. The judge, prosecutor, and several jurors were taken hostage. The episode ended with the death of four people, including Jonathan Jackson. The firearms Jackson used were registered to Angela Davis. The Marin County Superior Court Judge Peter Allen Smith issued a warrant for her arrest on August 14, 1970. She was charged with three capital offenses: conspiracy, kidnapping, and murder. Four days later, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover added Davis to the FBI’s Ten Most

Wanted Fugitive List. Davis fled California, but a few months later FBI agents found her in New York City. President Richard Nixon congratulated the FBI for the “capture of the dangerous terrorist Angela Davis.”⁹ When the news of Davis’s arrest came out, thousands of people started organizing, demanding her freedom.

The intense public response made Davis into a cultural icon during her 16 months in the New York Women’s House of Detention. By February 1971, more than 200 local committees in the United States, and 67 in foreign countries, had formed to free Davis. The *Soul City Times* reported “we must close ranks in the defense of Angela Davis. The Black community, the Chicano and Latino community, the campus antiwar movement, the women’s liberation movement, and especially the Black Student Unions, should unite in a common defense of Angela Davis.”¹⁰ She was certainly in the public eye. However, another event happened at this time that captured the nation’s attention.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, there was increasing alarm regarding the series of prison revolts erupting across the nation. In 1967, five prison riots occurred. In 1968, fifteen. In 1970, twenty-seven. 1971, thirty-seven. And in 1972, forty-eight riots broke out, a historical amount to occur in one year. The press characterized the events as examples of “lawlessness and violent criminality,” and it spurred on politicians’ clamors for law and order.

⁹ Angela Davis, *Angela Davis: Autobiography* (Haymarket Books, 2022).

¹⁰ *Soul City Times*, October 29, 1970, “An Attack on All.”

However, one of the most notorious riots shook the nation – the Attica Prison Uprising.¹¹

On September 9, 1971, prisoners at the Attica Correctional Facility in New York acted out against their hellish living conditions, lack of political rights, and racial discrimination. Nearly 2,200 inmates took over the prison as leverage for negotiating power with state officials. They held thirty-nine guards hostage. After four days of refusing to hear the prisoners out, the state police, National Guard, and prison guards regained control of the prison by force. The New York State Special Commission on Attica later characterized the event as “the bloodiest one-day encounter between Americans in this century.”¹²

Attica served as a catalyst for the many prison rebellions that followed. This is in part because the conditions at Attica were not unique. Prisoners across the country share a common struggle for better living conditions and political rights, and during this time the prisoner’s rights movement emerged in response to these conditions. It was in this context that Davis found herself imprisoned. Days after her acquittal and release, Davis addressed the public for the first time since gaining her freedom. In

¹¹ Robert T. Chase, *We Are Not Slaves: Rethinking the Rise of Carceral States through the Lens of the Prisoners' Rights Movement*, *Journal of American History*, Volume 102, Issue 1, June 2015, Pages 73–86.

¹² *Attica: The Official Report of the New York State Special Commission on Attica*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1972).

what follows, I provide a rhetorical analysis of this speech.

Prison(er) Synecdoche

In her 1972 address, Davis utilized synecdoche to make an argument about American society (the whole) by looking at the prison (the part). This serves as the foundation for the carceral imagination. She stated,

it has been said many times that one can learn a great deal about a society by looking towards its prisons. Look towards its dungeons and there you will see in concentrated and microcosmic form the sickness of the entire system. And today in the United States of America in 1972 there is something that is particularly revealing about the analogy between the prison and the larger society of which it is a reflection.

The prison in this way becomes the lens by which her audience should understand American society writ large. She anticipated that her audience may not care too much about the problems in prisons. After all, they are not in the prisons themselves, so why should they organize and advocate against them? This strategy allowed Davis to suggest to her audience that the problems with prisons are symptoms of the society they inhabit. Thus, her audience imagines America as a prison.

Later in the address, Davis repeated this idea saying, “by now it would seem more people should realize that such explosions of repression are not isolated aberrations in a society not terribly disturbing.” She argued that the incidents we see happening in the prisons, such as

violence, riots, unmet needs, are not random, isolated occurrences. Rather, they are symptoms of a “sick” society. She continued saying “none of these explosions emerged out of nothing. Rather, they all crystallized and attested to profound and extensive social infirmities.” This language of sickness continues, as Davis suggested that the incidents within the prison reveal the “profound and extensive social infirmities” of our society.

People are Not Free

Within this synecdoche is a comparison between those held within the prisons and those who are not. Davis claimed, “in a painfully real sense we are all prisoners of a society whose bombastic proclamations of freedom and justice for all are nothing but meaningless rhetoric.” Thus, she refuted her audience’s assumption that they are indeed ‘free.’ She continued,

Our condition here and now – the condition of all of us who are brown and black and working women and men – bears a very striking similarity to the condition of the prisoner. The wealth and the technology around us tells us that a free, humane, harmonious society lies very near. But at the same time it is so far away because someone is holding the keys and that someone refuses to open the gates to freedom. Like the prisoner we are locked up with the ugliness of racism and poverty and war and all the attendant mental frustrations and manipulations.

A society with racism, poverty, and war is not a free one. And those that live within that society, “locked up” with these issues, are not free either. Davis repeated this idea several more times, saying “our situation bears a very

excruciating similarity to the situation of the prisoner, and we must never forget this. For if we do, we will lose our desire for freedom and our will to struggle for liberation.” This part is especially significant because we see the strategy involved in this image. Davis convinced her audience that they are not already free as an impetus for ensuring that they work towards freedom.

We see this comparison extended again in the speech, as all people in American society are compared to prisoners, except wealthy white people. It is people of color and working-class people who share conditions with the prisoners. Davis argued,

As black people, as brown people, as people of color, as working men and women in general, we know and we experience the agony of the struggle for existence each day. We are locked into that struggle. The parallels between our lives and the lives of our sisters and brothers behind bars are very clear. Yet there is a terrifying difference in degree between life on this side of the bars and life on the other side. And just as we must learn from the similarities and acquire an awareness of all the forces which oppress us out here, it is equally important that we understand that the plight of the prisoner unfolds in the rock-bottom realms of human existence.

Here she also argued that it is equally important to work for our own freedom as it is to work for the freedom of those who are held in prisons. Thus, she strikes a balance between demonstrating the need of the prison movement to those who are not and those who are, incarcerated.

The rhetorical struggle Davis faced in making this argument is the ignorance of her audience. To successfully depict society as a prison and her audience as prisoners, her audience needed to have an image for comparison. Thus, Davis carefully crafted an image of the prison and prisoners in a way that aligned with her political purposes. She told her audience “I am returning from a descent together with thousands and thousands of our sisters and brothers into the ugly depths of society. I want to try to tell you a little something about those regions. I want to attempt to persuade you to join in the struggle to give life and breath to those who live sealed away from everything that resembles human decency.”

This framing of the state working in tandem with corporations to imprison people of color and poor people sets the stage for Davis to argue that prisons are political weapons of repression. Indeed, Davis defined prisons to her audience as “political weapons” that “function as means of containing elements in this society which threaten the stability of the larger system.” We see the synecdochical relationship highlighted once more.

In the address, we also see Davis extend her image of the prison, to the prisoner, to the “keepers of the keys.” She said,

we're also locked up with our dreams and visions of freedom, and with the knowledge that if we only had the keys – if we could only seize them from the keepers, from the Standard Oils, the General Motors and all the giant corporations, and of course from their protectors, the government – if we could only get our

hands on those keys we could transform these visions
and these dreams into reality. [applause]

Davis paints a picture of an oppressed prisoner, unjustly incarcerated. This image is one that John Sloop describes as characteristic of this historical moment. Sloop describes a dominant representation of the prisoner as “inmates should be neither imprisoned nor rehabilitated because their actions are indeed not “criminal.” Rather, such convicts are imprisoned as the result of an unfair and unjust system that ignores the relativity of moral systems and holds the dominant morality to be the correct morality.”¹³ Sloop claims that this representation “originates in and features arguments by and about revolutionary African American inmates such as George Jackson and Huey Newton; it is a persona that garners a considerable amount of interest and attention throughout the period.”¹⁴ It is not surprising then that this is the image of the prisoner that Angela Davis relies on. In this representation “black prisoners are generally depicted as being caught in the grasp of a violent and dictatorial system that treats them according to the norms of the dominant moral system ... leaving the guards and wardens with the appearance of brutes who imprison and punish others solely for the sin of difference.”¹⁵

¹³ John Sloop, *The Cultural Prison: Discourses, Prisoners, and Punishment* (The University of Alabama Press, 1996) 91.

¹⁴ Sloop, 91.

¹⁵ Sloop, 91.

Mythic Time

Finally, Davis's carceral imagination is situated in mythic time. By this I mean that the time frame she constructed is prolonged, extending far beyond the lifetime of her or her audience. Mythic time serves several purposes. It allowed her to de-naturalize the permanence of the prison. It also provided a way to reconcile the immediate needs of the present with the long-term vision for the future. And, as I will discuss in the next section, it provided the frame for her conceptualization of freedom; as an ongoing, generationally enduring journey.

One of the main indicators of mythic time is her reference to millenniums. With vivid language, Davis described the experience of incarceration. She said,

...as they awake to the oppressive sight of impenetrable concrete and steel. As they awake to the harsh banging of heavy iron doors opening and closing at the push of a button. As they awake each morning to the inevitable jangling of the keepers' keys – keys which are a constant reminder that freedom is so near yet so far away. Millenniums and millenniums away.”

This anaphora mimics the repetitive cycle of ongoing days. The repetition of waking creates the feeling of days passing by, of time continuing, yet freedom is still 'millenniums' away. A millennium is a thousand years. Thus, Davis articulated a freedom that is at once close enough to imagine, but thousands and thousands of years away from realizing. The reference to multiple

millenniums gave Davis's statement regarding a "long struggle" a new meaning.

She claimed that "the prison movement must be integrated into our struggles for black and brown liberation, and to our struggles for an end to material want and need. A very long struggle awaits us." This idea of a long struggle is repeated throughout the address, as Davis reminded her audience "that victories are possible, though the struggles they demand are long and arduous." However, the struggle she articulated is situated in a time span over the course of thousands of years, which encouraged her audience to think beyond their lifetime.

Our position within mythic time is also reflected in how Davis articulated the prison movement as a project of humanity, spanning generations. She said,

For our vow will be fulfilled only when we, or our children, or our grandchildren will have succeeded in seizing the reins of history, in determining the destiny of mankind and creating a society where prisons are unheard of because the racism and the exploitative economic arrangement which reproduces want for the many and wealth for the few will have become relics of a past era. [*applause*]

This excerpt makes clear that the vision for the prison movement is not limited to her immediate audience. The vow, Davis said, to the 'commitment of freedom' will only be fulfilled when we, or future generations successfully "determine the history of mankind." The

scope of impact for this vision is broad. It is mythic in nature; it expands far beyond America in 1972.

Mythic time is also valuable because Davis can characterize prisons as artifacts of the past. She invited her audience to imagine their present moment as one of the past. Davis created a temporally inverted perspective for her audience; that of an ancestor looking back from a future moment, a moment where “prisons are unheard of.” Prisons are “massive medieval fortresses and dungeons,” which suggests to her audience that they are from a previous era.

We see the prisons characterized as past when she states, “let our elation merge with a pledge to carry on this fight until a time when all the antiquated ugliness and brutality of jails and prisons linger on only as a mere, a mere memory of a nightmare.” Or when she says, “many of us can already envision a world unblemished by poverty and alienation, one where the prison would be but a vague memory, a relic of the past.” The language is not only past, but of long ago. The prison, which is so prevalent in this present moment, will one day be barely remembered.

This is a powerful rhetorical move because it resists the assumed presence of prisons in the future. It de-naturalizes their permanence. Moreover, the language Davis presents a world without prisons as an inevitability. Her audience imagines themselves in a future moment whereby prisons are already dismantled. Thus, she makes this world a possibility, but more than,

within the timeframe of mythic time, Davis can claim it as a certainty.

The last purpose that mythic time serves is to allow Davis to reconcile the needs of the present with the vision of the future. Through this prolonged temporality, Davis can oscillate between the present and future. The carceral imagination is encompassing at once of now and of then. In our immediate moment, “we should take on the task of freeing as many of our sisters and brothers as possible.” Even though, Davis admits, “it would be very romantic and idealistic to entertain immediate goals of tearing down all the walls of all the jails and prisons throughout this country.” Situated in mythic time, Davis accounted for the eventual goals and immediate needs of the movement.

With an expanded understanding of time, Davis claims that “we must demand the ultimate abolition of the prison system along with the revolutionary transformation of this society.” “However, however,” Davis continues, “within the context of fighting for fundamental changes, there is something else we must do. We must try to alter the very fabric of life behind walls as much as is possible through struggle, and there are a thousand concrete issues around which we can build this movement.” With amplification, she proceeded to list of many policy issues that people could organize around. These issues included...

uncensored and unlimited mail privileges, visits of the prisoners' choice, minimum wage levels in prison, adequate medical care – and for women this is

particularly important when you consider that in some prisons a woman, a pregnant woman has to fight just to get one glass of milk per day. ... Literature must be uncensored. Prisoners must have the right to school themselves as they see fit. If they wish to learn about Marxism, Leninism, and about socialist revolution, then they should have the right to do it. *[applause]*

Thus, she provided an outlet for people to work for in this moment, and one which works towards *eventual* societal transformation. This will ensure that her audience maintains hope. Yet, she seemed to suggest that the ideals of the future should not be lost. We cannot be satisfied with only utopian imaginings. She says, “many of us can already envision a world unblemished by poverty and alienation, one where the prison would be but a vague memory, a relic of the past.” “*But we also have immediate demands*” Davis continues, “for justice right now.” Davis tells us that while we can imagine the future, we have work to do now. We have to focus on our present. That is where she leaves her audience. She concludes her address in the present, with an orientation towards the future.

Freedom as Collective Action

The final strategy that Davis used to construct a carceral imagination is conceptualizing freedom as collective action. There are various dimensions of freedom deployed in this carceral imagination.

When Davis talked of freedom, it is framed as a *doing* of some kind. For example, she said “we also have immediate demands for justice right now, for fairness,

and for room to think and live and act.” In this sense, it is a freedom ‘to’ rather than freedom ‘from.’ Freedom to think, live, and act. This idea shows up elsewhere when Davis said “For only then can freedom take on a truly human meaning. Only then can we be free to live and to love and be creative human beings.” Again, we see that freedom is living and loving. It is being human. She referenced her time incarcerated, saying “from my cell I could look down upon the crowded streets of Greenwich Village, almost tasting the freedom of movement and the freedom of space which had been taken from me and all my sisters in captivity.” Even in this instance, it is ‘freedom of movement’ that imprisonment makes one desire.

The dominant metaphor in this speech, that of “seizing the keys to the gates to freedom” also characterizes freedom as an action. However, Davis is clear on who is capable of ‘seizing the keys.’ She said,

My freedom was achieved as the outcome of a massive, a massive people's struggle. Young people and older people, black, brown, Asian, Native American and white people, students and workers. The people seized the keys which opened the gates to freedom. And we've just begun. The momentum of this movement must be sustained, and it must be increased. Let us try to seize more keys and open more gates and bring out more sisters and brothers so that they can join the ranks of our struggle out here.

The people seized the keys. The people as a collective, not as individuals. It was only through their collective organizing, through the “people’s struggle” that they

were able to advocate for Davis's freedom in an impactful way. She said as much in her opening line to the speech. "It's really a wonderful feeling to be back among the people. [*applause, cheers*] To be back among all of you who fought so long and so hard, among all of you who actually achieved my freedom."

The role of 'the people' within the carceral imagination is emphasized throughout the address but comes up specifically when she described her personal experience with imprisonment. "I recall too well that in the bleak silence and solitude of a Marin County isolation cell, you, the people, were my only hope, my only promise of life," said Davis. She also greatly attributed her freedom to the organizing of the Free Angela Davis movement, saying "as I was saved and freed by the people so we must save and free these beautiful, struggling brothers." Thus, it is only 'the people' who have the capacity to free Davis and other prisoners.

Another key aspect of freedom is the state in which it occurs, which is "in struggle." Being 'in struggle' is how the collective people can achieve freedom in the carceral imagination. Davis told her audience that if they forget their shared condition with the prisoner, their "desire for freedom and will to struggle for liberation" might be lost. In this sense, freedom and liberation are tied to the action of struggling. When Davis articulated her relationship to her audience it is "in struggle." For example, she states, "You intervened and saved my life, and now I am back among you, and as I was wrested away from you in struggle, so likewise I return in

struggle. [applause] I return in struggle with a very simple message, a very simple message: We've just begun our fight. [applause] We've just begun.”

We see the emphasis on collective action here as well. For Davis was taken from the people and held in solitary confinement. In one sense she gained her freedom because she was no longer imprisoned, but she also returned to the collective. The collective people *in action* have the capacity for freedom. She says, “the thousands and millions of people throughout the world came together *in struggle* and saved me from the fate the government had planned as an example to all of you who were disposed to resist.” This is a persuasive move because if freedom is rooted in struggle, political organizing is freedom. Joining a prison movement is freedom. The work that Davis asks of her audience is hard and requires a long-standing commitment. By tying freedom to the state of being in struggle, she implies that freedom is found in the journey. In the pursuit of freedom, they experience it, not in an outcome at the end of the struggle.

This ties into the final component of freedom which is that it is “so near, yet so far away.” This idea is repeated throughout the address, and it reveals a great deal. Davis said, “Freedom is so near, yet at the same time it is so far away. And this thought invokes in me the same sensation I felt as I reflected on my own condition in a jail in New York City.” Thus, freedom is an ongoing state, not a place you arrive at. If imprisonment is stagnant, unmoving, then freedom is active, movement.

Conceptualizing freedom as “so near yet so far away,” has a similar effect to mythic time. It allowed her to reconcile the need for people to act immediately, but not expect the immediate transformation of society. She needed her audience to know that change takes time, so freedom is ‘so far,’ yet she needed them to have hope, so it is ‘so near.’ Finally, freedom is also indicative of the need for not just action, but collective action. She said that the “jangling of the keeper’s keys” are a “constant reminder that freedom is so near, yet so far away.” The nearness stems from the possibility of freedom if ‘the people’ are ‘in struggle.’ Yet, it is far because to do so is a challenging endeavor that requires sustained effort and work.

As abolitionist politics enter mainstream debates about the American criminal justice system, many are asking “what is prison abolition?” It is important to understand this discourse of our contemporary moment and of our past. This essay provides insight into the abolitionist thinking of Angela Davis. It argues that in a significant 1972 address, Davis created a carceral imagination that shifted the worldview of her audience. Using synecdoche, she claimed that the conditions inside the prison reflected the state of the society outside of it. The “free people” of American democracy were not actually free, she suggested. Rather, their lives looked much like that of the prisoners. Thus, the carceral imagination provided a new social structure, that of the prison. Situated in mythic time, the carceral imagination leads us to see the prison movement as a necessary and lasting effort, spanning far beyond our lifetimes.



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The Speculative Map

“Lo que quede de aldea en América ha de despertar.”
(What remains of the village in America must rouse itself).

José Martí, *Nuestra America*.

The title of the Humanities Research Institute's call was *Imagining Otherwise: Speculation in the Americas*. With this text called “The speculative map,” I conclude a year of personal and collective work around this theme. I am a Chilean woman raised in the landscapes of southern Chile. I recognized myself as *Americana*. Through this text, I reflect on what those two concepts mean to me: speculation and America.

I took the text *Nuestra América* by José Martí as a starting point. He calls to what “remains of a village” to rouse. This provokes some questions. Where are those remains located? When America was a village? What is America today if it is not a village?

I connect this with what Glissant mentions in his book *El Discurso Antillano*. “The West is not a place but a project” (Glissant, 1981). America is not a country, not a continent, but a project, an idea, an imaginary that has always been articulated under the shades of empires. Eduardo O’Gorman also developed this notion in his book *La invención de America*. “Not only was America invented and not discovered, as we believe we have proved, but it was invented in the image of its inventor” (O’Gorman, 1961). This invented America has been developed based on the colonization and expropriation of natural resources and the privatization of life and its

interrelationships. In that sense, America has been (and continues to be) a speculative project based on value extraction, plunder, and erasure. The result has been the subordination of specific spaces and bodies through the expansion of the capitalist paradigm across the continent by force and the creation of new imaginaries of consumption, displacement, and de-territorialization.

In that sense, by situating America as something imaginary, we can comprehend that it is a construction based on cycles of capital speculation since Spanish and Portuguese colonization to current extractive economies. However, it is also equally significant that it permits us to blur geopolitical borders and speculate about conceiving ourselves and our geographies in flexible and porous terms. Speculation in the Americas helps us to create spaces that challenge cartographic categories and imagine new territories connected by meanings and memories. Through this exercise, we reclaim the possibility of understanding the continent otherwise, challenging border hierarchies and opening an ontological space for constructing complex geographies. We must encounter the vulnerabilities and violence that cross us, that are actualized and recreated through time, to find mechanisms that allow us to link these experiences and create forms of alliance and solidarity that enable us to go beyond the false division between the Global North and South.

What is it that unites America today? What components allow us to connect the continent? How can we create speculative connections that enable us to link America

beyond the geographical, but perhaps in a fictional dimension, creating and provoking solidarities from the sites of organized abandonment (Harvey, 1989; Wilson Gilmore, 2020)?

Through this text, I invite us to think and speculate about the Americas from its places of extraction and dispossession. Spaces of extraction and ecological devastation help us to build a political imagination from resistance and re/existence. Following Franco Berardi, the idea of provoking concatenations and conjunctions, sometimes constellations that do not follow a particular design but as a creative act of something singular, unique, and unrepeatable (Berardi, 2016). Echoing this, I invite us to create a speculative map, which allows us to build other types of associations between geographies crossed by race, class, and gender colonial and capitalist violence.

Bolívar Echeverría, paraphrasing Walter Benjamin, said that if we brush the history of capitalist modernity against the grain, we will find not only its barbarities but also the innumerable forms of survival and systematic reproduction of everyday resistance. Those everyday performative elements of resistance to capitalist modernity have made it possible to preserve the use-value of the multidimensional reality of non-modern forms of organization in the face of capitalist and colonial productivity value (Echeverría, 1995).

Where are those forms of everyday resistance? Are those the “remains of a village” that Martí called to raise?

To answer those questions, I want to share the experiences of some places that helped me understand the entanglements of racialized violence, class, gender, and colonialism, but also of resistance and political imagination. Analyzing how these entanglements interact, in bodies, in space, and across time allows us to grapple with the different layers of historical oppression that emerge through the work of embodied memories.



Image 1: Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui in conversation with Gicella Saldivia from the Salvemos Mar Brava Movement. Daniela Morales, November 2018.

This is the beach of Mar Brava, in Chiloé. This place is fundamental for the subsistence of many families that live in the surroundings, not only because of the extraction of resources from the sea but also because it sustains a vital ecosystem. This wetland is fundamental for the maritime practices of the communities that live there. It is also a Ramsar site, identified as a fundamental place for the transit and migration of birds.

In this area, a private company has authorization to install a wind farm of about 70 power generation towers, energy that will not benefit residents but will go north to the mining industry. In this place, the communities and families have been resisting the installation of this project for almost 15 years because it will significantly alter their ways of life. As part of the organization Salvemos Mar Brava, we have carried out different actions on that beach, which have given us strength but also fed the legal strategy that has kept the project from being built.

We invited the Bolivian thinker Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui to this place, where we walked, talked, and reflected on this space and the importance of its protection. One of the things she said during that visit, and that has kept me thinking since then, was that “Nowadays, we are living in that tremendous, perverse, and poisonous form of domination which is that of sweetening words to make the bitterest realities pass underneath, which are those that imply permanent destruction and destitution, that is

to say, to remove us from our place in the world, and that is the place to which we must cling and articulate networks to be able to resist. That is why I think that through micro-political actions, reiterated, redundant, and extremely extended over a vast space through small points of an extensive network, we can have some glimmer of hope in the challenging moments we are living through. Not to renounce the possibility of struggle but to know how to calibrate our forces and articulate solidarities between different communities and focal points of struggle.” (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2018).



Image 2: Juan Manuel Castro, Malleco National Reserve park ranger, crossing the Renaico River. Daniela Morales, June 2021.

This is the Malleco National Reserve. This place stands out for its nature, but also because once it was a forestry and agricultural settlement, with many peasants and residents living and working there. After the 1973 coup d'état, their relatives were killed, and the whole area was dismantled and converted into a forestry industry.

With Prof. Magdalena Novoa, we are working with the Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos de Mulchén, led by daughters, sons, and wives of the eighteen forestry workers that were killed during the Chilean military dictatorship, in the recovery their memories and in the development of a memorial project¹⁶.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the coup d'état in Chile. In this coup, a democratically elected socialist president, Salvador Allende, was deposed by a right-wing general, Augusto Pinochet. The coup d'état and the subsequent 17-year dictatorship were possible thanks to the intervention of the United States, which provided direct funding to the military and civilian coup leaders to carry out the bombing of La Moneda and subsequently sustain the regime of terror, death, torture and disappearance throughout the country. The United States supported Pinochet in implementing the legal and economic reforms to dismantle the social state system implemented in Chile since the 1930s to promote a neoliberal state based on the Chicago Boys' postulates and

¹⁶ This work is part of the research project “Wounded Landscapes: Reclaiming land, gendered memories, and cultural rights in the Wallmapu”, conducted by Prof. Magdalena Novoa, from the Department of Regional and Urban Planning.

Milton Friedman's ideas. Thus, in the years following the coup d'état, the military regime privatized all public companies, which were almost given away to the families collaborating with the regime. The case of Chile is not unique, and the intervention of the United States in Latin American countries has been sustained over time.

As I say this, I remember when I had the opportunity to walk through the Reserve with the members of the Agrupacion, realizing how this whole space is connected to different forms of violence and resistance throughout America. I think of connections between the Malleco National Reserve and the situation of abandonment in Puerto Rico, the relationship with the prison complex in the United States, my physical proximity to Chicago, the city where those who justified the coup were trained, the disappearance of so many women during the dictatorship whose bodies we still do not know where they are and how this connects with the disappearance of women in Mexico, the violence that the neoliberal system has meant against indigenous bodies, in the same way as they were relegated in the United States. These are all connections I make with the research topics of some of my Speculation in the Americas fellows. We must make these meaningful connections between diverse geographies to create new ways of resisting and repairing.

In final words, through this text, I wanted to reflect on how to shed light on the relationship between capitalist speculation and creative speculation in the Americas and how the latter can help us create routes of solidarity between colonized and neo-colonized nations. How to

make speculation (and interdisciplinarity) not irrelevant but a political, practical, and activist tool (Gilmore Wilson, 2020, p. 37).

Finally, can speculation provoke concrete forms of reparation? I do not have the capacity nor the tools to give that answer. However, I do believe that by triggering the linkages between diverse forms of violence and extractivism, we can open ways to find reparation techniques. Echoing the Krannert Museum's "Fragmented History" exhibition, I think that in the same way in which an object has been extracted, decontextualized, sold, broken, exhibited, and exoticized, we can think speculatively of an America that is united and reconstructed through its fractures. Through its various pieces and fragments, a new meaning is reconfigured, different and diverse from the original.

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Adanya Gilmore
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Speculation Scores

The following is a series of movement scores developed and written by Adanya Gilmore in rehearsal process with two U of I undergraduate students, Jaden Monroe and Jaymes Crowder-Acres. Each of these scores can be done in a group or individually. They are inspired by photos of Black life taken from an oracle deck (to find the oracle deck, you can go to the Instagram @grandmababyapothecary). Each card from the oracle deck is often represented by an object or a concept significant to Black culture. To bring about further research on “speculation,” the photos brought about images of Black life in the historical to embody in the present and future.

In one of our rehearsals, I passed around my oracle deck, “Grandma Baby’s Black Gold Lenormand” card deck. Each dancer chose a card we wanted to embody and study and we danced for each other. After improvising for two minutes each as our card, we taught each other how to do what we did.

broom

“you are a broom.” A body can sweep. For two minutes, rake, draw, brush, clean, and scrub across the floor. Do this not practically but as if it’s the ritual of Sunday morning, when your mother has put on gospel music on the house speakers and it’s time for you to do your chores.

tower

For two minutes, perform with a sturdy base of the body and leaves atop. Change movement quality as the seasons change, and morph shape with the weather like storms, heat, and cold.

house

What is a home? What brings comfort? For two minutes, embody a home life. Move as the structure, the routine and quality of home.

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Beatriz Jiménez

Department of Spanish and Portuguese

*A New Voice at the Forefront: The Journey of Mothers
in Search for their Tesoros in Fernanda Valadez's Sin
Señas Particulares (2020)*

When discussing violence in Mexico, it is important to ask oneself where it is coming from. In the book, *Drug Cartels Do Not Exist: Narco-trafficking and Culture in the US and Mexico* by Oswaldo Zavala he signals how the discourse surrounding violence in Mexico has revolved around trafficking organizations. He argues “trafficking organizations may generate violence, but... this violence is more a symptom of state policing strategies than the criminal action of the narcos themselves” (4). The discourse used by the Mexican government is what has influenced the language used in journalism and the news which ultimately has led to the way that media portrayed this ongoing crisis. On screen the focus was on the narco image instead of the policies that the state created to generate the violence. More importantly, we need to ask ourselves who the victims of violence have been the last 25 years. And whose stories are accessible to Mexican and international audiences about this phenomenon. What does it mean to imagine a film that is focused on amplifying the voices of the victims instead of the narco image that has permeated the screen? And finally, how can cinema help us imagine otherwise? One way is by presenting stories we would not hear otherwise, those of the victims.

According to the “Registro Nacional de Personas Desaparecidas y No Localizadas”, 22,169 people went missing in 2022. From January 1, 2020, to June 27,

2023, 82,563 people have gone missing (Versión Pública RNPDNO). This is a new record of missing people during the presidency of Andrés Manuel López Obrador which is not over. In fact, it surpasses the number of disappeared people during Felipe Calderon's and Peña Nieto's presidencies. President López Obrador has justified these numbers stating that there have been modifications in the ways that disappearances are being counted. The biggest difference, he notes, is that they are rightfully being registered (Chavez). The disappearances have been correlated with organized crime since the war on drugs was launched by former president Felipe Calderon in 2006. This was an attempt to crack down on the cartels' control which meant that "...[his] government sent more than 6,700 troops -- soldiers, marines and federal police -- to his home state of Michoacan to launch his fight against organized crime" (Hernandez). Eventually, he sent soldiers all over the country. According to Nina Lakhani and Erubiel Tirado, "...the biggest costs have been humans: since 2007, almost 200,000 people have been murdered and more than 28,000 reported as disappeared". The numbers have been climbing. This is the discourse that state officials have used in order to justify the way they've dealt with the violence when in reality Felipe Calderon's actions during his presidency in 2006-2012 caused an increase in violence (Zavala, 28).

Family members are left to wonder whether their friend, child, sister, etc. have been killed or recruited into organized crime. One of the major obstacles for family members is that they struggle to find the bodies of their loved ones, and many do not give up until they find them, even if it is just to give them a proper burial. Some members are not as lucky and only find pieces of clothing or objects their loved ones carried with them before their forced disappearance. These stories have been shared through different mediums including documentary, photography, and literature, but of particular interest to me is cinema. It is important to evaluate the way these films shape not only the national perception of crime in Mexico, but also internationally.

In the film, *Identifying Features* (Valadez, 2020), director Fernanda Valadez tells the story of a mother, Magdalena, in search of her son's body after he goes missing in his journey to reach the U.S. Her son, Jesús was traveling with his friend, Rigo. Their mothers, Magdalena and Chuya, look at pictures of bodies found, and they realize that Rigo's body is in the book of images. They do not have any information on Jesús though. Valadez weaves in two additional subplots in the film; one of a doctor who is also looking for her son who went missing after making a trip to visit some friends and a second subplot of a young man who is deported from the U.S and is forced to return to Mexico. The

protagonist, who is Jesus' mother, Magdalena, meets the doctor whose name is not mentioned and the young man, Miguel on two different occasions. The film shows how all three are living the effects of the corruption of the Mexican state and the cartel related violence. In the film, Valadez blurs who the real enemy is, to point out that there is a bigger enemy than the cartels themselves and that people of all classes and races are impacted differently, but in reality, no one is exempt from the negative effects of a neoliberalist society.

It is important to consider the impacts of the presence of drug cartels and how the general population is impacted. Joel Wallman and David Shirk examine Mexico's drug violence and state, "One factor inarguably facilitating the proliferation of drug-trafficking organizations in Mexico has been the complicity of government and law enforcement personnel, as well as the cohesiveness and strength of the overall state apparatus, especially since the 1940s" (1358). Violence is rooted in the system and has been used to suppress students and women. The government has failed to protect the most vulnerable, and students and women have been many of the victims of state actions.

Representations of violence due to drug cartels have been present in films and tv shows. Unlike others, Valadez does not follow the narco tropes present in the

media and instead focuses on the ways that mothers and young men deal with the violence in their surroundings. She provides a space for subaltern discourses to achieve empathy with family members of those who have disappeared. By doing this, spectators in Mexico can sympathize to the trauma that these mothers undergo. In an interview with IMCINE, she was asked why she chose fiction to share this topic and responded that fiction films allow spectators to be in the present, while a documentary is only testimony. She acknowledges the importance of documentary and recording specific cases, but a feature film allows spectators to be in the moment following the characters in their journey. It is a story that does not end when it is done being viewed.

Analyzing films allows for a greater understanding of how communities can archive their struggles as alternative sites of history and racial formation. According to Stuart Hall, representations contain meanings that need to be deconstructed for us to analyze power. He argues that “Cultural Studies has to analyze certain things about the constitutive and political nature of representation itself, about its complexities, about the effects of language, about textuality as a site of life and death” (273). By analyzing the representations of the disappearances, one can better understand the different problems that exacerbate this phenomenon. It also reveals all the obstacles family members need to undergo

to continue the fight for the search of their missing loved ones. Hall is also concerned with the way culture influences politics. In other words, he is concerned about the different superstructures that directly affect the way culture is constructed and the way power is sustained. In the film *Identifying Features*, the fear of reporting violence constraints those to look for justice. Despite the failure of the bus that Jesús and Rigo were on to make it to its destination to the border, it was not reported. Magdalena was constantly warned to stop her search if she didn't want to put herself in danger. These different superstructures, including the bus company, migrant shelters, and police stations uphold the government's control in placing a stop for the search of their loved ones, preventing them from finding an object that can trace them back to the missing person. One of the biggest themes in documentaries about disappeared people is the negligence and lack of help from authorities. Those who look and make progress towards finding their family members are the families themselves or the collectives that have been created to find loved ones.

Analyzing the power structures isn't enough; it is important to view the different ideologies that sustain social systems but also how marginalized groups can use their own discourses to destabilize and resist those systems. In the case of the film, Magdalena's story is

very familiar to many, and the film brings awareness to the real enemy and cause of violence in Mexico: The Mexican government. By Magdalena insisting on finding her son despite people along the way suppressing her desire, she resists the system that tries to silence her to simply forget her son and move on with her life. She puts herself in danger to do the work of the police forces to get some closure. In this way, cinema is a powerful weapon that can critique the systems that oppress and silence the voices of those family members of the disappeared. Like Samanta Ordoñez states “film studies can make significant contributions to the critique of neoliberal structures of power and capital acquisition by introducing nuanced, politicized analyses of specific aesthetic strategies and larger systemic patterns of cultural representation” (14). In other words, film studies can allow spectators to understand the complexity of issues like the drug cartels by taking into consideration why they’ve become more powerful. By doing this, different groups can unite to give each other hope to combat the structures that are impacting the conditions for traveling to the U.S in the first place, but also the dangers of going missing even in the case of visiting your friends. *Identifying Features* is an example of ways that a critique of neoliberal structures of power can be examined while making the Mexican state accountable for the violence on the victims of the drug cartel and state violence.

Cinema also allows space where community building occurs. In *Identifying Features*, Magdalena's journey wouldn't have been possible without the support of those around her to try and construct the real story of her son's disappearance. In Mexico there are collectives that dedicate themselves to finding bodies of the disappeared. One of these collectives is named "Rastreadoras". It is made up of primarily mothers who "...scour the city's surrounding countryside searching for the bodies of desaparecidos—the disappeared—men and women, usually in their twenties or thirties, victims of cartel-related violence" (Zatarain). Women have come together through their shared pain of a family member going missing and have used that pain to help identify bodies that can bring family members tranquility, even if it isn't theirs. The women refer to the bodies as *tesoros* or treasures because of the significance each body has to family members. For the women, these bodies are more than statistics, they are humans who have undergone violence and they place themselves in the shoes of their family members to treat the bodies with care. Because the people they find are dead, their subjectivity does not end there. They don't want these bodies to be forgotten so they try to find the person's family members. The title of the film, *Sin señas particulares* or *Identifying Features* can refer to the heartless term that forensics use when dealing with a body without scars or birthmarks to

identify the body (Diaz de la Vega). Forensics look for very particular identifying features of a body while the family members are not only looking for a body but someone's son, sister, partner, etc. If bodies aren't recognized in Mexico, their bodies are taken to a general grave. This dehumanizing process of forgetting a body just because it has not been claimed reveals the goals of the Mexican state, to ignore the continuation of violence of its family members by not allowing them answers to their family members' disappearance. The bodies become another statistic to the Mexican government.

The film depicts how mothers need to grapple with either acknowledging the death of their loved ones or putting their lives in danger to get the fullest story possible of their loved one's whereabouts. In fact, in the film a doctor whose name is not mentioned during the whole film, receives a phone call during surgery to identify her son. She hops on a plane and as she sees her son's body, she states he is unrecognizable. She has no option but to claim his body and she must trust that the blood exams they did on the body match her blood. The same moment that the doctor is recognizing her son's body, Magdalena is also called to see if she can recognize any objects in their album of objects of missing people that belonged to her son, Jesús. The spectators learn about Olivia's son's disappearance through the encounter with Magdalena. During this

scene, the camera jumps from mother to mother. While the doctor is reading the documents to Magdalena, the focus is on her. Despite listening to Oliva's voice, the emphasis is on Magdalena. This sheds light to differences in social class. Valadez decides to give more agency to Magdalena by making her the focus of the camera through close up shots. Valadez wants spectators to sympathize with Magdalena and see her pain. Magdalena does not have the same resources as the doctor to hop on a plane to recognize the body. The film focuses on Magdalena's journey by bus and foot to bring awareness to how different classes are impacted. The reason that Magdalena even meets Olivia is because she is frantically going through the papers she was given. Olivia recognizes she is struggling, and Magdalena tells her she cannot understand the documents. The film points out a wider issue at stake that those who do not have the resources to find their families often sign the papers without knowing what they are signing. The fact that Magdalena did not receive help through the agency only reveals the lack of resources and assistance for the lower class. It is harder for those in rural areas, like Magdalena, to make the trip because that not only means spending money to make the trip, but she also loses the money she could have been earning. To her, finding her son does not have a price, but she isn't able to receive closure like Olivia has.

Valadez shows how the women in the film try to inspire each other to work against the system that prevents them from finding the bodies of their loved ones. When the doctor meets Magdalena, she tells her, “No importa lo que le digan, no cometa el mismo error” [It does not matter what they tell you, don’t make the same mistake] (24:26). Her son went missing four years ago and his body had been found just two weeks ago. She regrets not continuing the search for her son because she believed she could have found him alive if it weren’t for her giving up. Her story motivates Magdalena to not sign the papers the state gave her. The papers stated that she recognized a suitcase that her son carried with him. The papers also stated she recognized that her son will be declared dead due to the object found. An object alone is not enough to jump to the conclusion that the person is dead. A missing body for the police means that there is potential that the body was burned and there is no way of finding it, which on their end concludes the search. For the mothers, a missing body only gives them hope to know that their loved one is not dead. That slight hope to be reunited with their loved one is what drives them to continue searching.

There are actors that break away from participating in upholding the structures that suppress the voices of the family members within these superstructures, and collaboration is completed through community building.

Magdalena receives financial help from her friend Chuya, Rigo's mother, in hopes that she will find her son alive unlike herself. Later in her journey when Magdalena travels to the bus company where her son took the bus, she asks questions about the specific route and is recommended to stop. She is silenced and ends up with more questions than answers. She enters the bathroom stall to count the money she has left which also points out she is from the working class. During this moment a woman enters and approaches the stall that Magdalena is in. The camera blurs the edges of the shot to place an emphasis on the center. A woman stands in front of the stall, but all that is shown is her hand. The anonymous woman tells her to not ask about missing buses because she doesn't know who can be hearing her. This implies that there are accomplices that are aware of the current situation and do nothing to report these incidents. She proceeds to tell her that many buses have gone missing and there are times where the buses only return with the luggage of the passengers. She also tells her that they keep the luggage in a warehouse, but that information is never given to anyone. This sequence consists of three shots. The first shot is of the woman leaning on the stall but all you can see is her arm and the second shot is of the feet of the anonymous woman at a high angle of the woman's heels. The next shot is of Magdalena looking through the crack of the bathroom door listening attentively. The anonymity of this woman

is important because she is putting herself in danger by giving her this information. Despite knowing the consequences of what can occur to her, she decides to not participate in the system that ignores the problems that are occurring. She even gives her the name of a person who might know more information and works in a migrant shelter. The location of the sequence is significant because it happens in the bathroom. The women's restroom is a private place that only women have access to. It is a safe place to talk about what is repressed by the bus officials. It is also a place that men do not have access to and therefore is a violent free zone.

One of the mechanisms that Valadez uses to critique the Mexican state is through the anonymity of the drug cartels and the police forces to place a greater agency on the women looking for their sons. Although some may argue that by making them anonymous, it can be seen as a way of protecting the officials and drug cartel members, it calls for spectators to avoid putting a blame on a specific sector as the cause of all the violence. It makes the spectators realize that this issue is rooted in corruption and complicity of structures that uphold those values. It also makes the spectators consider how drug cartels have gained power through the actions of the Mexican government. Valadez wants spectators around the world to see the suffering of these mothers to make sure we are not complicit in upholding those structures.

During the film, men are the ones in a position of power. Despite never seeing these men, their voices are heard. The film begins with Magdalena's voice recounting the story of what was last known of Jesús and Rigo. The camera is placed in front of the women and the spectators are placed in the gaze of the police officer. Valadez wants the spectators to confront the gaze that the police have and eliminates the gaze using close ups of Magdalena and Chuya. Valadez focuses on the emotions of the women and not the cold emotions of the officers. At this point the spectators do not know the causes of the missing bodies until Rigo's dad takes Magdalena to the district attorney's office. As he is driving, the diegetic sound of a truck's engine heightens as it pulls next to his truck. The trucks' music heightens as well, and Magdalena exchanges looks with the men. The faces of these men are blurred, and the spectators do not have access to their faces. A close up shot of Magdalena reveals the fear she faces as this truck tries to pass them up. Although silence persists during this scene, there is no talk about who these men are in the truck. Because of the intense look of the men, it can be assumed they are members of a drug cartel. At a later point Magdalena is with an official of the district attorney's office and he is showing her objects and articles of clothing that have been found where human bodies have been burned. Magdalena recognizes Jesús' bag, which she packed for him, in the images being shown to her. He states that the

bag is the closest thing they will have in identifying him. The close up shot of Magdalena's face reveals the deep pain she is undergoing knowing that the officials will no longer look for her son. Valadez wants to shift the focus onto the women to show how they deal with the trauma that is being placed onto them by the state by moving the focus on the men.

The second subplot of the film is worth examining and reveals how men are not exempt from the suffering of a neoliberalist society. While Magdalena's journey is being told, Miguel's new journey back to Mexico is simultaneously intertwined in the film. Through the use of long shots of the desolate land and empty streets, the silence reveals the lonesome journey both Magdalena and Miguel need to undergo to get back to their loved ones. A shot of immigration officers and the border marks the shift of location in the film. A shot of a helicopter over the border shows the policing of immigrant bodies. Miguel's story is introduced through a judge that is reading his removal from the U.S due his improper entry. Spectators once again are not shown this person. The camera remains on Miguel. The medium shot reveals his disappointment in being caught by ICE. The camera tracks Miguel's entry into Mexico by foot while the suspenseful non-diegetic music heightens. This foreshadows the dangers that Miguel will face in Mexico. This is a reversal of the portrayal of an

immigrant journey because instead of tracking his journey North, the film focuses on his journey South. During his journey back to his hometown, he meets Magdalena, and he tries to help her. Magdalena, not knowing who to trust, tries to run away from him. She ends up receiving his help and when he returns home, his home is destroyed, his animals are dead, and his home is empty. They both have no one and are left to support each other. As he helps her get to the one person and survivor of the bus that Jesús was on, the camera follows Miguel through the perspective of Magdalena. Magdalena tells him that he looks like her son, and he responds, “Todos nos parecemos de espaldas” [We all look the same from the back] (1:00:18). He universalizes that anyone including himself can go missing. It also alludes to the idea that sometimes drug cartels have specific targets who they are searching for and sometimes they get the wrong person making them victims of the drug cartel violence. The only person Miguel can find is his godfather who doesn't even want to help him because everyone has left his hometown due to the unsafe and dangerous conditions, they are living in. Drug cartels take over towns and use the residents' homes as bases.

At the end of the film, Miguel and Magdalena realize they are in danger when they hear an engine get closer to their house. They know they must run away. The men

catch up to Miguel and all he states is an apology for being in his own home. This shows the displacement of the people in the towns and their forced migrations to other locations. He explains that he was in his mother's home. The men have no sympathy towards him and shoot him. This is the second sequence of violence in the film, the first being the flashback to the events of the disappearance of Jesús and Rigo. When the men realize he isn't dead, they shoot him once again. The noise of the gunshot is so loud it makes the spectator jump. Magdalena witnesses these tragic events and is terrified. When one of the men approaches her, she realizes it is her son. He tells her he was caught by the cartel, and he can't go anywhere. Jesus is forced to commit murders that he does not want to commit. All he wanted was to go to the U.S and find a job to support his mother. Because of the insecurity of Mexico, he wasn't even able to reach the border. Both Miguel and Jesús are victims of a system that fails to protect them. The film makes the officers and officials show their real role in the violence. Their absence only proves that they are not invested in improving the situation for the people. Valadez eliminates them to show their complicity and puts those fighting against these systems at the forefront. She also shows the thin line between victims and aggressors. Oftentimes those who become perpetrators have also been the victims of violence. Valadez opens a new perspective on the way aggressors are viewed.

This film can serve as a starting point in showing the complexity of violence in Mexico while beginning a conversation internationally. It makes the spectator understand at a deeper level that there isn't just one factor causing the violence and that families face many obstacles in seeking justice for their loved ones. It also changes the narrative of how violence is discussed. Cinema serves as a speculative tool in questioning how plausible films are and their approaches to bringing marginalized voices to the forefront. It is important to examine the way cinematic elements are being used to give access to stories that otherwise would have not been accessible.

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Excerpt of the novel *Emptiness*

Excerpt of the Novel *Emptiness*
By Ramón E. Martínez (Ray)

I

When I returned from the river, I saw grandpa standing on the porch. The flowers that were covering his face vanished. The salamander skin texture in his body was almost gone. He's not moving. As I approached the porch, I felt something had changed. I ignored him for a second to sit down and devour a delicious mangó that I picked from his favorite tree. One of the few that are still standing and giving the fight. While sucking on the fruit I was mesmerized by the cobalt blue color of the chunk of sea that could be seen only from that spot of the front porch. Arturo was floating away. He disappears through the jungle waving goodbye. Granpa sees him and waves back. In a holographic movement my old man appears close to my face blocking my view, that precious view that has always been a faithful and trusty witness to my life in that land, and my time on the island. "Granpa don't fucking do that. You always scare the shit out of me." Having him that close made me notice that his skin was now looking human-like, something weird; at least for someone that is dead. Still not a word. He makes a gesture for me to follow him. As soon as I stand up, I feel that peculiar cold breeze that is always present on that side of the jungle embracing my whole body,

making me shiver. The same breeze brought with it the delicious aroma of the mangó's seed that I recently had sucked. I fucking love that smell! It smells like... like... that whiff of men's nuts freshly washed in the river. All of a sudden, that exciting smell turns into a ripe and putrefactive one, making me gag. I immediately looked at the mangóes eaten to see if one of them ripped while eating them, but they were perfectly fine. I always smell everything before putting it inside my mouth. Nature is funny like that, and we do not know when she wants to start joking with us.

Suddenly, a rapid and annoying cold sensation stopped my walking, penetrating the nails of my feet, almost freezing them. The ground under my bare feet turns into an olive-green injecting into my heel the color and stopping me from walking. At that moment I felt him beside me. It was Omar. "Fuck, anybody else is going to visit me today? Jesus!" The pressure that I always feel in my chest and in my throat was not there anymore. I look at him and he has a peaceful look in his eyes. When he looks at me, I immediately understand that he is not there to make my life live in hell, if not, to protect me and to be with me, as a friend. I am glad because Omar is a difficult spirit. He was looking as hot as the day I first met him. Beautiful man. One thing is true, death always brings smells from the past. "Lapidus, what an awful fragrance." I could move my feet again and start walking. Getting into the house, I noticed that the river that surrounds the big house was not there anymore, nor was the loud noise produced by the extracting machines that are sucking the life of the of that part of grandpa's

acres. Who knows, maybe the brujería done by Matilde when she marks with cow's blood every worker's car made them reevaluate all the damage they're doing and leave. Even the house has recovered its color back. That bright yellow that distinguished it from afar in the middle of the savage forest. That house is a survivor. Like magic, it has managed to not be destroyed by any of the machines yet. Resilient.

Granpa starts walking inside the house and I followed him. I looked around to see if Omar was with me, but it wasn't. I insisted on finding him and looked again outside from one of the windows, and there he was, getting swallowed by the jungle. "I am sure he'll be back." We arrived at the bedroom and Héctor and the nurse were there. "What's with the faces...who died?" I asked, trying to make a joke, but they didn't laugh. Looking at grandpa's body being swallowed by a mechanical modern bed which was responsible for keeping him alive, I realized that it was time to let him go. I got closer to him and noticed that his skin was gray, and his gorgeous black hair was null... discolored. I feel him standing beside me. When I look at the old man, he is pointing to all the machines that were connected to every hole in his body, keeping him artificially alive. Why do we do this to people? Why are we just maintaining alive something that is just dead? With what purpose? I looked at him almost crying, because I knew right there, we must stop him from being in between worlds. He came closer to me, and I saw his emptiness... that emptiness in his eyes that told me that he was ready to move on.

The reality of making the decision to disconnect the only human being that ever loved me unconditionally killed me. “I didn’t ask for this shit, granpa? Why did you make me so miserable with this fucking decision...it is too much to handle!” I wanted to cry but held it in. I don’t want Héctor and the nurse to think that I am weak and hysterical. I must demonstrate to Héctor that I was strong, but I was losing it. I just don’t want granpa to go. And then it happened. I really lost it. “Granpa, don’t go, please, please. I am sorry, but I am not ready to let you go. I don’t want to be the one responsible for setting you free. I hate this. I want to mummify you to have you with me forever. I want to eat every bone of your body for you to live inside me indefinitely. I wish your spirit would get stuck inside your body and never leave. Please, allowed me to cry and cry you for the rest of my life.” All this was said in my head because I had grandpa beside me all the time waiting for me to react to his inquiry. I was motionless and expressionless in front of the nurse and Héctor as they were looking at grandpa’s dying body.

His eyes started to fill with a beautiful soft bright light. He was at peace. He also knew that at any moment I was going to spared his ashes over the Caribbean Sea as he also asked me to do. For the first time in my life, I regret seeing dead people. “But I must come through... I gave him my word. I don’t want him to be unhappy and get stuck on this side of the spectrum. I must let him go to the fucking special place that everyone it supposed to go to when they are done in this phase. That place that great

grandpa told me about many times when I was a boy. “I wish if that place exists, the bouncer does not let you in ever. This is fucking painful.” I look at the old man again and he smiles at me. Happy. I hated that moment more when I saw him so happy to leave me alone on this planet. The intensity of the light in his eyes became brighter and brighter, making me cover my eyes. Héctor and the nurse looked at me stunned. I could not hold it and fake it anymore.

“Grandpa, I can’t with this pain anymore! It’s breaking my bones. Stay. “Stay with me, baby... remember....!” While singing the tune in my head, I willingly jumped into the emptiness.

What a show! I was asking grandpa to stay as if I were a character from a Greek tragedy. What a woozy! The nurse is looking at me covering her smile and thinking. “Who the fuck is he talking to?” I felt my legs shaking. They were failing me. They could not hold me anymore and my eyes were filled with darkness and my face hit the ground...

My phone interrupted the oral sex that had started minutes ago. I saw the name Héctor and answered.

“What?” I answered taking the dick out of my mouth.

“Eugenio, it’s grandpa. He’s in a coma.”

For a moment I forgot how to speak. I hung up. When I turned the night lamp on, grandpa was sitting in the corner of my bed. Immediately, I covered the huge dick I was eating with the blanket. I couldn't say a word. Grandpa wasn't speaking either. We just looked at each other in silence. When I looked closer, I noticed his mouth closed with weeds. I freeze. While staring at each other, the dick of my nameless trick keeps pulsating between us. The old man's face was covered with small flowers. I moved closer to him and discovered they were *miramelindas*, his favorite flowers. The ones he has protected with his life, even when the government started buying his land to expand the expressway. His body was sweaty and smelled like wood. I grabbed one of grandpa's hands. So masculine and big. Now, boney, and fragile. My trade looks at me as if I were too high and hallucinating. Suddenly, time stopped for a second and I felt nauseous and loopy. That sensation announced that I must get another hit of coke. I forgot about the old man for a second and starting scouting for a bag of coke like a fucking junkie. Desperate. Every bag found was empty. I noticed the way grandpa looked at me, a bit judgy I must say, and I stopped my quest.

Nausea invaded my body. A weird familiar taste in my mouth made me gag loudly. I ran to the bathroom. When I got there, grandpa was sitting on the toilet. I tried to wash out the flavor with water and I recognized what it was. It was the taste of the land every time I stuck my tongue inside it when I wanted to be part of her. I mumbled some words to grandpa, but he was

unresponsive. At that moment, his mouth was sealed with more weeds. The image gave me the “jeepers creepers.” I didn’t know if I was trembling because of my low doses of coke in my body or the image itself. It was weird that he couldn’t speak. That was a first. Often the dead bring a message, and they won’t shut the fuck up. But grandpa just stood there looking at me with those tender eyes. A shivering cold sensation ran down my spine and I got worried. It was not one of the sensations that I always have when I see a spirit that needs me. At that moment I understood that something bad was about to happen and I was not ready for it. What I never suspected was the big surprise the old man had for me. One that will define the rest of my existence. One that will show me the obscure past of that old man that I loved deeply. Mostly, he will show me that I was mistaken about Héctor. That it was my fault for all the drama that I created towards him because I taught myself to hate him without any reason whatsoever. I came closer to grandpa to touch his face and he vanished.

I came back to bed, and I admired the beautiful naked body I had in my bed with his cock still hard and ready to battle, and I regret that I had to wake him up and tell him the party’s over. But before that, I uncovered his big nuts and smelled them for a couple of seconds. “Um, the delicious smell of mangó.” I was tempted to put one in my mouth. I haven’t touched a man’s body nor using cocaine since Rodney died. “Fucking alcohol. It pushes one to do shit we know is bad for your spirit... It pushes you to the abyss. But is it really alcohol? Or was it just that I was done feeling lonely? I am such a drama queen!

Is it the alcohol?... you know what... I don't have time to embark in the self-fucking-pity excursion at the moment. so, it is what it is!" I woke up the stripper and paid him what we arranged. I was so ashamed that grandpa had to know that his only grandson loved to extract viscous proteins that came from big and beautiful veinous penises. Veins sprouted so much that they reminded me of the rivers that crossed the island. To whom am I lying? Grandpa always knew I was a faggot.

II

I arrived at grandpa's big house at dawn. That rainy mist and the chilly weather that always permeated the surroundings was still there. I saw some workers driving by, but I noticed that they were not from the government. They were from another company. A foreign company. "What the fuck is grandpa doing with the land now?" I thought to myself while opening the gates of the big house. Walking back to the car the smell of jasmine and malagueta threw me to those times when I used to sneak out of the house to play with grandpa's big horses. Every time I explored the jungle, I came back with something new learned. That jungle taught me a lot. Maybe too much, I must say. Opening my car door, a kid appeared in front of me. I knew he was doing the same thing I did at his age. Conquering the jungle. Colonizing the land with my pirate costume. When I looked closely, I noticed the boy was me. I came closer to my boy self and looked into my boy's eyes, and I saw all the innocence that I lost on the maleza. My boy-self ran into the vast green spooky vegetation and vanished.

I got into the car and drove to the big house. It was weird but from a far the bright yellow of the house was opaque. It seems the house was sick too. It wasn't breathing normally. Grandpa could not do arduous work or move as he used to. After Don Julio, his right hand, died, their sons, who also helped to work and maintain the land, started to move off the island to the United States. Every time the old man got sicker and sicker the house also got sick too. "I think that is why those workers are around now."

The road to the house was a long one and has the most beautiful *flamboyánes* all the way to there. I noticed some of them were missing, but I didn't give it too much thought. Instead, I remember how much I used to love visiting grandpa and playing in his land. My favorite vacations there were Christmas and Summer. The death of grandma changed our life forever. Mom got so depressed that a strange illness ate her alive and without warning. One day she was strong and the next one she was dead. Because of mom's sickness we stopped going to the big house. Dad transformed into a bitter and sad husband. He alone had to take care of my mother because she did not want any stranger to take care of or be with her in the house. He had to take care of her for several years.

When I turned sixteen, he left leaving me in charge of everything. I never blamed him. I understood that he got tired of dealing with a body that was only bones and barely skin. She was not responding to any treatment anymore and he was a young guy who still had needs

that my mother could not cover. Also, at that point the only thing that we needed to do was wait for her to die. She was also in a coma. After mom died, I lived with grandpa for a while. I did not want to stay in our sad house, and mostly it was too big for just me. Mom was the only one that never came to me in spirit when she was in a coma. I remember that I used to call her “Mom!” “Mom! Where are you!?! Come talk to me for a while.” But she never appeared, she never came.

That shit that happened with mom, that I never could see her, makes me question for the first time if I were really hallucinating and not seeing spirits at all. Makes me wonder how thin the line is, between having spirits of dead people contact me or just being a schizophrenic. It’s not all the time, and I don’t see everyone that has died, I think that is impossible. I don’t know if I am the only one in my family who could see dead people. Maybe it is the excess of drugs and the alcohol that are incrusting in my cells, or it’s because I feel so lonely that my brain is tricking me to see people where there aren’t any. In all truthfulness, I don’t fucking know. Maybe grandpa could help me understand what is happening and why.

I got out of the car, and I was welcomed by a nurse. She wanted to say something to me, but I just fled inside the house ignoring her. She followed me. I ran to grandpa’s room, and she was talking to me about some documents that someone needed to sign. While I was walking, a loud noise of a machine caught my attention. They were cutting oaks from the side of the house. “What are they

doing?” I just continue walking and old pictures of my family slow me down. I felt happiness looking at all our memories. I think we were happy. I felt good for a second, but that sensation went away when the reality of why I was back in the house snuck in. I paused the movie of my life in pictures and ran faster to grandpa’s room. When I was about to open the door, I doubted myself if I was prepared to see my old man looking like my mother did before her death. In turns out it was a genetic illness and all the family suffered from it. Matilde says that is a curse.

Héctor and the nurse stepped into the room.

—He’s stable, but he needs the respirator. To be honest, this is going downhill. If he doesn’t respond, in a couple of hours we’re going to have to connect him to other machines. . . —said Héctor with that uncommitted tone of voice that distinguished him.

I looked at him so seriously that he shut up. I never liked him. He was an arrogant prick. I’ve always been jealous of him. Grandpa was always more invested in him than me. He always received his love and attention more than me. Héctor was an orphan at age six. His parents drowned while getting back to the island from Dominican Republic. There were many versions of the causes but the one granpa explained to Héctor when he turned twelve was that traffickers attacked his parents’ boat. Although that was true, it was just part of it. Later we were told that the traffickers were competition, and his parents indeed were attacked, but also got robbed.

They were helping people to get them onto the island illegally for thousands of dollars. The authorities found Héctor's parents' bodies floating and an empty boat. Obviously, grandpa, a loyal friend of Héctor's parents, denied this version of the story in its entirety. After the death of his parents grandpa took good care of him. He was treated like one of the family. He took advantage of the situation and did everything right, making grandpa immensely happy. After we graduated high school, he went to study medicine in the mainland. He was accepted at Cornell, and after finishing his studies he came back and stayed on the island. Grandpa was really proud of all Héctor's achievements. I never trusted him. I always treated him like an impostor and invader. Of course he was happy that granpa was going to die, that way he could claim all the inheritance and the land. Oh my God, Geño? You sound so stupid so telenovela. In all reality I never trusted him and never liked him because I never knew him. He grabbed my shoulder while I wiped some tears from my face.

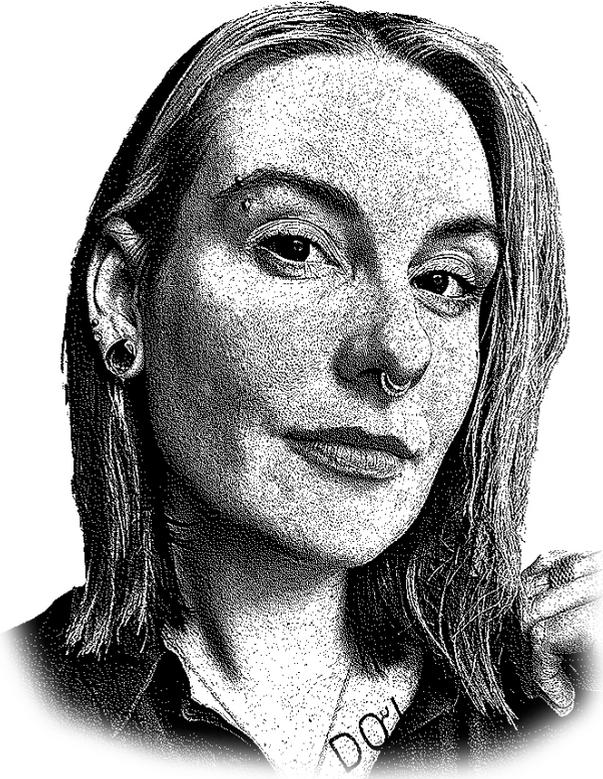
—This is really hard for everyone, Geño, but we need to be strong and accept the reality of what it is. I know this is not the moment but remember that we need to sit down with the lawyers to arrange everything and set up the meeting for the reading of the will to get that part done and out of the way. Surprisingly, I agreed and nodded yes. The nurse gave me some papers that I had to sign from the home health care agency as next of kin. I stood up to get out of the room and Héctor cut my way and intended to give me a hug.

—What are you doing? —I said pushing him away.
—Daim, Geño, go and take a long bath. You stink... —
said to me laughing.

I ran out of the room. I realized that I haven't bathed in three days. I didn't bring anything to change. Fuck! I went to the bathroom in the hallway, took off my shirt and washed my armpits with a lot of soap. It's really interesting the smell one has under their pits when consuming the quantity of blow, I did until the day before. It's a mix of poppers and sweat that, in all honesty, makes me really horny. This thought was a remembrance because at that point I had lost all smell and my airways were clogged with the chemical. When I finished, I felt the alcohol kicking in again and I needed a hit of coke immediately. If not, Héctor will know that I was extremely drunk, and the sweat and the trembling was getting back. I reached for my pockets, and I found a small bag with just a tiny amount. When I opened the small bag to lick it, I pulled too hard opening the bag abruptly and as a result I spread the tiny amount all over the counter. I proceeded to lick all the counter even the sink to get the drug inside my system. All of a sudden, I needed to sneeze. When I did, a smooch of blood and two tiny balls flew out of my nose and that helped me get my smell sensation back a little bit. This drug is crazy, you never know how the body will react to it. I'm glad I can breathe again. A whiff of the soap ran into my nostrils announcing that I will have smell and taste pretty soon.

That tiny amount did the deed, at least for a while. Got out of the bathroom and went to my old room to rest a bit. The intense smell of old oak in my room almost knocked me out. I was mesmerized by what I saw. The room was a snapshot of what I remember when I left the *casona*. Everything was so clean, so pristine. Seeing my room like that made me think about parents whose kids disappeared suddenly. They stop time leaving everything in their children's rooms intact from the moment they're gone. I wonder if that was how grandpa felt when I left. That I got captured by traffickers or that a weird rapist took me. The sad part of this thought is that I know how it feels to get into a cold room and be captive. But that's a long story for later.

I swear to myself that I would never put a foot again in this house. After mom died, I came to live with grandpa because I didn't have another choice. The fear that the jungle provoked in my soul fed the need to move to the city and never look back. I wanted to be surrounded by life. At the moment it didn't matter which city, I just wanted to be around car noises and alive human voices, to smell the hot cement and receive the cancerous dry rays of the sun in my skin. I was done with the humidity and weird cold that covered the house, but mostly, the quietness of the jungle. I hated that emptiness that the woods always carry. But, life, uff!... life always looks for a way to put you back where you come from, whether denying it or not its where you belong.



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*Assumptive Projections:
A Rejoinder to Passing and its Narratives*

“... the practices of visibility are indeed revealing of significant facts about our cultural ideology, but what the visible reveals is not the ultimate truth; rather, it often reveals self-projection, identity anxieties, and the material inscription of social violence.”

Linda Martín Alcoff,
Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self

i. About the
“Pass/-ing”



Passing and those narratives have existed within the United States for centuries. The concept of “passing,” or to “pass as,” broadly refers to those instances when a person is able to be regarded by others as a particular race, ethnicity, gender, sex, sexual orientation, class, religion, and/or dis/ability status that is different than their own.¹⁷ Elaine K. Ginsberg traces the American historical genealogy of the term “passing” into the nineteenth century with the discourse of “racial passing,” which often narrated “... the assumption of a fraudulent

¹⁷ Or written another way: that is “different” than their “own.”

“white” identity by an individual culturally and legally defined as “Negro” or black by virtue of a percentage of African ancestry” to escape enslavement into freedom (2-3). Ginsburg further explicates the metaphor of the term “passing” here as the crossing or passing¹⁸ across the racial line, boundary, or confines “... to assume a new identity[;] escaping the subordination and oppression [that] accompany[ies] one identity [to] access the privileges and status of the other” (3). By way of modulating the



material body, through a range of modes and for various durations of time, this concept of “passing” has also “... been applied discursively to disguises of other elements of an individual’s presumed “natural” or “essential” identity, including class, ethnicity, and sexuality, as well as gender” where the motivating rationale of these passes might be laden with complexities or ambiguities with indeterminant

¹⁸ Or “indeed *trespassing*” as Ginsburg asserts here.

recognizable “benefits” (Ginsburg 3). “As “passing” became a term to describe performing something one is not,” C. Riley Snorton explains that “it trafficked a way of thinking about identity not only in terms of real versus artificial but also, and perhaps always, as proximal and performative” (70). More than just merely a question of identity, passing is a performative act of poetic relation which is initially interpreted through Linda Martín Alcoff’s “visual registry” that operates within “... social relations that [are] socially constructed, historically evolving, and culturally variegated but nonetheless powerfully determinant over individual experience” (194; cárdenas 78). For micha cárdenas, it is only through the visual registry of the viewer, the person who is receiving the imagery of the “passing performance” of another, who ultimately “... makes a decision about whether or not a person [attempting to pass] fits into a particular category” (78) where often, during the mundanity of the quotidian, “one can never absolutely know whether one is passing or not” (83).

“Passing” and “attempts” of such continue to occur as relational performances. Since there are various types of passings which all occur within a wide array of contexts, the specific “passing” narrative that will be centered for primary analysis here, while also acknowledging that passing narratives are not solely informed by a singular identity or positionality, will be that of “gender passing,” as described by Ginsburg. In particular, the trans* experience of passing, the “successes” and “failures” of doing so effectively, and otherwise are of most interest.

For people of trans* experience, passing is not merely about experiencing gender affirmation or gender euphoria from the validation by another, if they are seemingly ‘successful’ in being ideally categorized, quotidianly, but it is often also about trans* survivability and livability, trans* life and death: “There are many variables one must calculate in the act of passing to avoid different forms of violence, such as whether or not one will be read as cisgender, Black, white or Latina and how these readings interact” (cárdenas 83). For these reasons, in addition to a myriad of others, this intentional act of passing often entails a set of calculations, such as the spatial context, the duration of the passing performance, and the potential receptivity of the attempted pass by others -that can be constantly reevaluated in order to gauge the ‘successfulness’ of the pass- as a way to assess variations of personal safety as well as validity by others.

While passing, as an intentional act of relational performance, has occurred throughout history and continues to transpire contemporarily, it is the ubiquitous application of the term “passing” to describe all experiences where “the false promise of the visible as an epistemological guarantee” is apparently recapitulated that I intend to challenge and to intervene on, specifically for “gender passing.” In other words, with the prevalence of determining every instance of particular identic (mis-)reading/ identification as an inherent attempt to “pass for” something (“else”), I want to ask, what is presupposed when describing this occurrence as a “passing narrative” and what

experiences are possibly *overlooked*? What does the act of overlooking eschew and what possibilities of analyses, (re)framings, and dare I say, freedom(s), might emerge from attending to alternative rhetorics of passing and its narratives?

ii. The Act(ivity) of Passing or the Efforts of “Still Restive”¹⁹ Existence

As a concept with transitory connotations, the rhetoric of “passing” discourses have certain implications that have remained unquestioned. To contextualize the need for a rejoinder to the concept of “passing,” specifically “gender passing,” this section will first reconsider the Westernized construction of the sex/gender system to then offer a semantic analysis of how the concept of “passing” emerges in ways that often, if inadvertently, invalidates trans* experiences and identities. Finally, since passing is a poetics of performative relation (cárdenas; Snorton), this section will then conclude by inverting the poetics of the relational performance of “passing” to burden the audience’s/spectator’s/viewer’s (binaristic) gaze that necessitates an intervention of their inherent “assumptive projections.”

¹⁹ As preliminarily defined by Snorton as “...a paradoxical word that means to be both obstinately motionless and willfully unable to be made still” (169) where I will continue to think alongside his theorizations on “gender restivity” in his chapter “A Nightmarish Silhouette: Racialization and the Long Exposure of Transition” in *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (2017).

In Susan Stryker's 1994 article, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage," it is the automatic declaration of a binary gender, that which is inherently informed by the visual legibility of infants' genitalia²⁰, that transitions the fetal "it" into the gendered subjectivity of "he" or "she"- "it's a girl"²¹- which prompts Stryker's own feelings of transgender rage. At the moment of birth²², if not even sooner, cisnormativity begins to structure the confines of racialized, gendered life. As Bey explains, cisnormativity "... requires the adherence to social equations of male = man = masculine and female = woman = feminine, sometimes by force and often by coercion" (40). Attempting to coherently align with this cisnormative equation, especially for trans*, gender non-conforming, and intersex people, often runs counter to people's own self-schemas and experiences of gender. As an essentializing term "cis, when attached to gender expression [and identity], defines a sense of remaining on the same side

²⁰ If and when that is actually legible through the binary or "accurate" as a way to understand "sex."

²¹ "I in fact do not believe that I, or anyone, is born any particular way, if that is to be taken as having some legible innate desire or identification preexistent to and independent of the ways we are socialized, the language available to us, the other entities we have to interrelate and thus emerge in the world with and through" (Bey 17).

²² Where, I would like to argue, that it is fundamentally illogical to assert that a fetus or a newborn is performing the social constructions of gender (or race), as others – such as Elaine K. Ginsburg- have insinuated as the genesis of (racial) passing narratives or 'authentic' social identities.

of one's natal (or in this day and age, perinatal) designation," which opposes the mutability of trans*gender as going across or beyond into another (gendered) place (Bey 29). The seeming naturalness, as Stryker would describe it as, of "sex" and "gender" and their supposed interrelation to one another is how (Western) cisnormativity pervasively continues to structure racialized gender expectations and life for everyone, trans*, cis, or otherwise.

Which this is all to explain why I believe that the concept of "passing," when applied to gender specifically, reinforces cisnormativity by invalidating the de-essentializing possibilities of trans* and trans* experience. Even within the previous section's literature review, the concerning aspects of "passing" discourse becomes readily apparent. It is imperative, though, to reemphasize Snorton's astute remarks about "passing" rhetoric which one, creates a false dichotomy of the visual "pass" as artificial or fraudulent that conceals a hidden "truth" (which can be revealed) (70), and two, that passing narratives both "... express[] a form of agency as well as a promise of restoration, which is to say that passing- as a limited durational performance- signals a "return" to a natural-cum-biological mode of being" (58). Said a different way, it seems that invoking "the pass" inadvertently implies that the identity or experience that is being performed "to pass as" is fraudulent or inauthentic and that once this "passing performance" has concluded that the "real" identity will emerge once again.

“To pass”: As what? If one is “to pass as” a binary gender that they identify with then what are the cisnormative implications underpinning the ‘successful’ “pass as a (cis)wo/man as a (trans)wo/man”? If the meaning “to pass” here actually connotes “as cisgender,” as Cárdenas implies, then how does this reinforce the perceived inauthenticity of trans*gender experiences?

“To pass”: What are the limitations of the ability to pass within the confines of Westernized gender structures, namely is it ever possible that one is ever able “to pass as” a non-binary gender? Then what does it mean that “to pass” seems to inherently invoke a cissexist gender binary? And for those instances when “the pass” fails or where the word “not” consistently precedes the desired or affirming pass (“do not pass as”), what is implied when “the pass” is applied to invalidating performances of gender expression? How does “gender passing” reinforce Westernized essentialistic understandings of sex, gender, and gender expression through racialized cisnormativity? “The pass,” and its perceived ‘successfulness,’ will always depend upon embodying the normative codes of (racialized) cisgender wo/manhood, which is not only premised on an unattainable equation but also through the unknown relational element of the audience/spectator/viewer of “the passing attempt” where they interpret these performed codes through their own subjective visual registries.

What warrants explicit implication is the social milieu of this staged performance: The Western binaristic framework of cisnormativity. More insidious than a mere

binary of genders, cisnormativity compels scrutiny and enforcement of gender, its expression and performance, to (closely) align with white cisgenderism. Under the strictures of cisnormativity, the audience/spectator/viewer of “the passing performance” is compelled to scrutinized for “accurate,” read “true,” gender and is compelled to enforce ‘correct’ gender norms if these are seemingly ‘violated.’ Which will continue to occur outside of the active context of “the pass,” or, in thinking alongside Snorton, could be described as autonomous moments of “restivity²³,” which he defines as “... a more precise alternative to passing’s narration to suppose how a figure may inhabit various gender positions with a sense of sincerity and intransience until otherwise moved” (172). Which is to say that gender restivity, in contrast to the relational performance act of “gender passing,” stubbornly refuses to advance a passing narrative²⁴. In resisting the controlling scrutiny of the cisnormative gaze, gender restivity reemphasizes how the gaze of the audience/spectator/viewer is, in-of-itself, a performative act that necessitates (abolitionist, gender radical) scrutiny.

²³ “The double meaning of “restive,” as I have previously mentioned, in one sense describes the adverse behavior of the discontented, an inability to remain still, silent or submissive, and in another characterizes a person “stubbornly refusing to advance... intractable, refractory... fixed in an opinion or course of action”; both refer, whether by fixedness or by movement, to a person intent on resisting control” (Snorton 172).

²⁴ If no active attempt at “passing” is being made, how should the relational interpretation of gender, its expression and performance, be understood as instead?

iii. Inverting the Visual Registry through the
Specularity of Another

Due to the perceived “naturalness” of gender, or the ways that secondary sex characteristics and gender expression become interpreted as visibly irrefutable evidence of gender’s and sex’s essentialism, it might be seemingly implausible to assert that the visual registry and its methods of (identical) interpretation and categorization based on encoding visible attributes is what should be truly implicated as a problematic actor in “passing” and its narratives. In other words, our visual registries, which are culturally variegated, socially constructed, and historically evolving as Alcoff reminds us, are not only subjective – rather than presumed objective- but also directly influenced by numerous cultural hegemonies such as, but not limited to, cisnormativity. Due to the pervasiveness of Westernized cisnormativity, which coercively creates the Western gender binary of “man” and “woman” as directly informed by its ‘natal sex’ designations of “male” and “female,” I argue that the visual registry often creates a binary framework²⁵, or lenses, for interpreting and categorizing “gender,” through gender expression and performances as well as secondary sex characteristics. The interpretation of gender (performances), then, is

²⁵ “The confines of our knowledge are structured on a binaristic framework whose architecture does not permit different materials or blueprints” (Bey 75).

predicated on what I understand to be an “assumptive projection.”

- a. Psychoanalytic, Psychodynamic:
Constant Analyses to Effective
Progressions

To invoke “projection,” is to invariably invoke (Freudian) psychoanalysis, especially within the context of literary studies. Historic psychoanalysis, a century-old at this point, provides imperative foundations to many psychological and therapeutic theories and methods that have emerged throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Psychoanalytic concepts such as projection as well as transference and countertransference provide imperative therapeutic concepts for the researcher and the practitioner (as well as the client). Instead of relying upon a psychoanalytic analysis, though, the invocation of projection is through the framework of psychodynamic theories. While psychoanalysis, as a contemporary therapeutic practice that has evolved since its inception in the late 19th century, primarily attends to the unconscious to “reveal” suppressed truths²⁶, psychodynamic, or psychotherapy, instead considers the external social contexts and their influences on human personality as well as, to an extent, on the psyche. This type of social “assumptive projection,” which inherently occurs beyond the psychoanalyst’s couch, is why

²⁶ Where this sentence, in of itself, might illustrate my own hesitations with this particular literature and clinical practice.

psychodynamism as an analytical framework is required to understand how projection operates beyond the limitations of its origins in psychoanalysis.

“Assumptive projections” brings together the word “assume” and the psychodynamic concept of “projection” as a way to accompany the active performance of passing by describing the visual interpretations of another’s “gender” when a state of “gender restivity” is activated. Projection can be understood as the unconscious process of displacing one’s feelings, which is often a negative internal feeling or trait, onto a different human-person, more-than-human person, or object. If one is not born cis, as Bey polemically asserts, and is instead made cis through coercive or forceful methods, then the negative experiences with cisnormativity is what is projected. Since “assume” connotes both a supposition without any proof as well as the means of seizing power or control, the manifestation of cisnormativity becomes readily apparent once again. Altogether, assumptive projections should be defined as the displaced preemption of hegemonic social(ly constructed) categorizations onto others that were maliciously²⁷ enforced onto one’s own subjectivity.

²⁷ In thinking alongside Bey’s remark where they assert: “I might be so bold to say that I was not born cis; I was made, diligently, maliciously, cis” (19).

iv. Visionary Vicisstitudes²⁸

“This allows us to eschew a *binarist logic that might reify a distinction between transgender and cisgender, black and white*; it allows us to eschew the cisnormative and transantagonistic logics of recognition, which means that we must *not readily imagine that gender, in this instance (or any, for that matter), can be adjudicated by making recourse to the visual.*”

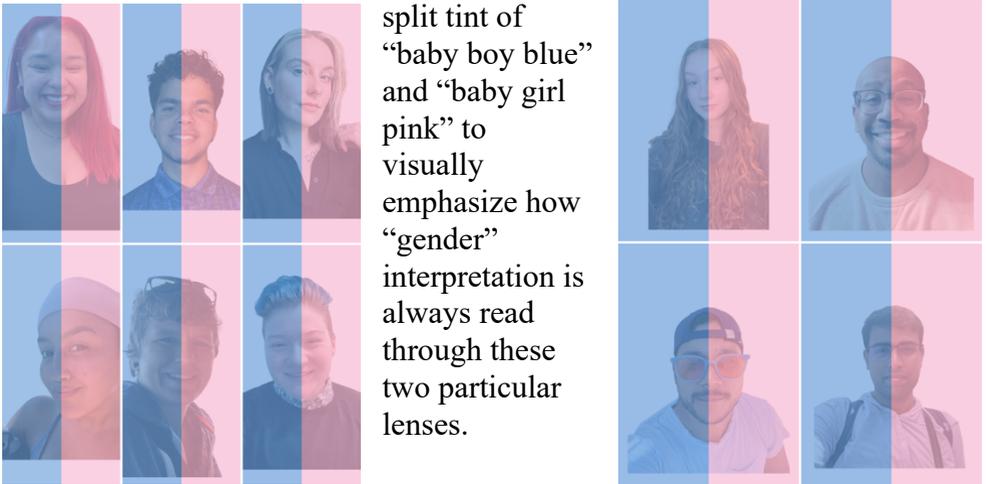
Marquis Bey, *Cistem Failure: Essays on Blackness and Cisgender*

To counteract the abstraction of “assumptive projections” as well as to more directly implicate the cisnormative Western binarist logic and lenses that inform the visual registry, I created a digital art project in an effort to illustrate this theory and its interventions. Nineteen people participated in this project by providing a photo of themselves, providing a hex color code – which is a universal numeric code assigned to every shade of color to distinguish them- that they felt best described their gender and/or gender experience at the

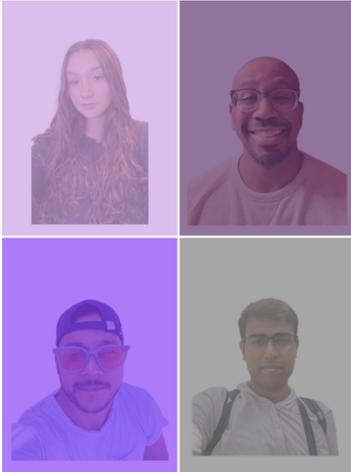
²⁸ “This is what cisness means; it is a reckoning that we must, if we are to survive, reckon right back with. So, *vicisstitudes*” (Bey 40). Vicissitude (n): a change of circumstances, one which is typically unwelcome or unpleasant

moment the photo was taken or in their life/ that current moment. A few even offered brief explanations into their color choices.

If gender, and all of its expectations, are cisnormatively declared at birth with the exclamation of “it’s a—,” then I wanted to frame the cissexist Western binary through the contemporarily assigned baby colors of “pink” (#F8B9D4) and “blue” (#6CA0DC). To illustrate how the visual registry renders interpretations through this cisnormative binary, I placed everyone’s images into a



As an attempt at abolitionist-reform, I then placed everyone’s images in their self-selected hex color code



tint as a way to illustrate a gender radicality which can and does exist beyond these two cissexist binary lenses that often inform the visual registry.

In juxtaposing

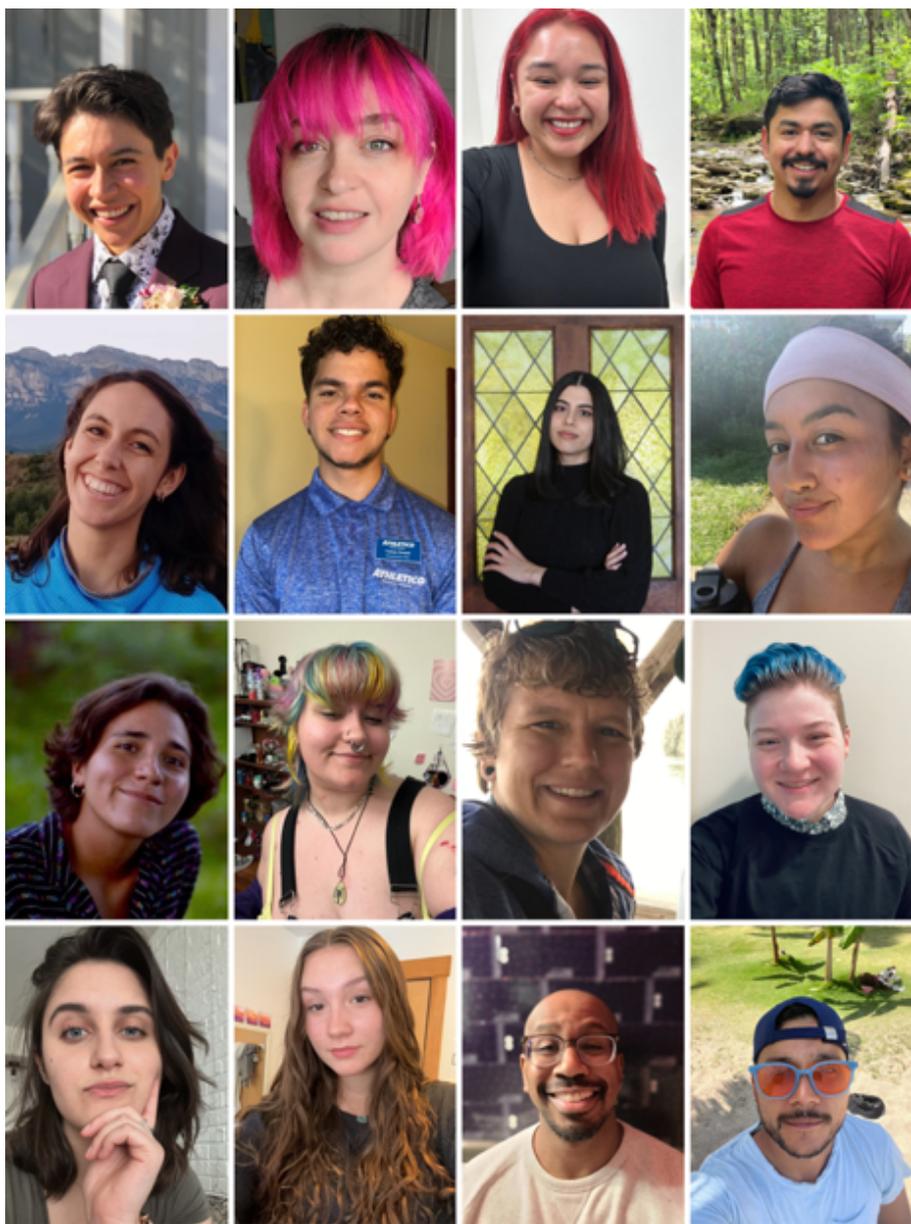


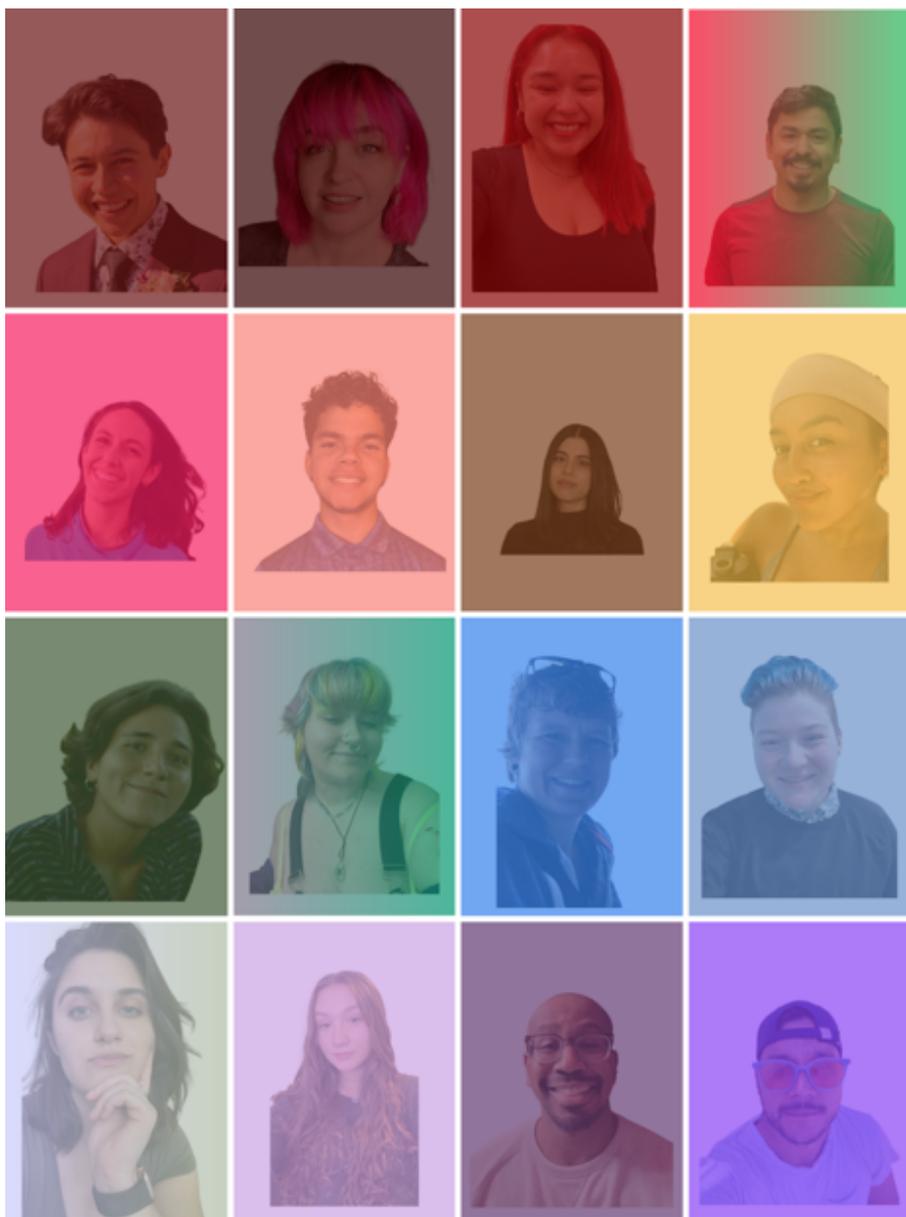
these two collages, one in a baby boy blue/ baby girl pink and the other within self-selected colors of gender and gender experiences, the limitations of the cissexist gender binarist lenses become apparent as every participant selected colors other than the two aforementioned hex codes and often in shades of color beyond exclusive blues and pinks. The images in these collages are the same, stubbornly stagnant but nevertheless valid in the gender experience that was captured in that moment—gender restive, but the shifting tints of the images emphasize how the visual registry does not reveal a “truth” in what is seen, but

more often reveals what is self-projected onto another.

As depicted with these gender restive photos, is it truly an instance of “gender passing” or is it, instead, an instance of inadvertent, but pervasive, assumptive projections?







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María B. Serrano-Abreu
Department of Educational Psychology

*School Closings Policy in Puerto Rico
and Speculative Memory*

June 21, 2023.

Dear *Specutellers Emissary LAB Award* staff²⁹,

As a doctoral student, searching for fellowships and awards that allow me to realize my professional dreams through the research projects I lead, has become a priority during my doctoral path. During one of my routine searches on the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) *Fellowship Finder* page, I identified the *Specutellers Emissary LAB Award* and felt compelled to apply. This opportunity will allow me to expand a research project designed to have a great scope in a time of turbulence and social instability such as the closure of public schools in Puerto Rico.

As a fellow of the *Interseminars Initiative Fellowship*, I have had the opportunity to explore speculation to design research, generate knowledge and produce creative scholarship. Interseminars is a pioneering initiative of the UIUC Humanities Research Institute seeking to reimagine higher education through interdisciplinary research, arts, and humanities. In alignment with my doctoral major (Educational Psychology), I have explored speculation as a method of collaborative and participatory research, using creativity as a means of designing possible worlds in the face of

²⁹ This writing piece was originally submitted to the [Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues](#) pursuing the [Applied Social Issues Internship Award](#) (granted). The proposal was inspired by the Interseminars Initiative experience. I have made slightly modifications to tailored it to the present book. The award mentioned in the document is fictitious.

slow institutional violence and social death promoted by school closures in the context of Puerto Rico. In addition, my research experience has been shaped by initiatives that promote and advance racial equity (e.g., exploring racial equity practices through program evaluation), an anti-racist practice in the education scenario (e.g., suggesting practical recommendations for a dignified teaching of African heritage in Puerto Rican elementary schools), as well as the use of research to advance public policies and concrete actions of social justice in STEM (e.g., exploring the ways in which underrepresented groups persist and thrive in STEM).

My current training practice as a researcher and future educational psychologist, is guided by a commitment to use research as an applied tool to critically inform thoughtful solutions and decision-making in hand with the people and communities affected by social issues, such as that of school closings in Puerto Rico. As a fellow of the *Specutellers Emissary LAB*, I will have the opportunity to keep expanding my training as an interdisciplinary researcher. Through this Lab it is of my interest to keep building knowledge regarding how we can apply speculative research as a tool for policy makers and social psychologist interested in a value driven and reparative practice that enables social change to thrive. I am looking forward to meeting you and thank you for your time in reading this letter.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'N. P. ...', written in a cursive style.

María B. Serrano-Abreu, M.Ed.³⁰

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School Closings Policy in Puerto Rico and Speculative Memory

Proposal for the *Specutellers Emissary LAB*

Research context

The public education system in Puerto Rico is facing a progressive dismantling which appears to be an unstoppable “man-made storm” (Brusi & Godreau, 2019). Since 2006, access to quality public K-12 education in Puerto Rico has been threatened by school closing policies documented to have an aggressive implementation, particularly during 2017-2019 (Brusi & Godreau, 2019). During this time, about 38% or 438 of the public schools in Puerto Rico were ordered to permanently shut down causing systemic harm with scopes into students, teachers, parents, communities, local history memory, and public education. The Department of Education of Puerto Rico (DEPR), the main governmental agency to provide accessible and quality education to children and youth in Puerto Rico, has supported this educational dismantling by consistent disinvestment and abandonment of schools’ infrastructure, advancing their deterioration and undermining their usefulness and educational purpose

³⁰ Department of Educational Psychology, College of Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

(Brusi & Godreau, 2019; Caraballo Cueto, 2020). Nowadays, DEPR faces striking budget cuts which propose cutting about 2.226 billion from 2019 to 2024. As well, a new wave of school closings for the upcoming years was advised as recently as in January 2022, threatening with the closure of 83 schools (Díaz Ramos & Encarnación Martínez, 2022).

According to educational researchers the closure of schools has represented a neoliberal solution and response to “failing” schools, schools’ underachievement, budget constraints, underutilization rates and infrastructure decay, among others (Aviles & Heybach, 2017; de la Torre & Gwynne, 2009; Ewing & Green, 2022; Tieken & Auldridge-Reveles, 2019). The implementation of this educational policy has been questioned and criticized due to its racial selectiveness, since it has mostly disrupted Black and Latino communities in the U.S. (Aviles & Heybach, 2017; McWilliams & Kitzmiller, 2019; Pearman & Greene, 2022; Shiller, 2018). Scholars have noted that some of the traces left by the closure of schools account for the destabilization of communities, a territorial displacement accompanied by gentrification efforts, neglected opportunities for social mobility, as well as for enjoying cultural assets and experiences offered by a school (Lytton, 2011; Othering & Belonging Institute & CRH, 2020; Pearman & Greene, 2022). Trends in the study of

school closures indicate that this policy will continue to increase in the upcoming years following global neoliberal reforms that aim to reshape education through the lens of privatization, high levels of accountability and standardized testing. Researchers call attention to gaps in the literature such as 1) scarcity of research in a context outside of the United States and in rural geographies, 2) responses from different school community actors and the ways they uplift their voices (teachers, students, parents, community, etc.), 3) impact studies and how communities, social fabric, and economies are affected (Ewing & Green, 2022; Tiekens & Auldridge-Reveles, 2019).

In the case of Puerto Rico, the field of educational research on school closures is an emergent one as this policy has been notoriously -and aggressively- implemented in recent years (e.g. 2017-2019). Consequently, few empirical studies have been published to record and document the scope of the implementation of this educational policy. The landscape of the school closure research in Puerto Rico has mostly concentrated efforts on the effects on the students' academic performance (Caraballo Cueto, 2020), teachers' experiences while facing the closure (Brusi, 2020; Díaz Ramos, 2020), community fragmentations after school closings (Othering & Belonging Institute & CRH, 2020) and socio-demographic changes accelerated by school

closings (Hinojosa et al., 2019). Teachers and school communities' responses have been documented mostly by the local media and newspapers. Empirical research is scarce in the school closures realm in Puerto Rico.

Purpose & research question

Considered “centerpieces and ‘anchors’ of communities” schools are a material representation of vitality, continuity, and local memory permanence (Allweiss et al., 2015; Kłoczko-Gajewska, 2020; Lytton, 2011). As a source of pride, they have represented an important cultural artifact in the heart of communities (Brusi, 2020). In this sense, they have a crucial role not only for the memory preservation of the communities but for the public health and wellbeing of a society in the sense that they cover social, emotional, and physical needs (Reid, 2019). Through school closings policy implementation, communities are under the menace of symbolic social death or in other words, a progressive deterioration and erasure of their local memory through the disinvestment, abandonment, and displacement of communities (Johnson, 2012). In this sense, this policy can be considered as a governmental tool that acts in service of territorial displacement and communities' dispossession by design. A violation of civil rights, the closing of schools undermines and demoralizes communities by avoiding a democratic participation in the decision-

making process, as it has been the case of Puerto Rico (Comisión de Derechos Civiles, 2018).

In the interest to fill the gaps in the school closings literature, particularly in the focus of what is potentially possible, desirable and actionable in the context of Puerto Rico, I seek to use speculation as a research method to craft an alternative panorama in which communities affected by school closings appropriate and name the desired futures for their schools. Wilkie et al., (2017) describe speculative research as an invitation to challenge the apparent stagnancy of the present in where uncertainty appears to be a confident sense in the face of diverse social crisis (housing crisis, hunger, global warming, migration, inflation, etc.). In this sense, speculative research seeks to contrast dominant modes of futurity that are forecasted exclusively as a direct product of the current conditions, giving no space to provide conditions for future grace (Levitas, 2013). As Wilkie et al., (2017) state, speculative research is a “thinking practice which involves the wager that the present is fundamentally unfinished” (p. 21) and it requires intentional intervention to alter current conditions.

I seek to study the possibilities produced when juxtaposing an apparent imminent slow social death such as that of school closings in the wake of a quest to

explore what school community flourishing looks like. My research question asks *What do the possibilities of a closed school building look like for people impacted by the school closure?* I aspire for my work to be grounded in the recognition of people exercising self-determination, empowerment, and practice collective agency through the search of solutions for critical problems such as that of school closings, and building abandonment. The proposed research intervention is part of a long-term project that seeks to look for action-committed alternatives in the face of school closings and building abandonment.

Speculative material and current collaborative efforts

Elementary school Antonia Sáez, located in the urban area of Humacao, Puerto Rico (a municipality in the east of the island) was ordered to shut down in 2017 following the orders of a school closings policy enacted by the DEPR. The building is a two level and historical structure which is in good condition. Although it sits closed for more than 5 years now, it still has windows, doors, and has not been vandalized or occupied. The building represents a multiplicity of possibilities for the future of a public education committed to a vision of the integral development of childhood. The possibilities could be endless. Still, as school communities were not part of the decision-making process in the face of school closings policy, this project aims to center community

voices to seek their input and explore how they envision the use of closed school buildings.



Escuela Antonia Sáez, located at Humacao, Puerto Rico and permanently closed in 2017.

In the interest of making ourselves part of the solution and looking to support the organization of a community impacted by school closures and how they can envision the future of it, I have come to develop a collaboration with Ixamara Jiménez Díaz³¹ and with Manuel Pérez-Troncoso, Program evaluator and doctoral student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign³². During September 2022 until May 2023 we established a partnership with the Social Work Bachelor Program at

³¹ Public school principal and doctoral student at the University of Puerto Rico at Rio Piedras Campus.

³² Program evaluator and doctoral student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

the University of Puerto Rico in Humacao, in where we collaborate, and support five undergraduate students registered in the *Social Work Scientific Research* course (TSOC 3131 & TSOC 3132). We asked the professor in charge and students from the course to conduct a needs assessment in the community around elementary school Antonia Sáez with the intention of raising a profile of the needs and resources of the community as well as the impacts after the school closed. The survey used for interviewing community residents ended with a short set of speculative premises seeking to look for residents' speculative thoughts regarding the possibilities for the future use of the building.

The proposed intervention, explained in the next section, is planned to be a posterior activity to this needs assessment to amplify the dissemination, and start organizing a group of interested people in seeking solutions and actions towards community flourishing and wellbeing amid institutional violence such as that of school closings.

Planned intervention

It is of my interest to apply to the *Specutellers Emissary LAB* with the intention of requesting funding for the implementation of a 3-day collaborative research session titled *School Closings and Speculative Memory*. This intervention is rooted in speculative design and creative-

making techniques. Governmental institutions seeking for the integration of innovative practices has resulted in the interest and increased use of speculative design to provide critical commentator of alternative futures in the wake of social problems that threaten the flourishing, stability, and permanence of life in society (Tseklevs et al., 2022). As well, policymakers have shown interest in this approach as a way of critically redesign communities-oriented problems (Wargo & Alvarado, 2020). Speculation entails the act of imagination to create hypothetical and demonstrative scenarios in response to a problematic present fact (e.g. school closings and the problem of abandoned buildings, (Mainsah, 2022). In this sense, it centers the act of creating models or prototypes that support to shape a conceptual design of ideas, expressed through narratives, metaphors, or storytelling. The planned intervention is comprised of three days of speculative activities which will be conducted in a cultural center located in the urban area of the municipality, near the abandoned school building described on the previous section:

- **Day 1. Research dissemination and critical reflections.** This first day will integrate the following activities:
 - a presentation and follow up conversation of the needs assessment findings conducted by Social Work undergraduate students from UPRH.

- a *Memorabilia Gathering*, a space that seeks for collecting memories (narrated, material artifacts, etc.) of the Antonia Sáez elementary school. There will be a space erected to collect crafts, arts or any other type of memorabilia representing the past elementary school.
- a short film screening titled *The war against our schools*. This film documents through storytelling, the impact of the school closings policy in Puerto Rico, as well as collective agency emerge from impacted communities to defend and seek for solutions after the closings. The film will be followed by a panel conversation integrating representation from community organizers, unionized teachers, and educational researchers.

This first day of activities will be open to the public in general. Promotion of the activity will be released by several media: local radio stations, posters will be paste in commercial stores of the urban area (bakeries, car shops, gas stations, etc.), in schools of the municipality, universities and technical colleges, social media, among others.

- **Day 2 and 3. Speculative encounters.** Each day will be dedicated to the facilitation of a

workshop on school closings, memory, and speculation around the school building and experiences in the face of the closure. Day 2 is dedicated to students and Day 3, is dedicated to teachers, all who were part of the school at the moment of the school closing. Each workshop will comprise the following set of activities:

- *School memory elicitation* = a set of premises and questions that aim to make place in memory inviting a calm contemplation to the past in which participants are asked “to bring” a gift received in the school environment, which will be used to address next activities.
- *Keyword set selection and creative crafting* = participants will be organized into groups of 3-4. They will be presented with a series of keywords (e.g., future, memory, success, death, thrive, speculation, imagine, displacement, create, placemaking) and each group will need to choose one which will inspire the craft of a hypothetical possibility for the reuse of the abandoned school building. Students will be required to craft this possibility in a collage while teachers will be required to craft a clay prototype. The distinction between the selection corresponds to

- 1) have a variety of products that the participant populations can create attending to 2) levels of complexity in attention to their age.
- Share creative pieces and explanations.

The participants of this workshop will be contacted through snowball sampling, social media, posted flyers, among others.

Assessment criteria for the effectiveness of the intervention

To assess the effectiveness of the planned intervention, several criteria has been identified in alignment with the activities designed:

- Day 1. Research dissemination and critical reflections. Assessment criteria consists of 1) Participation. It is expected that a minimum of 30 persons will participate from the activity. Registration information will require contact information (name, email, cellphone). 2) A volunteer list of a minimum of 10 interested people in collaborating with organizing efforts towards the rescue and reuse of previous Antonia Sáez school building. 3) A collection of at least 5 memorabilia artifacts and; 4) An evaluation form for the overall activity.

- Day 2-3. Speculative encounters. Assessment criteria consists of 1) documenting repertoires of the possibility thorough a collection of crafts such as collages, prototypes; 2) Brief narratives explaining the crafts created. 3) Self-reflection documenting learnings, experiences.

Budget

The planned intervention will require a total budget of \$2,500.00 which will be distributed for the following items: photo and video documentation of all activities; purchase of craft materials that will be used in Day 2-3; food expenses for all the planned activities; a payment for staff support which will work all 3 days of activities; printing materials expenses (e.g., flyers for promoting activities, registration, evaluation and consent forms, others); compensation for speakers.

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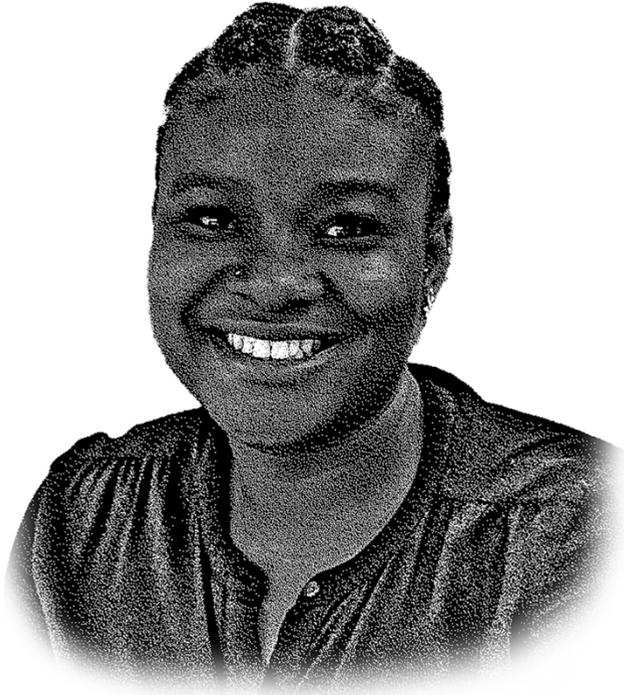
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Toyosi Tejumade-Morgan
Department of Theatre

Playing down, playing UP

Indeed, the finality of the “Negro problem” as the nineteenth century closed meant a United States dead set on playing down the southern horrors of discrimination and playing up what was wrong with Black people (quoted from Ibram Kendi’s *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*, pg 279).

PLAYING down playing **UP**

Performative Jottings and Dialogues
BY

Toyosi Tejumade-Morgan
An Experimental Play

CHARACTERS

BLACKMAN

WHITEMAN

SPECIAL APPEARANCES

Frantz Fanon

W.E.B Du Bois

bell hooks

Soyini Madison

Sara Ahmed

Ibram Kendi

SETTING

Everywhere the playing down and playing up lives.

TIME

Present and Future, with visits from the Past.

Note

This is a performative dialogue of readings, questions, and speculations of terms regarding Africans and African-Americans. It is an experimental piece that explores the use of performative writing to exchange dialogues regarding race, and the subject of performativity is utilized to reimagine the hegemonic formulation of language and terms. It is a devised work in progress.

PROLOGUE: *A silhouette of a man walking in the shadows. He is wearing all black; we can't see his face as it is very dark and gloomy. A man walks quietly behind him with a pistol in sight, and suddenly the man in the silhouette stops. The man behind him points the gun at the back of his head. This can begin an experiment of profiling and the image of a black man as threatening. What exactly makes a Blackman threatening?*

I

An empty classroom. A Black student is seated studying; He is sitting by the window with his back against the classroom entrance. A White student walks in with a gun pointing at him. This could also be a class discussion among students to delve into the subject of race and representations.

IDENTIFY AS WHITE:

You will die today nigga– *(He is visibly trembling.)*

IDENTIFY AS BLACK: *(With his back still turned.)*

Nigga? Oh, I get what this is– *(Starts to turn.)* Don't shoot... I'm not an American.

WHITEMAN: Of course! You aren't American. You're a descendant of imported goods— (*Raises the gun again, about to shoot.*)

BLACKMAN: (*Hands raised moving forward.*) Hold on! What I meant to say is that I am from Africa. I just got here last month on a scholarship to study.

WHITEMAN: Of course! Even better, I get to shoot an original Black man.

BLACKMAN: Original Black... Wait... what are you talking about!

WHITEMAN: Burnt faces.

BLACKMAN: Burnt faces!

WHITEMAN: Cursed descendants of Ham!

BLACKMAN: Who is Ham?

WHITEMAN: (*furiously.*) Say your last prayers, beast!

BLACKMAN: (*Defiance charges toward him.*) But you're the one pointing the gun at me.

WHITEMAN: It is your fault that I'm pointing the gun at you. You come into our lands...

BLACKMAN: (*Cuts.*) Our?... I thought the Lands belong to the Natives...

WHITEMAN: (*Cuts.*) America belongs to Us!

BLACKMAN: Who is/are Us?

WHITEMAN: People that look like me.

BLACKMAN: (*Pause.*) You can't help it, can you? Tell me... What do you see when you see me?

WHITEMAN: (*About to speak.*) I see...

BLACKMAN: (*Cuts.*) Be honest... you owe me that since I'm going to die tonight.

WHITEMAN: I don't owe you a thing! Need I remind you that I'm the one holding a gun?

BLACKMAN: (*Cuts.*) What makes you superior?

WHITEMAN: (*frantically.*) Everything!

BLACKMAN: You can do better than that! Racial discrimination existed before racist ideas were formed, leading to centuries of ignorance and hate for the Black race³³. So, I ask again, what makes you superior?

WHITEMAN: Everything!³⁴

³³ Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning* (New York: Bold Type Book, 2017), 9.

³⁴ "Whites must be seen to be white, yet whiteness consists in invisible properties, and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen". Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), 45.

BLACKMAN: You don't even know, do you? Is it my hair? Or my face? The color of my skin³⁵.

(Pause.) Was it Gomes Eanes de Zurara's *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*?³⁶ Or Leo Africanus's *Della descrizione dell'Africa*?³⁷ Richard Hakluyt's *The Principal Navigations, voyages, and Discoveries of the English Nation*³⁸.

(WHITEMAN takes a hard look at BLACKMAN trying to make up his mind whether to continue the discussion or shoot, he finally puts the gun down, and we see the

³⁵ "A third theme of critical race theory, the "social construction" thesis, holds that race and races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality: rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or reuters when convenient. People with common origin share certain physical traits, of course, such as skin color, physique, and hair texture". Jean Stefancic, Richard Delgado, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (NYU Press, 2012), 8.

³⁶ Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 23.

³⁷ Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 28.

³⁸ Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 32..

atmosphere change into a movement of two people, with one doing the chase while the other continues to dodge).

WHITEMAN: Aristotle’s “Climate theory” did say that extremely hot or cold climates produced intellectually, physically, and morally inferior people who were ugly and lacked the capacity for freedom and self-government³⁹.

BLACKMAN: All of these racist ideas that preceded American slavery were carried across to justify African slavery⁴⁰. Africa had civilization long before the British colony; (WHITEMAN became livid) I meant America. We had rulers, Ezes, Igwes, Alaafin of Oyo, Sultans, and Emirs. Just because some histories are not written in English or written at all doesn’t make one history nonexistent.

³⁹ “Burnt faces”- Original meaning of burnt faces in Greek is Ethiopia (Kendi,17),

⁴⁰ Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 19.

WHITEMAN: Genesis 9:18-29 ‘Negroes were the children of Ham, the son of Noah, who was cursed with the black color and the slavery God inflicted upon his descendants⁴¹.

BLACKMAN: Racism is still an issue because we continue to “play down”⁴² these crimes. White crimes are individualized, while Black crimes are generalized because it takes a whole village to claim Black crime. You keep playing it all down. You call looting and stealing colonialism. You call Cultural genocide-settler colonialism. Mass killings White supremacy. Until it becomes the Black crimes, the actual words start flowing, Burnt faces? Blacks don’t even help themselves. They castigate one another rather than stand by each other.

WHITEMAN: Let me give you some advice- from a majority to a minority...

⁴¹ bram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 21.

⁴² bram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 279.

BLACKMAN: (*Cuts.*) How dare you call me a minority! Do I look like a minor to you? I weigh 200 pounds, for Du Bois's sake!! You know the word I hate most! People of color... What the fuck is people of color. You have a color (*Pause.*), and it ain't white. But you use the word anyway⁴³. Where did all of these racist ideas emanate from, and why!

BLACKMAN: (*Aside*) I remember modern criticism class and post-colonial week. Like every graduate class, discussions, arguments, and opinions flew across the room as we delved into collections of articles, including

⁴³ " It has become commonplace for whiteness to be represented as invisible, as the unseen or the unmarked, as a non-colour, the absent presence or hidden referent, against which all other colours are measured as forms of deviance (Frankenberg 1993; Dyer 1997). But of course whiteness is only invisible for those who inhabit it. For those who don't, it is hard not to see whiteness; it even seems everywhere. Seeing whiteness is about living its effects, as effects that allow white bodies to extend into spaces that have already taken their shape, spaces in which black bodies stand out, stand apart, unless they pass, which means passing through space by passing as white". Sara Ahmed, *Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism*. (https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20050616083826/http://www.borderlandsejournal.adelaide.edu.au/vol3no2_2004/ahmed_declarations.htm).

Patrick Wolfe's *Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Natives*. Innocently, I asked the Professor why the term settler colonialism when the indigenes were forcibly removed from their homes and displaced from their roots. Don't you think the word 'settler' gives the action a different meaning? By the end of the semester, I had a long list of words that did not describe what action is, either connotative or denotative. I thought the whole purpose of the scholarship was to challenge our ways of knowing and doing.

WHITEMAN: (*Clears throat.*) "Settler colonialism is inherently eliminatory but not invariably genocidal,"⁴⁴... and it's BIPOC now, not people of color.

BLACKMAN: Another form of segregation. White as the "Chiefest color"⁴⁵ just had to be distant.

⁴⁴ Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Natives*. (Routledge Taylor & Francis), 387.

⁴⁵ Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 45..

WHITEMAN: (Hands spread out.) We are the majority.

BLACKMAN: I know other professions that use the term elimination... assassins.

WHITEMAN: You are missing the point.

BLACKMAN: Am I? Imagine you come home to find me making a cold sandwich in your kitchen; I'd say, "I'm settling in your home."

WHITEMAN: That's trespassing.

BLACKMAN: Then I head to shower to take a long bath.

WHITEMAN: That's an intrusion.

BLACKMAN: Intrusion! When did that word enter the Constitution? Was it before or after enslavement?

WHITEMAN: Two wrongs don't it right?

BLACKMAN: O, we are quoting Wyclef now! I bet I won't make it to the master bedroom... these days, Americans don't make it out of the driveway!⁴⁶
(Silence.)

BLACKMAN: Have you noticed how Wolfe's writing differs practically from Ibram Kendi's? Both historically and analytically? There is a playing down in Wolfe's work which is not evident in Kendi's, a similar trait you will find amongst scholars who are biological descendants of a race.

(A long pause.)

WHITEMAN: So what color will you call me

BLACKMAN: I'll tell you if you weren't holding the gun.

⁴⁶ <https://www.cnn.com/2023/04/18/us/woman-shot-wrong-driveway-upstate-new-york/index.html>

WHITEMAN: You'll still die anyway, so you might as well say it.

BLACKMAN: No, I'm not dying today until you justify why I have to die.

II

White and black men, fully dressed in hoods, gloves, and concealed parts of their bodies, are backing the stage. This scenario critically analyzes the imagery of blackness as a color of threat. (The NARRATOR/BLACKMAN turns and starts to speak)

NARRATOR/BLACKMAN: Imagine the color purple; try to replace the color purple with another word. (*Pause for audience response.*). How about pink? Close your eyes and imagine the color pink; what other names can you call pink? Let's try another color... black (*Pause.*)... Try to imagine the color black like you imagined purple and pink. In Toni Morrison's documentary *The Pieces I*

*Am*⁴⁷, Sonia Schez says, ‘To reinvent means you don’t like yourself and that there is something wrong, but to reimagine yourself on this American landscape is what we must do. How we must live, rearrange your toe jam, your hair, our thoughts’...*(Pause.)* What colors did you come up with?

(Wait for the audience to respond. Brings out a dictionary and starts to read).

BLACKMAN: “Characterized by the absence of light, indicative of condemnation or discredit, sad, gloomy, calamitous, marked by the occurrence of a disaster, characterized by hostility or angry discontent, distorted or darkened by anger. An example is, “his face was BLACK with rage.” After several definitions in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the tenth description says: having dark skin, hair, and eyes. Dark skin, black skin. So tell me, how do I wash myself clean? I often wonder

⁴⁷ Toni Morrison: *The Piece I am*. Directed by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, Performed by Sonia Schez, Johanna Giebelhaus et al, 2019.

if the word black existed before we were made or created after we were made.

(BLACKMAN pulls out a bible and starts to read.)

NARRATOR/BLACKMAN: In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth; the earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters, and God said, Let there be light, and there was light- Genesis Chapter 1 verse 1-3.

(Close the Bible.)

NARRATOR/BLACKMAN: We live in a world where, culturally, white symbolizes good and black bad, Engraved in history, literature, religion, and the mass media⁴⁸.

Black and red are the two most common colors symbols of evil,

⁴⁸ Tom W. Smith, Changing Racial Labels: From “Colored” to “Negro” to “Black” to “African America.” 501.

and yet nothing is sexier than a red-haired lady in sexy
black lingerie.

Some want it Black,

Served without milk or cream.

Echoes of ignorant chants of the depiction of Black
hypersexuality; when you go black, you never go back.

You mourn wearing black,

Judge and uphold the constitution adorned in black,

Yet no parts in this dictionary have excellent illustrations
with black hair, black skin, black outfit...

BLACK.

III

NARRATOR/BLACKMAN: Do you know what I love
most about the Crits? No book captions imagine
otherwise than the Crits⁴⁹. Through storytelling, these
writers develop complicated scenarios to explain race-
based oppressions in law and legal institutions. I
ultimately agreed with everything except one. Why are
we using the terms microaggression and small acts of

⁴⁹ Jean Stefancic, Richard Delgado, *Critical Race Theory*, 1-40.

racism? Yes, they did say that sometimes the acts are not small, but how about we say NO ACT OF RACISM IS SMALL. THERE CAN BE MINI FRIDGES AND MINI SKIRTS; NO MICROAGGRESSION. Using the term micro, you indirectly telling me to micromanage my emotions to your racist ideas or utterances. It is what bell hooks⁵⁰ meant by Black folks internalizing racism so much that we find pleasure in the images of our death and destruction in our collective consciousness. Imagine reporting a racist, and you start with, “ I know this is subtle, but I still want to draw your attention to this issue.”.. (*Pause*). By saying this ‘dispiriting transaction⁵¹’ is subtle, you’re unconsciously announcing- It is okay! I participate in this present entertainment spectacle of contemporary colonization, dehumanization, and disempowerment, where Black images serve as a murder weapon”⁵². A world where a

⁵⁰ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representations*. 7.

⁵¹ Jean Stefancic, Richard Delgado, *Critical Race Theory*, 4.

⁵² bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representations*. 7.

murderer enters a place of worship kills 11 people, injures seven, and is called a white supremacist.

(NARRATOR/BLACKMAN brings out the dictionary.)

NARRATOR/BLACKMAN: Merriam Webster's definition of supreme: The highest in the rank of authority: especially in a position of unquestioned authority, dominance, or influence, A supreme being! Characterized by the highest excellence of achievement: Outstanding. of great importance: Ultimate! Final! No single negative word about supreme in the dictionary, likewise white. Are we still talking about murderers, cruelty, and oppressors? (I mean, an example of White Supremacy could have sufficed.) The Crits use phrases like white self-interest and white race... (22) to describe WS, which sounds like BS. Freedom indeed remains elusive as racism is persistently renovated⁵³; just like

⁵³ Michelle Commander, *Afro-Atlantic Flight: Speculative Returns and the Black Fantastic*, 21.

dictionaries, histories perpetuate erasures⁵⁴. What Britain did to America (British Colony) can be called colonization. Outlaws were colonialized! Africa experienced something else I don't still have a name for it. Oh, I have tried to put everything in one word, but it doesn't work! So tell me how decolonization would be successful when we are misdiagnosed. Using the opposite of the problem won't fix the problem. How about we find a name for what we experienced (the actual one) before we add a "de" to fix it?

(NARRATOR moves closer and starts to whisper.)

NARRATOR/BLACKMAN: I know this sounds off point, but It is irresistible not to look at the idea of color blindness as discussed by the Crits. Let's try and exercise. Let's say we all decide to draw a ballot, we each write what we want, and we all drop it in a bowl, and I shake it, and we can only pick one. What happens in a country where the race ratio is 9 to 1? There is a

⁵⁴ Diana Taylor, *iPresente! The politics of Presence*, 18.

possibility the idea of an individual represents the idea of the entire race. Who are at the helm of government affairs? Therefore, I can relate to skeptics against color blindness, but I think the CRT scholar recommendation sums it all up: “Look to the bottom” when judging new laws, and this simply means that we should apply Ghandi in our daily lives...

*Will my actions today affect the poorest: the least powerful person?*⁵⁵.

IV

NARRATOR/BLACKMAN: Since speculation is a debate that mediates between materials and immaterial, I say we cancel the use of the term white supremacy because it is playing both ways. It plays down the mayhem, horrors, and atrocities inflicted on the black folks, and likewise, it plays up by emphasizing and acknowledging that the idea of white superiority exists. When a child is born, they know no color. Yet, racism

⁵⁵ Ali Campbell, *The Theatre of The Oppressed in Practice Today*, 4.

keeps spreading because of documented racist ideas, repetitions, and citational acts of racism prevalent in America. Resisting repetition and citationality becomes apparent if we want to create a future devoid of oppression due to the color of one's skin, sealed from the public like the FBI and CIA, top secret... How does reliving the historical experiences of Black people help them? Does it help or instead create more myriad of such scenarios? Zuhara's book, for instance, gave the British colony the idea to weaponize and capitalize off slavery. Shouldn't this history become a top secret that shouldn't see broad daylight, not even Mar-a-Lago? Repetitions and citationality, according to Derrida, are what create the cause and effects, not the Language. Is repeating racist images, documentaries, articles, pamphlets, and essays dehumanizing Africans and African-Americans, creating more harm than good? A Black reading about history can lead to liberation, self-reckoning, and reclaiming, but what happens when a racist reads it?

EPILOGUE

I mourn Africa a lot,
Especially my country.

With its pungent smell, Colonial hangovers ooze
across Africa,
Harboring a falsehood for Western beliefs, cultures,
and Whiteness.

African Americans are grieving for ancestors they
will never know due to enslavement.
I grieve for ancestors I never met or heard of due to
colonization and Christianity.
As the fear of village people continues to displace
people from their ancestral homes.

Thanksgiving, Christmas, Halloween, St Patrick's
Day.
Halloween nuances like African traditional cultures,
yet one is termed fetish, while the former is seen as
woke.

Our people frown at tribal marks and traditional symbols yet, they graciously embrace tattoos.

How do we methodologically look forward into the past to find the answers we seek?

How do we stop our traditions from extinction when we continue to costume in Barbie and Iron Man rather than Sango, Oya, and Moremi?

Is decolonization truly the answer to Africa's predicament?

Or should we imbibe the ideologies of the founders of PanAfricanism?

Does believing in the concept of determinant proclivity make me a racist?

African Americans and Africans in Diaspora use Afrofuturism to intersect speculations, Technology, the future, and freedom for the Black race.

Our myths, folklore, and beliefs trying to find their voice amidst Eurocentric noise.

How about we bring our heroes to the mainstream?
Proliferate spaces with the imageries of Queen Amina, Funmilayo Ransome Juti, and Margaret Ekpo. Saturate the media and public with African ideologies, philosophies, and slogans.

Tough like Margaret Ekpo.

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BACKSTAGE NOTES

IBRAM KENDI: Virginia lawmakers made slave patrols compulsory for non-slaveholding Whites; these White citizens were charged with policing slaves, enforcing discipline, and guarding routes to escape (68).

J.L AUSTIN: All languages are a form of doing and highly performative.

SOYINI MADISON: Language performs reality.

JUDITH BUTLER: Performativity is the stylized repetition of acts.

JILL DOLAN: Performativity is the non-essentialized constructions of marginalized identities.

JACQUES DERRIDA: Language does not make action performative, but the repetition and citational force that it gives the effect—the metaphysics of presence.

MADISON: Derrida says that all we know and say is based upon what has gone before and what we have inherited from past actions. If something is done with words, it is because it has happened before, and we know out of convention and custom to continue to do it.

RICHARD SCHEHNER: A restored behavior.

SOYINI MADISON: Subversive performativity can disrupt the citations that hegemonic performativity enacts.

SARA AHMED: Anti-racism is not performative. An utterance is performative when it does what it says.

BLACKMAN: What Black excellence means is what White supremacy is doing... Ascribing supremacy to Whiteness and doing it! Literarily

IBRAM KENDI: By the early eighteenth century, every Virginia country had a militia of landless Whites “ready in case of any sudden eruption of Indians or insurrection of Negroes”. Poor Whites had risen into their lowly place in slave society-the, the armed defenders of planters-a place that would sow bitter animosity between them and enslaved Africans (54).

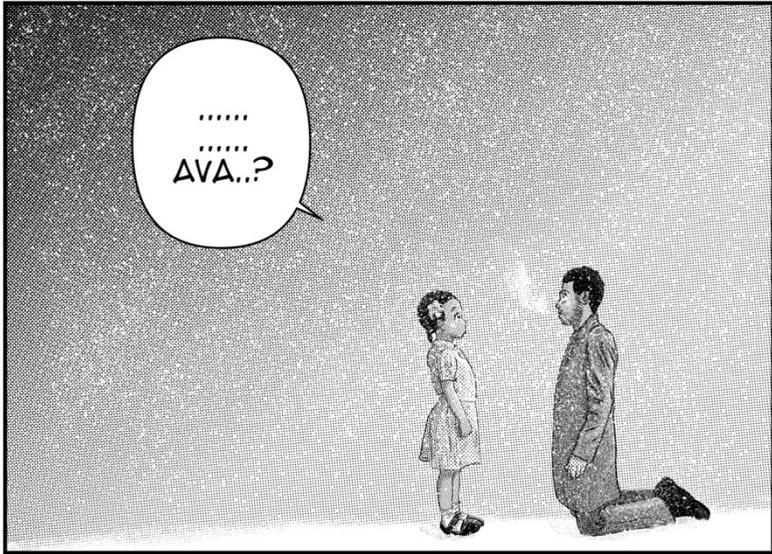
(Sound of police officer screaming from offstage, “On your knees.” The actions following happened simultaneously)

WHITEMAN: Start running or? I’ll shoot you.
(Police officer screams, “I said on your knees”).

BLACKMAN: (In a trance, recites Frantz Fanon from *Black Skin, White Mask*) I am black; I am in total fusion with the world, in sympathetic affinity with the earth, losing my id in the heart of the cosmos -- and the white man, however intelligent he may be, is incapable of understanding Louis Armstrong or songs from the Congo. I am black, not because of a curse, but because my skin has been able to capture all the cosmic effluvia. I am truly a drop of sun under the earth.

THIS PIECE IS READ
FROM RIGHT TO LEFT
PLEASE START FROM
THE BACK OF THE BOOK.

この作品の読む順番は
右から左です。
本の後ろからお始め下さい。



COLD.

**IT
REALLY
IS**



THEY BEEN
WAITIN ON
ME TO
COME HOME.



YOU'RE
WELCOME
TO JOIN
ME.



I'M...
TIRED.

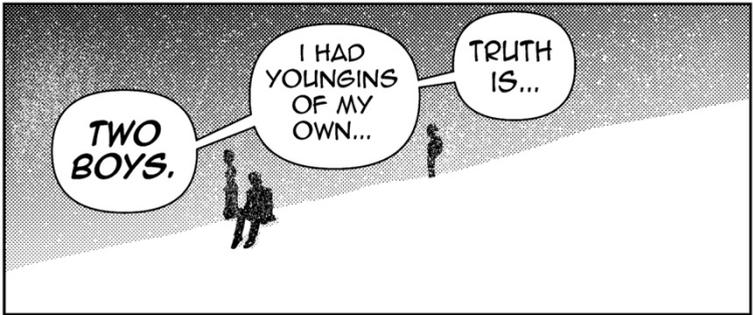
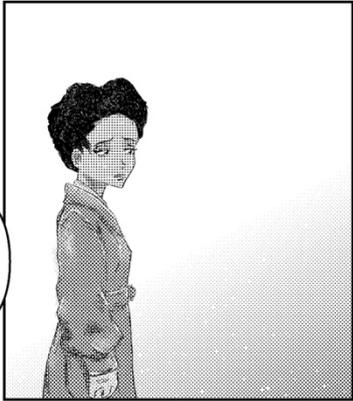


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OH...
HONEY...



**TWO
BOYS.**

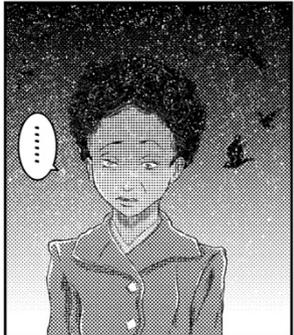
I HAD
YOUNGINS
OF MY
OWN...

TRUTH
IS...

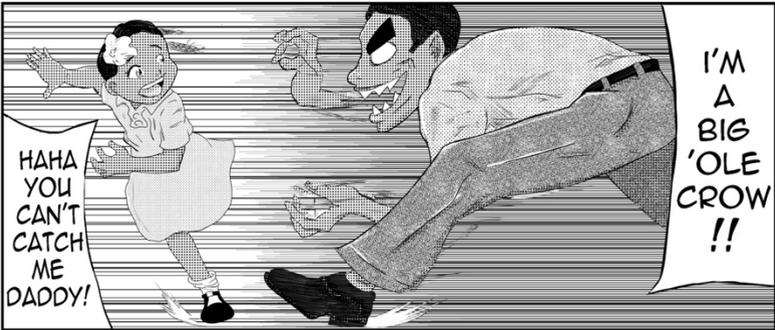


IT AIN'T
ME
WAITING
ON THEM

...AND
ONE
THING I
CAME TO
REALIZE



.....



Translation・翻訳

I am interested in what is lost in translation between English and Japanese works, and how translators work to reconcile the lost content by adding new meaning during the localization process. Since I am translating my own works, I have complete creative control over how they are written and how they are altered in new linguistic contexts.

Karasu was originally sung in a Kyushu dialect. There is no perfect way to communicate the nuanced meanings laced within dialects during the translation process, so I decided to lean into this ambiguity and write the English version in a Black southern dialect, creating slightly different versions that invoke different cultural and linguistic histories and contexts.

ある作品の翻訳を通じて何が失われたか、何が生じるかに興味を持っており、英語で書くか、日本語で書くかでは、意味が少し変わります。なぜなら、それぞれの言語の伝えられることや表現が異なるからです。だから、翻訳者自身が、翻訳の過程で新たな意味を与える権限を持っています。私は自身の作品を翻訳しているため、それらがどのように書かれ、新たな言語的な文脈でどのように変更されるかについて、私は完全な創作のコントロールを持っています。歌われている九州弁は英語に直接翻訳できないので、代わりに、この作品の英語のバージョンを標準語でなく、アメリカの黒人弁で書きましたので、各バージョンは異なっている文化的な文脈を呼び起こします。

To read the manga in its entirety please visit my website below. Links to the inspirational song and more information can be found via the QR code.

全作品を拝読するには、以下のウェブサイトをご覧ください。QRコードからは、インスピレーションを受けた楽曲や詳細情報へのリンクもご利用いただけます。

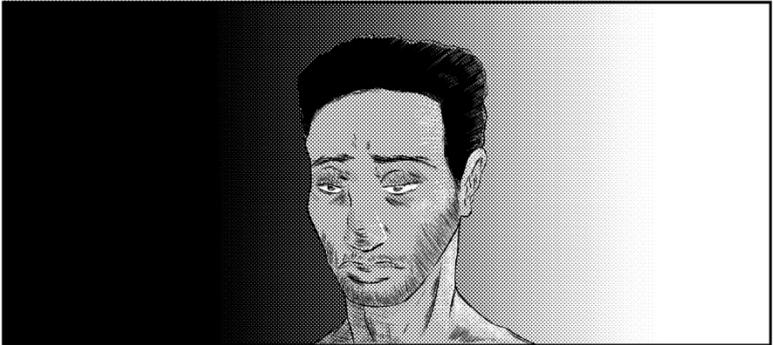
www.kofimanga.com

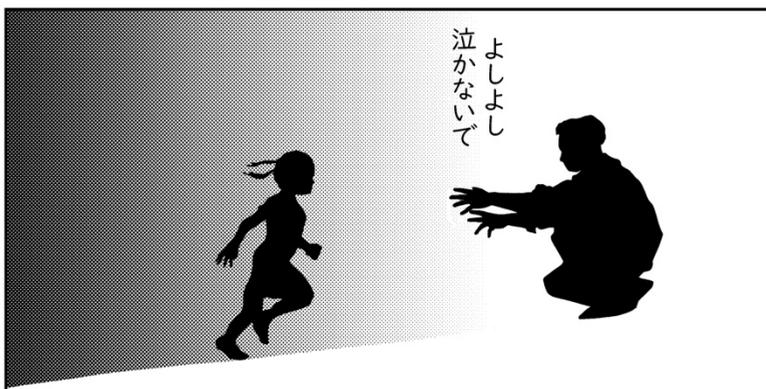


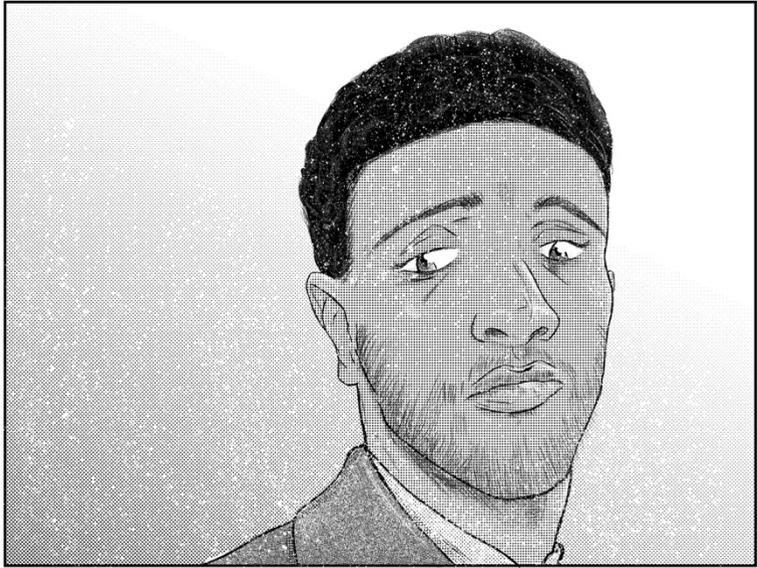


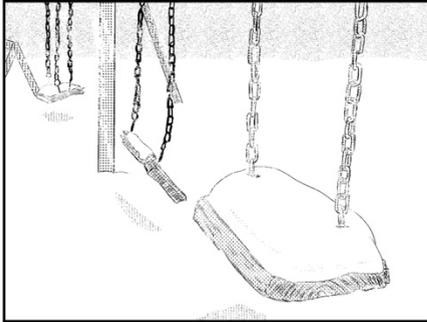


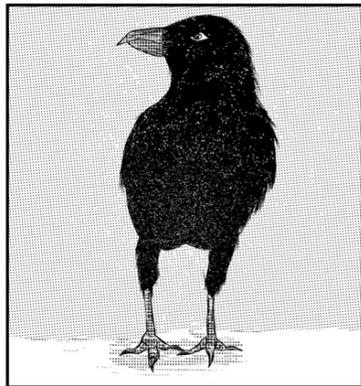
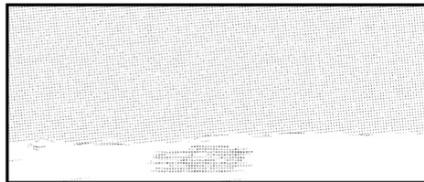
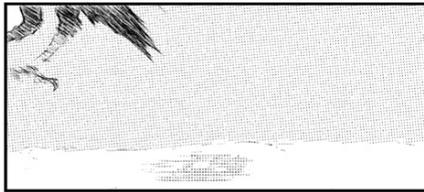


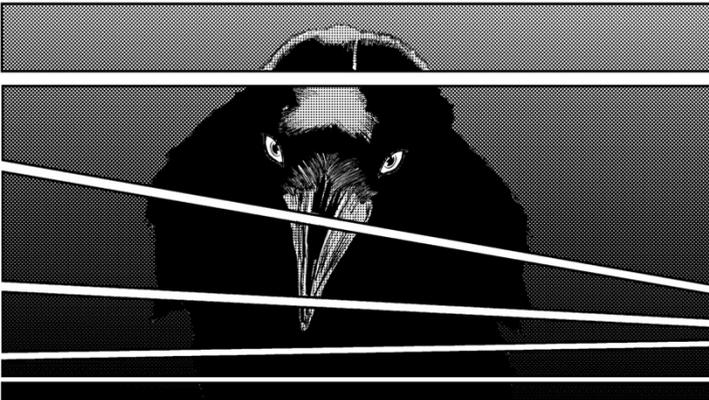












Karasu からす

作家：Kofi Bazzell-Smith

This section features selected pages from my manga *Karasu* (meaning crow(s) accompanied by notes on my thought process.

ここで私のからすという漫画から選ばれた代表ページを創造的な過程についてのメモと共に紹介します。

Japanese is read traditionally from top to bottom and right to left. This manga was written in Japanese first and translated into English, thus, the reading direction is right to left.

この漫画をもともと日本語で描きましたので、読む順番は右から左です。

Manga is the Japanese sequential art form. The form features various idiosyncrasies such as the 4-arc plot structure, the use of various abstract, nondiegetic elements in compositions to communicate feelings and states of being, and the monochromatic aesthetic.

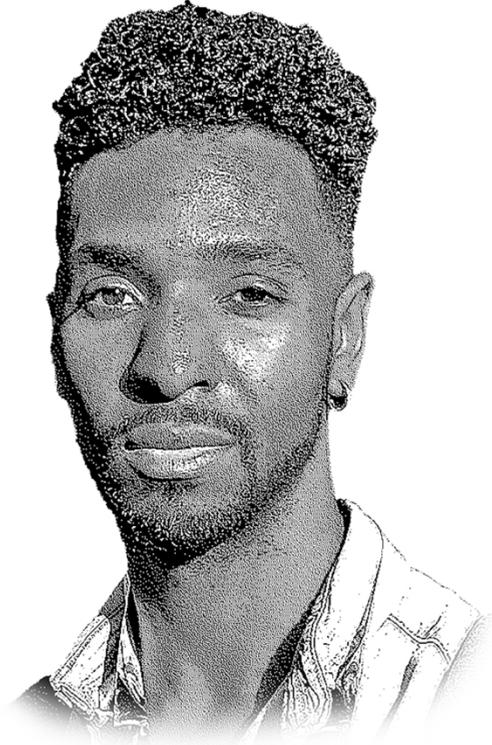
日本のマンガの特徴について話すと、起承転結というストーリー構造、エフェクト、擬音語といった、感情や状態を伝えるための様々な 抽象 的な要素の使用、そしてモノクロの美学など、様々な独自性があります。

Concept • 概念

Karasu is a story that explores loss, using emptiness as a visual tool to evoke "Ma" (間), a Zen Buddhist concept emphasizing silence and the significance of the space between objects. Through the deliberate absence of certain elements, the viewer's attention is drawn to what is not present, fostering contemplation and introspection.

I was inspired by Japanese folk singer Hako Yamasaki's "Karasu" a song about crows kidnapping children. The emptiness in the song evokes a feeling I attempt to reproduce in this manga.

70年代の歌手、山崎ハコのからすという歌に基づき、子供を失った父親について短編漫画を描きました。最近、間「余白の美」という概念について考えていますが、このからすという歌をどうやって視覚的に表現できるかと想像しました。



Kofi Bazzell-Smith
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Humanities Research
Institute

UNIVERSITY OF
ILLINOIS
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



Imagining Otherwise: Speculation in the Americas is the first Interseminars project through the University of Illinois' Humanities Research Institute (HRI), funded in large part by the Mellon Foundation. It was an experiment in graduate education and a collective reconceptualization of what interdisciplinary scholarship could potentially be in the academy. Participants came from programs across the University including Theatre, Urban & Regional Planning, English, Educational Psychology, Art & Design, Dance, Communication, and Spanish & Portuguese. This book is a collection of documents and works-in-progress from the eighteen months of the project.

With contributions by

Kofi Bazzell-Smith

D. Nicole Campbell

Josue David Cisneros

Daniela Morales Fredes

Adanya Gilmore

Patrick Earl Hammie

Beatriz Jiménez

Jorge Lucero

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Emerson Parker Pehl

María B. Serrano-Abreu

Toyosi Tejumade-Morgan