

Friday, April 24, 2015

Session 1: 9:00 – 10:15 a.m.

1. Native Iterations: Race, Difference, and the Construction of Utopia

“Toward a New Lexicon: A (Re)reading of Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* and Rigoberta Menchú’s *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*”

**Esmeralda Arrizón-Palomera**, Cornell University

Written over 100 years apart, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* and *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, articulate the need for a new epistemological framework for a deeper understanding of the experiences both of these narratives describe. What if we re-read these two works as entering, for the first time, an ongoing discussion about truth, authenticity, and literature in the mid-1980s? What does the social, cultural, and historical context in which these two texts enter the conversation tell us about the trajectory African American and Latina/o literature followed? This project is concerned with the discussions that emerge in the 1980s about *Incidents* and *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. In this essay, I map moments of overlap between these two texts in an effort to identify slippages between two literary genres: the Slave Narrative and *Testimonio*. I propose that the overlap between these two works allow for a re-reading of the Slave Narrative as *Testimonio*. This is an effort to locate temporal and spatial coordinates for the production of Latina/o literature in the hopes of moving toward the development of a new lexicon that can help us to re-imagine African American and Latina/o communities in the U.S. beyond the narrative of cooperation and conflict.

“On The Quagmire of Black and Indian Concordance and Dissonance in *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*”

**Chad B. Infante**, Northwestern University

In this paper I attempt to think through concordance and dissonance in Beli and La Inca’s relationship in Junot Díaz’s novel *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. In reading Beli and La Inca as signifying the structures of blackness and Indianness, I argue that their relationship articulates two major principles about black and Indian connections generally; the first is that Bartolome de Las Casas’ and Alexis de Tocqueville’s respective declaration to save the Indian and enslave the African and that blackness is unremitting servitude and Indianness is unbridled liberty subtends the ontological interaction between Indianness and blackness as paradigmatic structures; the second is that their relationship (dis)articulates the normative discourse of black and Indian connections structured by the heterosexual sex act, interracial mixing, and the figure of the black-Indian. Fundamentally, the novel becomes a microcosmic for thinking black and Indian relationships as they are constructed in the New World formulation of red, white, and black. In the novel Beli comes to signify homelessness that exists with/against La Inca’s signification as home and belonging. I use Jose Munoz and Jared Sexton’s work to think through La Inca’s attempt to rebuild her world with/through Beli and how such an endeavor bespeaks the powerful (im)possibilities that lies in the interaction between blackness and Indianness that both affirm and defy their colonial structuring as relational via discourses the colonial discourse mixing and heteronormative sex.

“Bridging the Past with the Present: Disability, Transgression, and Fetishized Fascination in Reimagining the Cultural Haunting of San Antonio’s Legendary Donkey Lady”

**Mercedes E. Torrez**, Texas A&M University, San Antonio

This essay examines how the legend of San Antonio, Texas’ folkloric Donkey Lady moves beyond the distinction of mere urban legend by illustrating how the Donkey Lady’s non-normative, or queer, behavior leads to her violent and brutal disfigurement and how the dissemination of her folktale by San Antonians connects to greater sociopolitical issues concerning the perception and treatment of people with disabilities. Through analysis of cultural imaginaries such as the Donkey Lady within the scope of theories of the ghostly it is possible to understand the underlying sociopolitical implications that bring about the reoccurrence, or hauntings, of folk figures. This essay demonstrates how theories of the ghostly, queer theory, and disability theory work together to provide an understanding of the continuous resurgence of the Donkey Lady narrative and the frequent desire to seek her out at what is known as Donkey Lady Bridge.

Moderator: **Nancy Quintanilla**, Cornell University

## [2. Love, Hope, and Healing on the Queer Streets of L.A.](#)

“Finding Sequins in the Rubble: A Queer Utopian Framework for Understanding Queer Latina/o Lives and Narratives of/in Los Angeles”

**Eddy Francisco Alvarez Jr.**, SUNY Oneonta

The mapping of queer immigrant memories in Horacio Roque Ramirez’s autohistoria, “El Sereno,” the untold story of Sibely, a translatina whose memory exists only through a newspaper clipping and the oral history interview of a queer Chicano from Huntington Park, California, the tragic love story of Veronica, the protagonist of Terri de la Peña’s novel, *Margins*, sequined dresses hanging on faceless mannequins in the West Hollywood fashion boutique lobby of an Argentine immigrant, the liberatory lyrics of Mexican pop icon Gloria Trevi’s song “Y todos me miran,” and the dancing bodies and ephemeral chants of protesters at the 2006 Immigrant Rights Marches in the streets of Los Angeles. All of these seemingly disparate moments, narratives, memories and sounds come together as different technologies for what I call “finding sequins in the rubble,” a decolonial modality used by queer Chicanas/os and Latinas/os or *jotería* in Los Angeles to resist the “logics of capitalism, neoliberalism, globalization, imperialism, militarism, xenophobia, sexism, and heteronormative regimes.” Based on my interdisciplinary and multi-method research on *jotería* in Los Angeles, I theorize and play with the concept of “finding sequins in the rubble,” as a version of what Jose Esteban Muñoz calls “queer futurity,” a way of “cruising utopia.” Using the examples mentioned above, as a decolonial framework for understanding queer Latina/o lives, real or fiction, I posit that “finding sequins in the rubble” is a way to excavate love, hope and possibility from the debris of intersectional oppression and erasure.

“*Café Vida* and the Healing Power of the Arts in Los Angeles: Homegirls, Theater and Transformation”

**Denise M. Sandoval**, California State University, Northridge

The power of storytelling and performance in the play *Café Vida* (2012) allows not only for the naming of oppressions that affect our daily lives--especially traumas that often remain hidden behind the steel locked doors of silence, shame, and guilt--but also provide useful weapons to challenge perceptions of dehumanization and powerlessness through the building of kinship and community. This paper is interested in documenting the healing and transformative power Chicano/Latino performance in the lives of Chicana/Latina homegirls/ex-gang members from Homeboy Industries by examining specifically their collaboration with Cornerstone Theater Company in Los Angeles, as well as how themes in the play *Café Vida* provides an effective tool of education and empowerment for the female participants. I am interested in not only exploring how theater can transform the lives of the participants, but in addition how the arts are also tools of social justice and self liberation for people who are dealing with issues in Los Angeles often labeled “social problems” or “burdens”, such as gangs, domestic violence, sexual abuse, addiction, and child abandonment. This essay places these Chicana/Latina experiences at the center of analysis and uses their words to document this artistic collaboration through *Café Vida*. The play and the experience it created allowed some of the participants to become “agents of transformation”. José Esteban Muñoz challenges us to “re-direct our interpretative lenses toward more liberatory and affirming futures”, Chicano/Latino performance through the play *Café Vida* can tap into that transformative power of change, both on an individual and a collective level, and can be the foundation for social justice movements in Los Angeles.

“Home(bodies): Transitory Belonging at LA’s Oldest Latina/o Drag Bar”

**Katherine Steelman**, California State University, Long Beach

In his book, *Cruising Utopia*, José Esteban Muñoz writes about a visit to Los Angeles’s oldest operating Latina/o gay bar, La Plaza, which he describes as a paradox – at once frozen in time, and yet embodying physical and national transition. I interrogate the relationship between drag performance, transgender identity and migration as it manifests itself in the physical location of La Plaza through the scholarly works of Jose Muñoz, Nael Bhanji, Vek Lewis and David Román, as well as through interviews with those inhabiting the space of the bar. I also examine the position of trans studies within the discipline of border studies, juxtaposing existing scholarship with interviews that I read as literary texts. I argue that La Plaza, as Muñoz suggests, is a utopian space, going beyond Muñoz’s discussion of the bar by exploring the many contradictions (the AIDS epidemic, gentrification, and changes in

society) that continue to reshape La Plaza, while somehow allowing it to be perceived as unchanging. Muñoz notes that being involved in the LA scene through music, as a teen in Miami, allowed him to imagine LA as his queer home even though he was physically removed from the place of LA by thousands of miles. Home for him was somewhere he could be free and, paradoxically, that had to be someplace far from his “real” home. Similarly, through La Plaza, LA can be theorized as border space where contradictory notions of liberation and limitation are at play.

Moderator: [Belinda Linn Rincón](#), John Jay College

### [3. Monsters of Utopia: Death, Vampires, and Resistant Nationalisms](#)

“Recreating our Vampire Selves: Luis Zapata’s *El Vampiro de la Colonia Roma* in Chicano and U.S. Mexican Urban Spaces of the United States”

[Jorge Estrada](#), State University of New York at Oneonta

The year 2014 marks the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the novel *El vampiro de la colonia Roma* by Mexican writer Luis Zapata. Published in 1979, two years before the first cases of what later became known as AIDS were diagnosed, this novel presents us a new reality of what it was to be a gay hustler in the streets of colonia Roma in Mexico City of the 1970s. In an era where sexual promiscuity represented liberation without the looming shadow that AIDS would represent in 1980s, this novel represents a reality in a space where only Adonis García, the *vampiro*, and his sexual exploits coexist in the narrative. Through his own voice, recorded on tape, we learn about his dreams, his ambitions, his goals, and his venereal diseases. Toward the end of the novel, Adonis dreams of escaping the city on board a spaceship flown by Martians, where iconic city buildings get smaller and smaller until they completely disappear. Having as a literary context Zapata’s *Vampiro de la Colonia Roma* and in commemoration of its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary, this essay posits that thousands of gay Mexicans left their hometowns and immigrated to urban spaces of the United States to recreate Adonis’ sense of freedom. In the words of Jose Esteban Muñoz, they were “cruising utopia.” This novel, read widely in Mexico and by Mexicans in the US, taught them, like Adonis, to dream a world where being a gay vampire was possible; to live in a utopic reality where AIDS was not a looming threat.

“Gothic Utopias? Death, Hope, and *What You See in the Dark*”

[Tanya González](#), Kansas State University

Manuel Muñoz’s debut novel *What You See in the Dark* (2011) centers on an explicit connection between the filming of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960) and the lives of the small California town hosting the film crew. While the premise of the novel may not explicitly register as the queer Chicana/o literature Muñoz is known for, the novel actually continues his career focus on individual experiences of longing, loss and love in Central California. This paper reads these affects as simultaneously gothic and utopic in nature and shows how Muñoz’s aesthetics provide other ways to see the social realities of those who are in the shadows. Weaving in a fictional retelling of Hollywood star Janet Leigh’s experiences during the production of *Psycho* alongside the narrative of a young Latina who is murdered by her lover, Muñoz manages to produce a treatise on the operation of fear and anxiety in our every day lives. To this effect, Muñoz manipulates the gothic, traditionally considered the genre of fear. Muñoz’s conventional gothic mode focuses on his use of point of view, a mysterious murder, tropes of darkness, and madness resulting from loneliness and loss. Looking at *What You See in the Dark* with his previous story collections in mind, an aesthetic preoccupation with fear and anxiety appears. However, his stories do not necessarily linger in the pessimism of fear and darkness. Rather, it treats a hopeful search for the future, while infusing a political critique of the present. Death and hope coexist in a gothic text that moves us toward a better time and place.

“Cosmopolis Aztlán: Chicana/o Utopias and Resistance to Nation”

[Annemarie Perez](#), Loyola Marymount University

While the nationalist Aztlán of the 1960s and 1970s Chicano Movement was conceived as a poetic vision in hope of creating a bronze utopia to inspire a political movement, the Aztlán of the twenty-first century is their dystopian mirror darkly. On right-wing websites run by organizations like the Minutemen, documents from the Chicano Movement are used to justify the militarization of the border, where the criminal and terrorist are collapsed and both become the fault of immigrants. Against this right-wing dystopia, re-visioning Aztlán as a borderland cosmopolis connects it to larger cosmo-political and cosmo-poetic movements. These, made up of borderlands and

cities worldwide acting against nation and nationalism to create “cities of refuge,” defy the conservative notions of nation and state militarization of the border. Derrida closes his essay on the cosmopolitan with the passage: “Being on the threshold of these cities, of these new cities that would be something other than ‘new cities’, a certain idea of cosmopolitanism, an other, has not yet arrived, perhaps. If it has (indeed) arrived.....then, one has perhaps not yet recognized it.” Without trying to draw the lines too sharply or neatly, I believe the borderland cosmopoetic spaces create “new” (though not new) cities of refuge, of which the Aztlán southwest is but one. They exist not because the nation state recognizes them, nor are they sanctioned by any nation, but because they are claimed by those who take refuge there. This paper explores the possibility of the borderland cosmopolitan in Chicana/a texts, focusing on Alicia Gaspar de Alba’s *Calligraphy of the Witch*, Cherrie Moraga’s *Hungry Woman* and John Rechy’s *The Vampires*.

Moderator: **William Orchard**, Queens College, CUNY

#### **4. Form and Fiction of Queer Utopianism**

“The Imprint of the Word: Reclaiming the Queer Migrant Body and Performing the Resignification of Freedom in ‘The Legalities of Being’”

**Rosanna Simons**, University of California Los Angeles

“My grandmother has never used the word ‘undocumented’ to describe her existence. In fact growing up she never taught me about limitations.” With these words, two-spirit poet and migrant activist Yosimar Reyes begins his poem, “The Legalities of Being.” I first encountered this work on a website called *Dreamers Adrift*, where I viewed it as a digital performance of spoken-word poetry with live illustrations by artist, activist and co-founder of *Dreamers Adrift*, Julio Salgado. The video features the hand of Salgado moving across a long stretch of paper as he creates marker drawings that illustrate Reyes’ voice. Drawing on ideas from performance theory, queer of color critique, legal studies, and (im)migration studies, I develop in this paper an analysis of “The Legalities of Being” as a contestatory performance that functions to relocate the site of the production and transmission of knowledge from the Word to the body. I propose that this performative reclaiming resists the oppressive technologies of regulation that mark the brown bodies of queer and queered migrants, and ultimately enacts a utopian resignification of freedom. My analysis demonstrates how Reyes’s and Salgado’s refusal of the neoliberal, presentist logics that work to co-opt efforts of the (im)migrant rights movement involves the utopian resignification of freedom as a freedom from what I term ‘regimes of documentation.’

“‘Zones of Possibility’: Queer Forms of Lezamian and Anzaldúan Consciousness”

**Kristie Soares**, UC Santa Barbara

This paper examines the theoretical work of gay Cuban author José Lezama Lima within the context of Queer Theory’s recent turn toward utopian futurity. Lezama Lima is well known as the most canonical and complex of all Cuban writers. While some have analyzed gay themes in his fiction, no study has yet been completed of how Lezama Lima’s theoretical texts help us reshape notions of queer temporality. In the wake of Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia*, which turns Queer Theory’s attention toward “potentiality or [the] concrete possibility for another world,” an examination of Lezama Lima’s utopian theorization of the privileged historical time periods that he calls *eras imaginarias* [imaginary eras] becomes especially timely. This paper redefines his famed term *era imaginaria* as “zones of possibility,” arguing that the author’s “imaginary era” is actually a consciousness accessible through literary experience. Reading Lezama Lima’s writing in *La expresión americana* against Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of *conocimiento*, I argue that for both the “zone of possibility” exists in a third space outside of geography and temporality, and as such can be accessed by any culture or time period. Through his “technique of fiction,” I contend that Lezama Lima proposes a reading practice that elicits this consciousness in response to the text, which has vast implications for linking art to social change, and positing utopian futures.

Title??

**Sarah Muñoz-Bates**, Arizona State University

Undocumented immigrants often become victims of exploitation by those who take advantage of the immigrants’ vague legal status and the uncertainties that accompany it. These immigrants are often unaware of their legal rights in the United States, or they are afraid to fight against mistreatment. Understanding how undocumented immigrants depend upon others for services, employment, protection, and a voice reveals not only the ways in which they can

be exploited but how they—and the community members with whom they live—can fight against such exploitations. This paper examines Ana Castillo's *The Guardians* to illustrate the ways in which unauthorized immigrants regularly depend upon others and how this dependency can lead to compromising situations for the immigrants. While recognizing immigrants' vulnerable position, this paper also reveals how Castillo's novel shows potential for change when community members unite and take steps towards social action. In *The Guardians*, Castillo highlights the effectiveness of community action, while still recognizing the individual agency of undocumented immigrants. In addition, Castillo incorporates elements of magical realism to create a discourse that helps the reader imagine a different present and future for immigrants. While still far from a Latina/o utopia, these imagined realities create a sense of hope and possibility within the harsh realities of the present. By examining the dual dependency and agency of undocumented immigrants in *The Guardians*, this project helps us to envision ways in which immigrants can be empowered to survive in their respective communities and in the borderlands, where the novel occurs.

“Maps of the Intangible: Inserting Cuba into Cuban American Fiction”

[Izabela Zieba](#), University of Miami

John Urry, the sociologist of tourism, asserts that photographs can “substitute for physical travel in complex and contingent ways” (*The Tourist Gaze 3.0* 155). In my essay, I extend this claim to argue that photographs, genealogies, religious and cultural artifacts might function in the fiction of multi-ethnic authors as surrogate journeys to their homelands. I specifically focus on the Cuban diaspora, whose returns to the island are particularly charged with moral dilemmas (each dollar spent is one dollar too many to support the regime, for example) and, oftentimes, simply impossible. The “controlled abstraction” of a map in Achy Obejas' *Days of Awe*, famous pictures of Ernesto Guevara in *Loving Che* by Ana Menéndez, and finally Santería figures in both Obejas' novel and Jennine Capó Crucet's short stories operate not only as symbols of the homeland, but also props in what Michael Chabon calls “the wistful theater of the past,” the utopia of an imagined Cuba. The props substitute for travels not always possible to be undertaken, traversing space as well as time. Yet their literary significance is not always unambiguous; just like, according to Phillip Muehrcke, a map can be “more and less than itself, depending on who reads it,” the props used by the authors can be meaningful and lead the reader in the direction of the island, or they can be reduced to mere effigies of Changó in the corner of the room. The importance of reader response and simultaneously its invalidation in *Loving Che* helps me make larger claims about remembrance and its performative nature.

Moderator: TBA

## [5. John Jay Student Panel](#)

TBA

## Session 2: 10:25 – 11:40 a.m.

### [6. Lo Siento: Queer Latina/o Embodied Consciousness \(Without Apology\)](#)

*Lo Siento*, translates to both, “I'm sorry” and “I feel.” This panel offers up theories related to queer Latina/o feelings and does so without apology. The proposed panel will explore various interpretations of queer racialized affect, including apprehension, shame, pleasure and dolor. In particular, we are interested in examining, interrogating and theorizing queer Latina/o embodied consciousness as represented in expressive cultural forms. Each paper engages the question of subjection and racialized affect from distinct yet interrelated rubrics. Ernesto Javier Martínez engages ‘raised flesh phenomenology,’ Emma M. Pérez privileges the decolonial, and Francisco J. Galarte puts forth trans modalities. Taken together, the papers offer nuanced, illuminating and comparative readings of queer racialized affect and point toward the possibility of alternative imaginaries for the queer and transgender racialized subject that are as pleasurable as they are dolorous.

“¿Sin Huevos y Qué?: The Queer Pleasures and Dolor (Pain) of Brown Transmasculinities”

**Francisco J. Galarte**, University of Arizona

This paper takes up the figure of the “marimacho,” or *macho sin huevos* as a site for exploring the pleasures and *dolores* of racialized transmasculinities and considers the ways in which trans- as a modality queers the relationship between the sexed body and the gendered subject. To be more specific, I am interested in what Lisa Cacho describes as, “a politics of racial masculinity premised on willful emasculation and its pleasures” (2012; 81). The question of the macho without huevos (balls, cojones, the list goes on and on) is indeed a trans- question, intimately related to Roderick Ferguson’s suggestion at the end of his book, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* that we should look to trans of color subjects as “sites of knowledge” (2004; 148). Specifically, I’m interested in, what the destabilization of maleness from Chicano masculinity can teach us about the affinities between trans of color and queer of color critique. It is not my aim to argue that “macho” is resignified when huevos are not present, instead I seek to track the possibilities for pleasure that open up when the sociopsychic position of the castrated boi is embraced. This presents the opportunity for thinking about how a disinvestment in huevos undercuts and disrupts, but does not resignify the heteropatriarchal thrust of macho as mobilized both within and outside of Chicana/o cultural nationalisms. Racialized transmasculinities in the examples I will discuss represent a counter investment in queerness, maleness and nonnormativity that does further devalue Chicana/o masculinities. I will be tracking various scenes of trans-embodiment, in in Gloria Anzaldúa’s short story, “Historia de Un Marimacho” and Carla Trujillo’s novel *What Night Brings* to discuss the trans of color body as archive of culture, or day to day life patterns. According to Lucas Crawford, transgender bodies “not only actively archive—through/with bodies the possibility of moving beyond binary gender, but also unwittingly archive the violence that our culture perpetuates on those who attempt to do so” (2010; 533). To conceive of the transmasculine body of color as archive in the case of these two texts which address and critique Chicano cultural nationalisms allows for exploration of the affective dimensions (affective positions I name as dolor and pleasure) of heteropatriarchal disciplining and regulation.

“Phenomenology of the ‘Raised Flesh’”

**Ernesto Javier Martínez**, University of Oregon

In this paper, I present the rubric of “raised flesh phenomenology” as a way to trace and theorize a preoccupation in contemporary queer ethnic literature with forms embodied consciousness that do not fit conventional expectations of liberatory activity in response to oppression. By embodied consciousness, I mean to reference nonpropositional knowledge; wisdom that people have about the world that cannot always be expressed through words, concepts, or theories, but that is often evident in behaviors. However, I also mean to reference something less tangible than the terms “consciousness” or “wisdom” might connote. I propose the concept of apprehension (with its dual connotation of understanding/fearing) in order to capture the embodied experience of, on the one hand, apprehending (i.e., grasping) a sense of oneself as an erotic being in contexts of violence and, on the other hand, experiencing apprehension (i.e., experiencing anxiety) particularly as one desires in ways not too clearly congruent with one’s political aspirations, emotional needs, and cultural expectations. This less conclusive understanding of “embodied consciousness” becomes a recurring framework through which queer writers of color explore behaviors and desires not easily understood as healthy or liberatory. For the purpose of this paper, I discuss (as a case study) writings by Manuel Muñoz, with special attention to the horizon of harm and muted quality of desire his characters manage to intuit through affective “apprehensions” of such things as sexual promiscuity or desiring (and being desired by) white men.

“Shameless (sin vergüenza): A Decolonial Erotics of Pleasure”

**Emma Pérez**, University of Colorado, Boulder

When addressing shame, queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points out that “The forms taken by shame are not distinct “toxic” parts of a group or individual identity that can be excised; they are instead integral to and residual in the processes by which identity itself is formed” (Sedgwick, 2003, 63). In this paper, I’d like to address shame as a culturally specific affect touted and known as “sin vergüenza,” or shameless, for Chican@s. Culturally, we are raised on shame as a form of social control. “Sin vergüenza is hurled as an epithet to ensure that we maintain gendered roles and do not step outside of conventional heteronormativity. As Chican@ queers, we learn to embrace that which is considered toxic about our queerness and subsequently enact a “fuck you” attitude through the performativity of shamelessness while at the same time clinching the pleasure of defiance. To be sin vergüenza is to be shameless unabashedly when all around you are convinced that you should be ashamed, want you to be

ashamed and are themselves ashamed that you are not ashamed. You have managed to make integral to your queer Chicana@ identity a shamelessness that will be the tool, the device for negotiating a hostile, hateful world. By addressing “sin vergüenzas” (those who are shameless) I will attempt to define the concept as a decolonial erotics of pleasure. If we define decolonial as a deconstructive tool, a critical device to excavate the colonial logics of white heteronormative power, we can also implement decoloniality as a process in which we engage daily to disrupt that power. A decolonial erotics performs shameless pleasure in the very act of boldly defying vergüenza, shame, to embrace queer identity in all its forms. I’ll also briefly discuss my forthcoming novel, “Electra’s Complex: An Erotic Mystery” to track a Chicana queer character’s shameless pleasures.

Chair and moderator:

**Michael Hames-García**, University of Oregon

## [7. Potentials of Desire: Narrating Affective Futures](#)

“What’s Love Got to Do With It? White Desire and the Political Potential of Love”

**Lee Bebout**, Arizona State University

This paper emerges from a chapter of my current book project, which explores how representations of Mexico, Mexicans, and Chicanas/os are deployed to fashion whiteness and Americanness, or more aptly whiteness as Americanness. This paper interrogates perhaps the most challenging expression of whiteness on the border: white desire. White desire presents a greater challenge because of the way it romances and “positively” renders the Mexican Other. Drawing upon the rich tradition in film, music, and literature of white Americans “loving” Mexico and Mexicanas, this paper excavates the nationalist and racial logics at play in these acts of desire. The heart of this paper provides an analysis of Ivan Thompson’s cross-border matchmaking as depicted in the documentary *Cowboy del Amor* and his book *Cowboy Cupid*. Thompson has made a living and reputation for crossing the border and finding Mexican women for middle-aged Anglo suitors. His work draws upon and reinforces notions of the erotic, exotic Mexicana who is characterized by her demure nature. This paper reads Thompson’s matchmaking as the extension and enactment of a long discursive tradition found in the scholarship of Arnolde de León and songs by Robert Earl Keen and others. Ultimately, I contend that white desire is far from love. Rather, it is an expression of US racial project in sexual terms. In its conclusion, this paper draws on feminist theorizations of the politics of love to map other, anti-racist engagements with Mexico, Mexicans, and Chicanas/os.

“The ‘Brown Affect’ of *Nepantla*: Latina Domestic Workers, Antinormative Feelings, and the Future Latina Subject in Pat Mora’s *Chants and Borders*”

**Georgina Guzmán**, California State University, Channel Islands

Since the 1980s, the image of the immigrant Latina nanny and domestic worker has become a ubiquitous stereotype; in the media, these women are frequently portrayed as intellectually, linguistically impaired, racialized objects of disdain and ridicule. Such dominant representations of Latina domestic workers within popular forms of entertainment produce hegemonic perceptions within the U.S. populace that, I argue, create a dangerous affective anemia towards Latina laborers. I read this affective anemia as a lack of basic human empathy and mutual human recognition that normatively devalorizes immigrant Latina subjects and their labor in the U.S. Reading Pat Mora’s poems about Latina nannies and housecleaners in her collections *Chants and Borders*, I examine the role and position of the Chicana writer as a *nepantlera*—a cultural and political intermediary between immigrant Latinas and the American public—who actively humanizes Latina domestic workers through the dissemination of antinormative feelings of empathy. As a middle-class, college-educated Chicana writer, Mora shows that for Chicanas who increasingly inhabit a liminal space between American and Mexican, middle-class and working-class, citizen and alien, living in this in-between *nepantla* space can generate specialized affective skills to live in-between *and become a go-between* between peoples from both sides of the border, navigating and mediating multiple systems of power. In my theorization of a *nepantla* empathy and what it means for the articulation a future Latina subject, I draw from José Esteban Muñoz’s conception of “feeling brown” and the corresponding “antinormative feelings that correspond to minoritarian becoming” (2006, 679).

“Affective Landscapes: Rehistoricizing, Remapping, and Remembering in Helena Maria Viramontes’ *Their Dogs Came with Them*”

**Ariana Ruiz**, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Helena Maria Viramontes’ *Their Dogs Came with Them* is set in East Los Angeles between 1960 -1970 as the community is entering a period of transformation and isolation. The inception of the 710 Freeway, as well as a forced quarantine and imposed curfew against rabies-infected dogs sets the stage for state surveillance and social upheaval. These structural and policed boundaries further segregate the space from a greater Los Angeles County and in process complicate notions of community and continuity for its residents. From this perspective, I examine the role of public memory in *Their Dogs Came with Them* as a terrain where master narratives are produced and contested. The novel’s response to the threat of erasure redefines geographic and emotional boundaries that in turn bring issues of gender, representation, and history to the forefront. I argue that Viramontes’ novel provides and documents alternative modes of remembering and mapping as a tactic of resistance to state violence. Furthermore, this rehistoricization project incorporates quotidian tools of resistance that take into account social and cultural expressions from the predominantly Latino population of East Los Angeles. The act of remembering, I contend, operates as a critical geographic and temporal intervention making visible the limits and potentials of revisionary history within urban communities of color.

Moderator: TBA

## [8. The Ambiguities of Genre: Autobiography, Memoir, and the Epistolary Novel](#)

“‘Type-Cast-Set’: What Autobiographies of Latino/a Performers Can Tell Us About Playing to (Stereo)Type”

**Susan C. Méndez**, University of Scranton

What would it be like to live in a world where there are no stereotypes? Where actors (paid and unpaid) can be who they are, regardless of individual and communal expectations? Would this occurrence constitute an exercise of queer utopianism, “an idealist mode of critique that reminds us that there is something missing, that the present [...] is not enough”? Or do we have the ability to live in this world now and just lack the will? Can performers, of all types and levels, speak to this last question most directly? And if so, what would they have to say? Using performance and feminist theories, Rita Moreno’s autobiography *Rita Moreno: A Memoir*, John Leguizamo’s autobiography *Pimps, Hos, Playa Hatas, and All the Rest of My Hollywood Friends*, and Rosie Perez’s recent memoir *Handbook For An Unpredictable Life: How I Survived Sister Renata and My Crazy Mother, and Still Came Out Smiling (With Great Hair)*, it is my aim to establish a trajectory of the utilization and reformation of stereotypes for Latino/a performers. These actors have been consciously (and sometimes unconsciously) struggling with the stereotypical roles that they are asked to present on stage and screen and have, as a result of their struggle, reformulated stereotypes into prototypes, which John Leguizamo defines as the building blocks of comic theatre. It is through the existence of these prototype roles that Latino/a performers (of all levels) are empowered to take on any scripts presented to them, and that Latino/a lives and experiences are validated overall.

“My Genome, My Utopian Self? Genetic Ancestry Testing, Race, History, and Latin@ Memoirs”

**Dalia Kandiyoti**, College of Staten Island, CUNY

In this talk, I explore the recent popularity of genetic ancestry testing through memoirs that are constructed around quests into the “deep history” of the self and community. Genetic ancestry testing in which private companies, public research institutions, and the media (such as Henry Louis Gates’s television show) are deeply involved, has been viewed critically as re-introducing scientific conceptions of race through “the back door,” by fixing ancestry and race with “scientific evidence.” At the same time however, genetic testing is also positioned as going beyond race to show patterns of human connectivity. In this paper I ask how the narration of genetic genealogy by Latin@ authors rewrite history, identity and Latin@ racialization based on the new biopolitics of race that emerged after the mapping of the human genome and notions about “postracial” society. Drawing both on a utopian discourse of racelessness and also of communal/racial belonging, memoirs by Raquel Cespeda and Doreen Carvajal and testimonials by other Latin@s help us understand how “genetics and the unsettled past” (the title of a recent volume) are positioned within the context of post-racial discourses in the “Obama age” as they affect Latin@ identities, as well as within the conjuncture of science, commodification, and race. Moreover, the quest for ancient ancestry through genetic testing reveals new models of kinship (including of queer kinship and technology), and a

different ideas about diasporization through the re-spatialization of belonging through the human migration narratives that genomics works with. The autogenomographies, Latin@ memoirs and other personal writings I examine, negotiate, through literary and cultural means, Latin@ identity, the utopianism inscribed in ancestry testing, and genomics-based history through highly crafted narratives about the personal and collective past, revealing many aspects of the new biopolitics of molecular race and contributing to the new genre of genomics-based life-writing.

“Ana Castillo's *The Mixquiabuala Letters* and the Uses of Ambiguity”

**Ashley Hope Pérez**, The Ohio State University

Ana Castillo's experimental epistolary novel, *The Mixquiabuala Letters*, presents readers with radically divergent possible outcomes for the central relationship of the narrative, a friendship between Teresa, the Latina poet who composes the letters, and Alicia, whose responses are not included. Castillo's table of contents for the novel proposes three paths through the letters and invites the reader to improvise others. Consequently, the prospect of restoration and solidarity (signaled by renewed contact between the friends in one of the paths) exists in irresolvable tension with at least two other possibilities: a vision of this correspondence as a tool for Teresa's self-definition and a vision of female friendship as an inadequate stay against destructive heterosexual relationships and social pressures. This paper frames the ambiguity at the heart of the novel as an invitation to engage seriously with the diverging paths—both utopian and cynical—that may grow out of Latina experience and to question the interpretative narratives we improvise in response to the resulting tensions. Although readers of the novel often seek to overcome or account for the contradictions between the multiple paths through the letters and within the letter writer, *The Mixquiabuala Letters* ultimately asks that we linger with, rather than resolve, uncomfortable ambiguities.

Moderator: **Raúl Rubio**, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY

## [9. Regenerative Stories: Health, Literature, and the Poetics of History](#)

“Knowing the history of these buildings”: Medical Violence and the Potentialities of Historical Futures in Alejandro Morales's *The Captain of All These Men of Death*”

**Christopher Ferreira**, University of California, San Diego “Knowing the history of these buildings,” Robert Contreras in Alejandro Morales's 2008 novel *The Captain of All These Men of Death* states, “sheds a completely different perspective on what having tuberculosis was and meant, on what medicine was and has accomplished, on how medicine became abusive, [...] especially [for] those of us who were poor, Mexican, and black” (3). This paper explores the temporal and spatial dystopic potentials in *The Captain*, as it confronts histories of racialized quarantined patients at the Los Angeles Olive View Sanatorium. As Morales engages actual hospital archives and patient testimonios, the novel re-imagines what is produced at the intersections of race, medicine, tuberculosis treatment, and how these narratives converge from histories of colonialism, land dispossession, and potential futures haunted by racial violence. The novel remembers the story of Contreras, a young Chicano who, while attempting to enlist in the U.S. Army in the 1940s, is instead interned under the authority of the Los Angeles Public Health after being diagnosed with tuberculosis. Quarantined at Olive View for over a decade, Contreras witnesses events that reveal a medical practice that situates poor patients of color—Latina/o and black “TBers”—as the “raw materials” for experimental medical procedures. As José Esteban Muñoz has suggested, such a text “reminds us that there is something missing” from dominant narratives, and that to take seriously oral histories, patient writings, and subjugated knowledges is a political act—what Cherríe Moraga has described as “refus[ing] to end with the bitter facts.” I ask in this paper: What possibilities emerge from *The Captain*—a story that refuses to end with the bitter facts of history by constructing a world which records both structural violence, as well as ongoing resistance to it.

“Collaborative health and healing stories in Aurora Levins Morales's new work”

**Suzanne Bost**, Loyola University, Chicago

Aurora Levins Morales has led me to rethink what a story is and what a story does. From the memoir she co-authored with her mother in the 1980s to her multi-dimensional website, her work produces collective, networked stories and authors. Her newest book, *Kindling* (2013), narrates her experiences with epilepsy and multiple chemical sensitivity disorder and her varied experiments in healing. Story-telling is central to the healing processes

throughout: when doctors and insurers refused to recognize or treat her illnesses, she turned Re-Evaluation Counseling, a group therapy revolving around performing stories for an audience that can imagine narrative pathways for healing. Her website extends these processes to networks real and virtual, sharing stories and selling books and webinars as well as offering her services as speaker or writing coach in trade for web management, massage, water filters, or non-toxic flooring. Health becomes a collective product; as the website proclaims, “It takes a village to keep the blogs coming” ([www.auroralevinsmorales.com](http://www.auroralevinsmorales.com)). A somber indictment of the status quo emerges in these stories about toxic environments, trans-corporeal suffering, and the shallow minds and shallow pockets of U.S. medical insurers, all of which drove Levins Morales to plead for donations online. But this story has powerfully expanded the purview of literature. Levins Morales’s website creates new spaces for story-telling and deploys stories as material objects with the power to heal. These stories also disrupt conventional economies (the website solicits barter and donations alongside conventional credit card sales) and circulate between and among bodies in ways that challenge conventional understandings of the literary. Using the lenses of posthumanism and new materialism, this paper will uncover the intellectually and politically liberatory potential of stories as medicine.

“Aurora Levins Morales and the Creation of a Healing History”

**Suzanne Uzzilia**, CUNY Graduate Center

In *Medicine Stories: History, Culture, and the Politics of Integrity* (1998), particularly the essay “The Historian as Curandera,” Aurora Levins Morales outlines a guide for how history should be written, which she performs in her sweeping alternative history of Puerto Rican women, *Remedios: Stories of Earth and Iron from the History of Puertorriqueñas* (1998). Levins Morales seeks to heal the damage done to those who have not traditionally held power by writing histories that tell the stories that have not been told, highlight erasure and hidden power relationships, and embrace complexity. She fills out backstories for writers and thinkers like Sor Juana de Asbaje and Flora Tristan, and imagines the tale of Fray Inigo’s imaginary sister (in the tradition of Virginia Woolf’s musings on Shakespeare’s sister). This type of history is shaping not only the way in which Levins Morales herself writes history, but it is beginning to function as a lens through which other critics are studying historical writings, as evidenced by Elisabeth Guerrero’s examination of Mexican author Brianda Domecq’s *La insólita historia de la Santa de Cabora* (*The Astonishing Story of the Saint of Carbora*) (1990) as a healing history. In both creating and performing this type of healing history, Levins Morales seeks to promote a future in which we all move “forward in multicultural alliance to a just contemporary society” (43), reflecting perhaps the queer utopianism proposed by José Esteban Muñoz.

Moderator: TBA

## [10. Pedagogical Horizons: Performance, Teaching, and Textuality](#)

“Pedagogy and Performance in an Intermediate Spanish Online Context: Developing Embodied Thinking about the Latina Experience via Theater and Film”

**Christina Biron**, University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth

Feminist scholarship, poststructuralism and language socialization studies have all posited that identities and experiences are reconstructed and reconstituted in relation to changing discursive and material contexts. Within a classroom environment, Cangarajah (2004) has shown that complex, hybrid identities and experiences can be fostered through pedagogical safe-houses - contexts in which students can develop critical and creative learning practices, act out imagined communities and identities, develop solidarity and community, and reflect on diverse discourses and subjectivities. Within a university-based intermediate Spanish online context, then, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the ways in which film-based and theater-based activities can contribute to the creation of safe -houses where students learn to embody and experience varied Latina standpoints toward race, class, and gender issues and the ways these intersect with students' own viewpoints. As a result of this session, participants will learn ways to structure film-based, theater-based strategies of embodiment into an experientially-based learning sequence, a sequence that can be adapted to a variety of online, blended, or face-to-face learning environments that explore the Latina experience through film and/or literature. The presenter will discuss challenges involved in this type of instructional design, include multiple samples of student work across different components of the sequence, demonstrate the transformative impact of this pedagogical approach on Spanish students' linguistic and intercultural growth, and suggest ideas for using presentation content in more advanced Spanish classes. The session will

conclude with a summary of how students' construction of diverse Latina voices in response to session activities supports a feminist epistemology of difference (Sandoval 2000; Wing 2000) and assists them in gaining a more nuanced understanding and empathy for self and other.

“Down These [Clean] Streets: Teaching Nuyorican Literature in Central Florida”

**Stacey L. DiLiberto**, Valencia College

According to the latest Census, 300,000 Puerto Ricans live in Central Florida and that number is steadily growing. In fact, the Puerto Rican population in Florida is second behind New York, a metropolis that has produced some of the most prominent voices of Puerto Rican literature in the U.S., including Piri Thomas, Tato Laviera, and Sandra Maria Esteves. These authors have used their writings to express Puerto Rican identity, living in between two worlds: Spanish and English, in the urban jungle of New York City. The sentiments of these authors are similar to those felt and experienced by the Puerto Rican population in Central Florida, and their literature resonates deeply with this population, but how does this unique population define its own identity in the suburban landscapes of the I-4 corridor in which they live? How can the Central Florida population add new layers to Puerto Rican identity first expressed by Nuyorican authors? How does one teach Nuyorican literature in Central Florida classrooms, why is it important to do so, and what unique opportunities are there for invention and further cultural production by Puerto Ricans in Central Florida? This presentation seeks to answer those questions.

“Language and Power: The Presence of Latino/a Texts in the Spanish Classroom”

**Sobeira Latorre**, Southern Connecticut State University

The teaching of US Latino/a texts originally published in English poses significant challenges for scholars housed in traditional Spanish departments. Although the English/Spanish divide has been amply debated within the field of Latino/a literary studies, the practical and scholarly implications of this divide remain unresolved. My essay examines the ways in which the power dynamics that operate with regard to Latin American versus Latino/a Literature, English versus Spanish language, and established versus recent immigrant communities, play out in the classroom setting. Focusing on Dominican literature, a literary corpus that includes works by writers with varying levels of connection to the home or adopted country and whose literary language may be English or Spanish, my paper seeks to underscore the pedagogical challenges involved in the teaching of such a diverse body of literature and community.

Moderator: TBA

## Session 3: 11:50 – 1:05 p.m.

### 11. Senses, Afro-Religious Imaginaries, and Nuyorican Poetry

“Audacity of the Senses: Memory, Utopia, and Queer Identity in *We the Animals* by Justin Torres”

**Richard Perez**, John Jay College, CUNY

“Coaxing the Skull: Writing in *Palo Monte* in Lyn DiIorio’s *Outside the Bones*”

**Victoria Chevalier**, Medgar Evers College, CUNY

“Re-sensualization, Insolvency, and Abnormality in Nuyorican Poetics”

**Rachel Ellis Neyra**, Wesleyan University

My mind is on parts of three texts presently, which have a place, also, in my book project on Latina Poetics. I am re-thinking the importance of fragments and brokenness in Latina/o and Caribbean theories of the subject and language, not towards an amendment to or corrective of such, but rather towards further elaboration on the necessary social violence of cuts, fragments, and parts within a conception of a minoritarian aesthetics. It is a minoritarian aesthetics that, in layers, José Muñoz’ interventions carve out for us in the vocabularies of disidentification, cruising punk and queer utopias, invoking the brown commons, re-phrasing “this bridge” as his “crack.” These and other terms and metaphors are, as the first chapter of *Disidentifications* raised and suspended,

precisely invested in the language of theory as marking out a difference of embodiment in the world – nothing less, and with no *apologia* for being a theorist in making this alternative world-marking. So, the three texts I would like to think in relation to you all and the conference formation to come are: the utterance “Cuidao por allí vienen los anormales, y con eh’strait jackets” that precedes one recording of the “proper” lyric lines of Hector Lavoe and the Fania All-Stars’ salsa ballad, “Mi Gente” (1975), which I want to read as a crucial performative utterance to thinking Latina; the performance of “richness” alongside abjection, flatulence and shit, and un-livable living conditions in Pedro Pietri’s play, *The Masses are Asses* (1984); and, finally, the language of a black American female character, Alayce, and the cries of a trans-woman character, La Vieja, that are cut off of the pages of Piri Thomas’ novel, *Down These Mean Streets* (1967). These examples all take us into Nuyorican theater, music, and narrative. If we were to really run with them, they would take us to the Bronx on fire, to white flight from NYC, to the AIDS epidemic, to the brown working-class and skid-row imaginaries, to “motherfucker this easy flow beneath our living room” (Moten), which is also Ellison’s Harlem apartment embattled in noise becoming sound, which is also the mythical white train car that Ramo paints into an Island Fantasy in the film, *Beat Street*. I would like to think about language and re-sensualization in relation to capital with you all.

Moderator: [Jennifer Harford Vargas](#), Bryn Mawr College

## [12. En/Gendering Nations and the Sacredness of Place](#)

“Navigating Gender and Nations in Daisy Hernández’s *A Cup of Water Under My Bed*”

[Juanita Heredia](#), Northern Arizona University

As critics of multiethnic American literature continue to be preoccupied with the representation of the city within the national context of the United States, few scholars of U.S. Latina/o literature have examined this urban literary discourse in conjunction with gender in the transnational context of migrations between Latin America and the United States in twenty-first century. Cuban Colombian American author Daisy Hernández exemplifies a literary voice who is concerned with urban experiences and gender in her transnational memoir *A Cup of Water Under My Bed* (2014). In this narrative, Hernández unsettles the representation of single national diasporas as the daughter of a Colombian mother and Cuban father who also explores her bisexual/queer identity across urban centers in the United States as well as Colombia and Cuba. Hernández further demonstrates how Latinas of multiple national heritages and sexual orientations are in dialogue with other women of color who also seek community and a sense of belonging as they negotiate their situational identities in increasingly globalized cities. This study of Hernández’s transnational memoir also points to the future as an imaginary and space of constantly moving identities that reconcile the past and present.

“With the Sacredness of a Priest: Centering the Body as Ritual Site of Feminist Knowledge in Viramontes’ ‘The Moths’”

[Christina Garcia Lopez](#), University of San Francisco

Drawing on Cindy Cruz’s assertion that the bodies of our mothers and grandmothers function as critical sites of knowledge production, this paper focuses on the embodied, spiritual labor of ritual transformation in Helena María Viramontes’ short story “The Moths.” The scenes of caretaking undertaken by the young female protagonist attending to the recently expired body of her grandmother demonstrate not simply a gendered, domestic labor, but rather, a spiritual labor of inheritance which effectively restructures space and time, resulting in a transformation of consciousness. Building on Meredith B. McGuire’s discussion of spatial and temporal disorientation associated with spiritual consciousness, and Barbara J. McClure’s discussion of ritual as an ‘awareness of the divine’ in ordinary life, I argue that Viramontes creates a textual experience which centers the body as a site of knowledge; for, it is the ritual attention to the body which delivers the protagonist, and subsequently the reader, into a knowledge of self that unhinges the logics of patriarchal space. The emergence into such self-knowledge, as Viramontes presents it, is inherently connected to the actualization of a knowledge of interconnectivity with others. In particular, the author utilizes sensory elements of interaction with a ‘lived’ body and all its mappings as well as its ‘profanities’ in order to connect the reader to a shared knowledge of sacred epistemology. The depiction of the protagonist as ‘priestess’ positions her as recipient of a sacred knowledge, engaged in the kind of ‘crossing’ which M. Jacqui Alexander has described as a space of ‘convergence’ and ‘endless possibility.’

“Mexico City in the Imagination of Three Contemporary Latino Writers”

**Monica Hanna**, California State University, Fullerton

Mexico City has long been a literary crossroads and safe haven for writers across Latin America, particularly those fleeing censorship, persecution, and political uncertainties in their home nations. Recently, though, the capital has proven not to be immune to the intense violence of the transnational American war on drugs and the political corruption that has allowed that war to be propagated on Mexican soil. This paper will focus on three recent books by US-born Latino writers whose work interrogates the effects of these shifts on the city from various perspectives: Francisco Goldman’s *The Interior Circuit: A Mexico City Chronicle* (2014), Alfredo Corchado’s *Midnight in Mexico: A Reporter’s Journey* (2013), and Daniel Hernandez’s *Down & Delirious in Mexico City: The Aztec Metropolis in the Twenty-First Century* (2011). These journalist-narrators navigate the chronicle form, interwoven with a heavy dose of memoir, in order to expose the contemporary social and political landscape of Mexico City, reinvigorate the urban chronicle tradition, and imagine a transnational American home for their own multi-centered identities. In all three chronicles, the authors engage with their idealized imaginations of the city and take their audiences on a journey toward a much more nuanced and at times dystopic vision of the Mexican megacity. These journalists take us to the cutting edge of the contemporary cultural and political realities of Mexico City in all its contradictory glory. An investigation into their work allows for a discussion of contemporary non-fiction genres harnessed by Latin@ writers in search of utopian possibilities.

Moderator: TBA

### [13. Masculinity, Nationalism, and the Insistence of Utopia](#)

“Son of the State: Institutionalization and Identity in the Writings of Jimmy Santiago Baca”

**Carolina Villalba**, University of Miami, Coral Gables

This paper examines how the prison poetry and autobiographical prose of writer Jimmy Santiago Baca positions the prison-industrial complex within a network of American institutions that contribute to the social construction of Latino criminality. In his first collection of prison poems, *Immigrants in Our Own Land* (1979), Baca explodes myths often attached to incarceration by depicting prison as a place that can be both/either a punishing space marked by violence, terror, and dehumanization, and/or a self-styled home-space and site of cultural production. In his autobiographical works—*Working in the Dark* (1992), *A Place to Stand* (2001), and *Stories from the Edge* (2010)—Baca also establishes significant links between criminalization and the institutionalization of Latino children-without-status, who occupy the orphanages, foster homes, and juvenile detention centers he inhabited in his youth. Baca’s writings join in the Chicano tradition of *pinto* poetry and prose by illustrating how, for many prisoners, self-preservation and survival require resisting the system’s so-called “rehabilitation” and writing one’s own. In other words, these writings not only reflect Baca’s experiences, but also speak to the marginalization of many Chicano borderlands’ lost children—the orphans, runaways, and wards of the state who exist on society’s fringes and often become criminals or community castaways. Giving voice to their invisible experiences, Baca writes them (and himself) back into a place of personal dignity and social value.

“Out of the Closet and into the Toilet: Cruising Utopia in Miguel Piñero’s ‘Paper Toilet’”

**Jason Baumann**, CUNY Graduate Center

“Thirsting for Utopia: Migration, Identity, and Voice in Jimmy Santiago Baca’s *A Glass of Water*”

**Lorna L. Perez**, SUNY Buffalo State

Jimmy Santiago Baca’s *A Glass of Water* is a complicated novel that gestures towards utopic ideas in an ultimately ambivalent way. A complex novel featuring various story lines and narrative perspectives, *A Glass of Water* is ostensibly about the migrant experience in the United States. Though it is not inaccurate to describe the novel in these terms, it is also not representative of the complexity of Baca’s text. This paper will argue that the familial saga of Casimiro, Nopal, Lorenzo and Vito play with certain kinds of stereotypes in order to remind the reader that easy categories of identity—“migrant”, “Mexican”, “Chicano”—are also constructed and intersectional, influenced by geography, class, gender, and generation in important ways. Though *A Glass of Water* features multiple narrative perspectives, and utopic gestures that attend to each, the novel ultimately remains ambivalent about the possibility of such utopias. By focusing on voice and voicelessness, my paper will argue that the Baca’s ambivalent utopias

speak to notions of representation, more specifically, who represents what to whom. Taking a cue from Spivak, I will contend that the pervasiveness of silence and voicelessness in the text suggests not an impossibility of representation, but rather an inability to hear. Part of this inability to hear or to understand, lies precisely in the way that dominant culture seeks to impose its meanings and scripts on marginal others, a move that Baca's text continually resists.

Moderator: TBA

#### [14. Brown Bodies, Affiliations, and Imaginative Life](#)

“Bones breaking and speaking”: The Brown Commons in Ire'ne Lara Silva's “cortando las nubes” and “la huesera”  
**Magda García**, University of California, Santa Barbara

Using Esteban Muñoz's notion of “feeling brown,” discussed in “Feeling Brown” and “Feeling Brown, Feeling Down,” this paper analyzes the affective register circulating within Silva's short stories in *Flesh to Bone*. More specifically, I read the ghostly elements within these stories, such as la llorona's appearance to the dying along the Mexico-U.S. desert and la huesera's healing of the spiritflesh “for the women of Juárez, for women everywhere,” as speaking to a brown affect that retains ties to historical materialism but refuses the restrictions of race/ethnicity. Furthermore, Silva's fluid notion of the spatial-temporal, illustrated in la llorona and her children's wanderings against a backdrop of historical moments and struggles beginning with the conquest of the Américas and in the melding of la huesera's identity with that of femicide victims, speaks to an attentiveness to what Muñoz calls “feeling brown” by focusing on a shared affective register between brown women through time and space. Thus, this paper recognizes that “brownness” in Silva's stories evoke an affective register that resonates not solely with Mexican and Mexican-American women, labels that are not mentioned within her stories even as they are starkly marked by a specific context, but also with the violence that is hemispherically and globally experienced by women in Central America, South America, and even India. Finally, this paper employs the elements discussed above, as present in two of Silva's stories, to explore both the depressive modalities and the utopian horizons within what Muñoz refers to as “the brown commons.”

“Brown and Down in Hyde Park: Wilfred Santiago's *In My Darkest Hour*”

**William Orchard**, Queens College, CUNY

This paper situates Wilfred Santiago's 2004 graphic novel *In My Darkest Hour* in a growing body of writing populated with depressed Latino protagonists. This archive of Latino depression could include figures like Oscar in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and Alejandro in Manuel Muñoz's short story, “When You Come Into Your Kingdom.” In order to pursue this inquiry, I turn to the work of scholars who have been working on “public feelings,” thinkers like Lauren Berlant, Ann Cvetkovich, and, especially, José Muñoz, whose essays on “feeling brown” help us understand the significance of the performative dimensions of the graphic novel and give us a paradigm for examining Latino works that bypass conventional understandings of identity. Although comics are often profitably discussed in terms of narrative theory and text-image interplay, Santiago emphasizes performativity when he describes his technique in *In My Darkest Hour* as “method cartooning.” In *Graphic Women*, Hilary Chute reminds us that alternative comics are records of a procedure of “embodied repetition,” in which embodiment occurs in two registers: in the visual forms materialized in the work and as a record of the comic artist's bodily performance. Approached from this vantage point, Santiago's work reveals depression not as a symptom of a crisis masculinity that could refurbish group identity (as it is depicted in some narratives of Latino depression) but as an affective interruption that allows for a new kind of aesthetic engagement with the world.

“Abandon(ed) *Latinidades*: Orphanhood, The Feeling Brown of Kinship, and Transcultural Adoption”

**Jesús J. Hernández**, Williams College

This paper examines the notion of orphanage in Karen Reno's docu-comedy *Reno Finds Her Mom* and Joy Castro's collection of essays *Island of Bones* and memoir *The Truth Book*. Drawing attention to the ways that Latina/o identity and belonging are structured by notions of biology as circuited through the family, this paper asks how the figure of the orphan may challenge our definitions of Latinidad. Orphans, I argue, embody the constitutive lack – born into language as bereaved and abandoned; they open up a range of potentialities as well as anxieties around origins, belonging, and Latinidad. The orphan (and other illegitimate subjects) lacks history and is thus vulnerable or privy

to misrecognition and misreading. This presents a moment and space of crisis in the fictions of coherence that adhere to the (Latina/o) subject of/through the family and nation. Released in 1998 through HBO Films, *Reno Finds Her Mom* follows its titular subject, Karen Reno, on her journey to track down her biological mother, in large part to understand her ethnicity and origins. Though she grew up in a white middle class suburb of New York City, Reno has always known herself as Othered. Her search ends with her discovery of her Cuban and Puerto Rican heritage. Joy Castro's memoir and personal essays narrativize her early life growing up as the adopted child of a Cuban Jehova's Witness family and the subsequent revelation of her non-Latina/o white biological parents. Castro nevertheless maintains but also questions her Latinidad. I examine both of these texts to understand what a search or a discovery for origins might offer to these subjects' understanding of nationality and/ or Latinidad. How do narratives of origins act as sutures attempting to stitch together familial and national identity to provide the subject a fiction of coherence or integrity? I turn to the work of Jose Munoz ("Feeling Brown") and David Eng (*The Feeling of Kinship*) to explore how the affect of feeling brown might elucidate the possibilities and challenges of the poststructural family. I consider what it might mean to feel brown but not identify as Latina/o or to identify as Latina/o but not feel brown.

Moderator: **Carlos Martinez**, Framingham State University

### 15. Pedagogy and Subversion

Title?

**Olga Ríos-Soria**, St. Joseph's College

How may undergraduate students gain a better understanding of the socio-historical processes that have helped shaped (inter)national perceptions and discourses of/about the United States-Mexico border region? My current research draws from my students' (family) immigrant narratives and experiences as they relate their own histories and shifting identities to the multifaceted reality of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. I particularly employ Debra Ann Castillo and Maria Socorro Tabuenca's dialectics in regards to border writing in their book *Border Women: Writing from la frontera*, where the authors distinguish between metaphorical and physical borders. Their opening anecdote — a dialogue between a French philosopher and a fisherman from Pátzcuaro— illustrates this difference: "there is a letter missing" in Tarasca [...] 'hace falta una letra, entiendes amigo.' This letter, lost from time immemorial, can never be recovered. And this letter is the one you have to cross the northern border" (1). Reflecting on their own identity as it relates to (im)migration, my students' narratives about their own personal and/or family's "missing letter" in turn helps (re)construct a new interpretive space that is dialogical and inclusive in nature.

Other panelists TBA

## **Session 4: 2:40 – 3:55 p.m.**

### 16. Diaspora, Oral Histories, and Chicano Print Culture from the 1960s and 70s

"Performing Diaspora: A Re-View of Political Exodus"

**Nancy Quintanilla**, Cornell University

While scholarship that examines the U.S. Civil Rights movements of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century usually focuses on the experience and work of racialized U.S. communities, much more can be said about the transnational events that informed sociopolitical resistance. My presentation will examine how both the cultural work of the San Francisco-based literary collective, El Pocho-Che, and Danticat's book, *Brother, I'm Dying*, responded to the exile, displacement, and legal dispossession of would-be refugees during the 1970s and 80s. For El Pocho-Che, I argue, such encounters set into motion a creative movement resolved to articulate a transnational collage of Latinidad, highlighting the role that Central American expatriates played in the struggle for social justice. I not only ask how the encounters influenced ideas of nationalism and identity-formation, but also how the legal policies informing Central American and Haitian immigration helped shift, transform, and mobilize a Central American imaginary within the U.S.? The complex engagements at the heart of El Pocho-Che's work and Danticat's memoir perform a series of functional

contradictions. On the one hand, they provide an alternative gaze at the relationships forming within U.S. soil and across Latin America while simultaneously struggling to rescue invisible subjects from the multiple forms of displacement generated by legal policy. Indeed, just as narratives of recovery proliferate across the work of these artists, so too do the inconsistencies that inform such a task – revealing that a project of resistance is always in process.

“For the Good of the Land, For the Good of All the People’: *El Grito del Norte* and the Forging of a Radical Left Chicana/o Print Culture”

**Dennis López**, California State University, Long Beach

Writing in the 14 June 1969 issue of *El Grito del Norte*, Enriqueta Longeaux y Vásquez connects the forging an egalitarian, utopian future society and citizenry to the new revolutionary political consciousness emerging across the so-called “Third World.” She turns to revolutionary Cuba, in particular, to identify the basis for this radical consciousness and the new world it will create: “In this new society, money must disappear completely. ‘We want an abundant society with a different kind of man,’ the Cubans said. In other words, people will not work for money—they will not have [to] sell their hard work to somebody else. They will work for the good of the land, for the good of all the people.” This essay will examine the rich history of New Mexico-based newspaper *El Grito del Norte*, a Chicano Movement publication committed not only to interrogating the sexism and gender politics of el Movimiento, but also to promoting and making accessible the language of Left radicalism and utopian revolutionary change. *El Grito del Norte* played a pivotal role in recasting the largely local and ethno-nationalist politics of main segments of the Chicano Movement as a crucial part of the internationalist struggle for radical social transformation. The editors and writers for *El Grito del Norte* did much more than simply internationalize the views of el Movimiento: they helped to impart an anti-imperialist, Leftist tone and character to Chicana/o radicalism. The essay presents a critical discussion of the seminal contributions of *El Grito del Norte* to the radical print culture of the Chicano Movement.

“The Many Red Flags of Utopia: Oral Histories of the United Farm Worker Movement”

**Christian Paiz**, University of Southern California

In *Freedom Dreams*, historian Robin Kelley explained, “In the poetics of struggle and lived experience, in the utterances of ordinary folk, in the cultural products of social movements, in the reflections of activists, we discover the many different cognitive maps of the future, of the world not yet born.” Like Carlos Muñoz’s “queer utopianism,” Kelley argued, “The best [progressive social movements] do what great poetry always does: transport us to another place, compel us to relive horrors and, more importantly, enable us to imagine a new society.” This paper is a response to both scholars’ call for an “idealist mode of critique.” Specifically, I will present and discuss the various cognitive maps produced by the United Farm Workers’ rank-and-file members in Southern California. As a historian, I understand I enter the conference’s dialogue from the margins. But, I propose to do so by approaching oral history as a culturally-productive and imaginatively-creative medium, akin to literature. As expected, no singular vision prevailed amongst the participating individuals; instead, a diversity of positions produced a kaleidoscope of social justice imaginaries. These included nuanced critiques of farmworker patriarchies, entrenched white supremacy and the everyday pressures of material deprivation. Most importantly, however, these oral histories also emphasized the affective dimensions of utopic vision – most often expressed as joy in possibility and love in movement. Lastly, these oral histories reflected the “anticipatory illumination” cited by Muñoz: never a clear roadmap, though always a promising becoming.

Moderator: TBA

## **17. Liberty, Justice, and Rasquache Futurities**

“Fractured Dreams: Life and Debt in *The United States of Banana*”

**John Riofrio**, College of William and Mary

Although at the very earliest stages of conception, my work begins with the contention that meritocracy not only constitutes one of, if not *the*, most important myths in U.S. society but is also the one with the most deleterious social effect, particularly on communities of color. Meritocracy, I suggest, effectively leads critical social and political actors away from discussions of larger social patterns of racism and systemic inequality by reinterpreting

crime, poverty and failure as *individual* flaws and “cultural” failings. Moreover, the myth of meritocracy functions as the ideological center of a society that has wholly bought into (pun intended) the principles of neoliberal thought. The wholesale commitment to neoliberal ideology that coheres in the last four decades has resulted in a social system that actively catalogs and divides whole populations into those that contribute to society and those that don't. In a society driven by an obsession with the endless growth of markets and profits, I contend that meritocracy has been put at the service of determining human “value” by virtue of an individual's ability to either create jobs or bear debt. My paper will use these larger concepts to frame an examination of Puerto Rican novelist Giannina Braschi's latest novel *United States of Banana*. Braschi's novel is a scathing critique of what, I would argue, are the over-wrought concepts of Liberty and the American Dream. Specifically, I suggest that Braschi's novel critiques the very notion of “America” via its examination of the persistent invocation of individual freedom over community, the shift toward a society premised on debt, and the sometimes subtle cultural politics of inclusion and exclusion. Braschi's novel, I suggest, connects the dots between 9/11, the suppression of individual liberties, and the fragmentation of individuals and communities in favor of a collective worship of the larger dictates of “the market” and “the economy.” Furthermore, Braschi's novel foregrounds the crucial role that the Arts play in contesting extant narratives that construct human value solely in economic, debt-ridden terms.

"The Interrogative Mode of Justice in Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier*"

**Eric Vázquez**, , Carnegie Mellon University

Because of its landmark status as one of the first, popularly received, novels composed by the Central American diaspora in the US, Héctor Tobar's novel *The Tattooed Soldier* has been read by US Latino/a critics as an explication of identity, or its absence. This paper will contest this consensus to examine the constitutive contradiction between the frame of identity and justice as proposed by the novel. Instead, I argue that the novel is preoccupied with the search for justice for the atrocities of war in Guatemala. However, in the novel's deliberations over the nature of appropriate redress, it formulates a number of claims for justice, not only for war, but also for life in neoliberal Los Angeles. These deliberations point to, what I call the "interrogative mode of justice," which does not assume concrete demands. I claim that in this interrogative mode Tobar constructs an image of justice that steps aside from his protagonists' wounded attachments to the past and their personal stake in seeking justice. Rather than fixate exclusively on historical trauma, the interrogative mode of justice calls for redress that looks toward future liberation.

“Aesthetic Futurities: *Rascuache* Typographies and Latino Imaginative Texts”

**Sharada Balachandran Orihuela**, University of Maryland

Told in the form of the epistolary novel, Rosaura Sanchez and Beatrice Pita's science fiction text, *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148* (2009), follows the lives of Lydia and Frank, labor *cholos*, working on lunar camps, and dramatizes their resistance to a speculative marketsphere dependent on their exploitation. Alex Rivera's film, *Sleep Dealer* (2008), a work hailed as the first science fiction film produced in the Global South, follows a young man named Memo as he enters a virtual world of labor and ends with his coordinated “aquaterrorist” attack on the dam suffocating the rural and primarily agricultural community of Santa Ana del Rio living in the aquacorporation's shadow. Rather than read these texts as representing the successful overthrow of the neoliberal corporation, I propose that their use of *rascuachismo*, defined as a “bawdy, spunky consciousness...a witty, irreverent, and impertinent posture that recodes and moves outside established boundaries...[and] an attitude rooted in resourcefulness and adaptability, yet mindful of stance and style,” points to a narrative and aesthetic refusal to fictionalize or to fantasize about the liberatory possibilities of individual opposition to the neoliberal marketplace (Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, “Rascuachismo: A Chicano Sensibility,” 155). *Lunar Braceros*'s use of disruptive typography, line art by Mario Chacon, and transcription illustrating the shape of Lydia and Frank's rebellion, paired with the repeated aesthetic ruptures in *Sleep Dealer*'s choppy special effects, upend the suspension of disbelief so critical to entering a work of fiction, and thus engages the reader/viewer's metacognitive awareness of and adherence to both narrative and capital.

Moderator: **Esmeralda Arrizón-Palomera**, Cornell University

## [18. Spotlight on Repertorio Español: A Scholarly Dialogue with Playwrights Carmen Rivera and Marco Antonio Rodríguez](#)

This panel will feature a live, face-to-face conversation with two successful playwrights currently in production at Repertorio Español: the Obie-award winning Nuyorican dramatist Carmen Rivera and the up-and-coming U.S.-Dominican dramatist Marco Antonio Rodríguez. We will perform dynamic dramatic readings of scenes from Repertorio's new production of Rodríguez's *Barceló con Hielo* (opened 2014) and its record-breaking, long-running, production of Rivera's *La Gringa* (1996-present). Dr. Camila Stevens and Dr. Jason Ramírez will present relevant scholarship on these works through an active discussion with the playwrights themselves (see detailed abstracts below), moderated by Dr. Kimberly del Busto Ramírez. This unique performance-style panel offers a rare opportunity for theory to be explored in the context of creative practice. Our scholarly-artistic ensemble will address topics including: each dramatist's writing process, developing the plays in production, the playwrights as performers in their own work, and pedagogical approaches and resources for teaching each play. After our performances, interviews, and presentations, the conference audience will have a chance to pose questions, comments, and interact with the playwrights.

“The Theater of Marco Antonio Rodríguez: Making a Home for *Dominicanidad* on the New York Stage”

**Camilla Stevens**, Rutgers University

In spite of representing one of the fastest growing populations of Latinos in the United States, a survey of the recent scholarship on Latino playwrights and performers suggests that Dominicans have yet to make a home in the Latino theater community. My research attempts to correct this absence, since there is ample evidence of Dominican actors and writers working in New York City today. However, in contrast to the foundational Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican theater projects that have carved a space for Latino theater in the U.S. cultural landscape, the “New Latinos” —Colombians, Dominicans, Salvadorans—arriving in large numbers since the 1980s and 1990s enter this ethnic space less apt to form a separate theater company rooted in national identifications. There is, nevertheless, a wealth of theatrical activity that engages Dominican-U.S. migration. Since the 1990s, Dominican artists have shown theater to be a multi-sited transnational practice in which authors, actors, and audiences make temporary homes for displaying bodies and discourses not always recognized by the majoritarian culture of the nation-state. For these artists, both the creative processes of production and reception are embedded in a field of relationships that links them to two nation-states. Like their characters who perform the social scenarios of migration, the playwrights and their creative endeavors are psychically and materially invested in more than one geopolitical space. As a result, their work can be overlooked, since it does not fall easily into either the categories of a minority U.S. Latino theater or a national Dominican theater. In this paper, I propose that with the exception of perhaps pioneer performance artist Josefina Baez, Marco Antonio Rodríguez is the Dominican playwright whose works identify most closely with a Dominican-American identity, and that we might see his family dramas *La Luz de un cigarrillo* (2011) and *Barceló con hielo* (2012) as founding narratives for Dominican-American drama.

“Performance and Pedagogy: Cultivating Identidad y Dignidad through Carmen Rivera's *La Gringa*”

**Jason Ramírez**, Suffolk Community College, SUNY

Nuyorican playwright Carmen Rivera's has achieved national prominence with productions including *The Downfall of Rafael Trujillo* at New York's Teatro Circulo, *Julia de Burgos: Child of Water* at Chicago's Urban Stages, *Celia Cruz: Her Life and Music* at New World Stages and the upcoming 20th anniversary season of *La Gringa* at Repertorio Español, which remains Off-Broadway's longest running Spanish language play. Carmen Rivera's classic explores Nuyorican displacement from, and a desire to return to, Puerto Rico; an enterprise made impossible by economic constraints on the island as well as post-colonial rejection by native Boricuas. *La Gringa* dramatizes the complex nature of Puerto Ricans “de aquí y de allá,” who are often stigmatized by their unique socio-economic identities as “ameRicans.” As poet Tato Laviera explains “En el fondo del Nuyorican hay un puertorriqueño.” The cultural dramatization of return, more often desired than needed, is ever present in the work of dramatists dealing with issues of identity. As Juan Flores decries in *Divided Borders*, “Memory fuels desire: the past as imagined from a Latino perspective awakens an anticipatory sense of what is, or might be, in store.” This paper will examine the use of inter-generational conflict in *La Gringa* and its successful promotion of diasporic studies at Repertorio Español's weekly matinee performances, specifically designed to accommodate New York City's K-12 students.

## [19. Critical Phantoms](#)

“Cholos in Space”

[Marcus Embry](#), University of Northern Colorado

In a post on La Bloga, Rudy Ch Gracia argues that “Latino, and other, spec literature is a largely untapped source of new voices, perspectives, legends and unique cultures that interest the Anglo commercial world.” Garcia posits “Spec lit” as fantasy, sci-fi, horror, alternate world, etc. literature read outside the mainstream “literary” world of literature that is the focus of academe. He insists that though academe ignores spec lit, the market does not, as is evident in the recent decades of Hollywood blockbusters. Garcia’s call to focus academic perspective on spec lit is timely and relevant, not because of the market per se, but because the rise of Chicana/o science fiction heralds important questions for Chicana/o lit in the twenty-first century. With the exception of Alejandro Morales’s *Rag Doll Plagues* and Cherrie Moraga’s *The Hungry Woman*, Chicana/o literature has been said to lack any vision of the future. Though neither book is science fiction per se, both look into the future and construct a vision of what North America will become and how Latinidad will shape it. As we know, Utopias are hard to come by, but as Jose Muñoz wrote, that means we should certainly keep looking.

In my presentation I will consider the future we see in twenty-first century Chicana/o spec lit. I will focus on Rudy Ch. Garcia’s *The Closet of Discarded Dreams* and explore how his novel’s form shapes the future his text foresees. I will also address Ernest Hogan’s *High Aztech* and consider to what degree we can read both texts as metahistorical romances that use the historical preoccupations of the twentieth century to turn our faces to the future, a future with Cholos in Space.

“Critical Phantoms and Futuristic Vatos: Latino/a Scifi and the Theory of Rupture”

[John V. Waldron](#), University of Vermont

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the brutal force used to put down the Tiananmen Square uprising, there has been a growing sense that we are living in the “end of days.” Frances Fukuyama famously and problematically declared an end to the Hegelian dialectic. For him, the end of history had come and all that is left is for us to engage in endless consumption as we seek recognition from our peers. Other critics have argued against his thesis in ways that are equally problematic and famous, but without proposing any concrete alternative. Perhaps as a way of dealing with the hopelessness that pervades an age that believes in nothing but neoliberal ideals, Latino/a writers and critics have imagined or theorized a rupture with the unendurable dystopia in which we live. Through their theory and fictional representations they create the possibility for a re-energized dialectic putting an end to the end of history. In an effort to re-energize a belief in something beyond the ideological closure that neoliberalism proposes, my paper will analyze some recent and not so recent representations of and by Latinos and Latinas in the realm of science fiction. I will engage the fictional representations of Latino/as through the critical lens of critics such as José Muñoz, Antonio Viego and others who propose a theory of rupture.

“Latino Dystopias”

[Rolando J Romero](#), University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Junot Díaz’s “Monstro” focuses on the narrators’ description of “La negrura/the Darkness,” an epidemic that strikes Haiti forcing the quarantine and eventual elimination of those people who had been infected: “At first, Negroes thought it *funny*. A disease that could make a Haitian blacker? It was the joke of the year. Everybody in our sector accusing everybody else of having it. You couldn’t display a blemish or catch some sun on the street without the jokes starting. Someone would point to a spot on your arm and say, *Diablo, haitiano, [¿] qué te pasó?*” The narrator (Junior, perhaps?) as in Díaz’ previous work, describes the epidemic simply as background to the narrator’s own reasons for being in the Dominican Republic. The reader will be informed of the symptoms of the “negrura”: drops in body temperature, congregating in groups, chanting, with eventual hear-say descriptions of cannibalism from the refugees escaping Haiti. In “Monstro” Díaz joins several contemporary authors, such as Guillermo del Toro (*The Strain*), Robert Rodríguez (*From Dusk til Dawn*), Alex Rivera (*Sleep Dealer*), George Romero’s recent *Empire of the Dead*, in describing a world in chaos, falling apart. But opposed to other classic work, such as Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner*, where Latinos serve as props to signal the decline of western civilization,

globalization and late capitalism, the monsters presented by Latinos are not two-dimensional. Latino authors present their “monsters” as preserving the remnants of their own humanity. This paper analyzes the ways in which Latinos counter-act the dominant narrative of third-world overpowering of the first. For these monsters, depicted as diseased, uncontrollable, infected, represent dominant society’s fear and anxieties of a changing world.

## [20. Strategies of Writing: A conversation with poet and anthropologist, Renato Rosaldo and fiction writer Helena María Viramontes](#)

In his “Notes On Poetry and Ethnography,” Rosaldo explained why he felt the need to invent what he coins “antropoesia” or anthropoetry. “It makes a case” he wrote “for poetry that situates itself in a social and cultural world; poetry that is centrally about the human condition.” In this panel, both Viramontes and Rosaldo will talk about what directives, inspirations and research motivations subvert conventional paradigms of writing in order for them to better render the “social and cultural world” of their personal experiences in their poetry and fiction. The conversation will include a literary reading.

**Helena María Viramontes**, Cornell University

**Renato Rosaldo**, New York University

## **Session 5: 4:05 – 5:20 p.m.**

### [21. Queering the Latina/o Literary Imaginary](#)

This panel seeks to challenge the heteronormative politics that often underpin Latino/a literary history. In critically assessing the work of various queer Latino poets, novelists, essayists, and memoirists, each panelist will detail how their particular intervention squares with recent scholarly work in feminist and queer studies while insisting upon an expanded genealogy of Latina/o expressive culture. In particular, the panelists will specifically address the work of gay male writers and therefore dispel the unfortunate continued assumption that literature by queer Latinos lacks a history or a meaningful presence in the Latina/o literary landscape.

“Slow Lightning: Image, Metaphor, and The Visual in Eduardo Corral’s Poetry”

**Eliza Rodriguez y Gibson**, Loyola Marymount University

This paper explores questions of formal experimentation in the Eduardo C. Corral that frame ways of knowing not only Chicana/o poetics, but also Chicana/o subjectivity. Poetry articulates (in both senses of the word), a way of seeing that is both figurative and literal: Corral’s work in *Slow Lightning* show us this confluence of the literary and visual image that generate moments of productive tension and ambiguity. For example, *Slow Lightning* experiments with the orientation of the page. At several points in the book, the reader has to turn the book on its side in order to read it. Corral embraces the visuality of poetic form as metaphor, as formal strategy, and as the ground for offering complex articulations of Chicana/o subjectivity. Further, his work offers us ways of thinking about how the body is textualized, and conversely, how the text is embodied: as historical, embedded in the world, and imagined. These textual bodies carry affective weight and possibility. They are never fully legible, never fully clear, resisting surveillance and the tyranny of certainty, a strategy central to contemporary Chicana/o cultural politics.

“Fierce Mariposa Warriors in Latina/o Literature: Building a Mariposa Nation”

**Daniel Enrique Pérez**, University of Nevada, Reno

This essay examines the use of butterfly iconography in cultural texts to demonstrate how butterflies are often employed as semiotic devices in order to facilitate a mariposa consciousness, a decolonial site grounded in an awareness of the social locations, social relations, and history of the mariposa subject. An examination of the mariposa subject in literary texts demonstrates how butterflies can be used to reimagine identities in innovative and positive social locations. Such sites function as discursive spaces where marginalized subjects not only tell their stories, but rewrite them in order to overcome the multiple forms of oppression that often shape their subjectivities: patriarchy, homophobia, and racism, for example. The researcher argues that the construction of “fierce mariposa

warrior” identities in Latina/o cultural production is integral to a larger political project that centers on building a Mariposa Nation.

“Oedipal Wrecks: Justin Torres’s *We the Animals*”

**Richard T. Rodríguez**, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

This talk will critically assess Justin Torres’s *We the Animals* by drawing from the insights of recent work in queer and animal studies. Picking up from Mel Chen’s engagement with Deleuze and Guattari in *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* to ascertain the function of “non-Oedipal animals,” “Oedipal Wrecks” shows the two-pronged function of the novel for disrupting both conventional kinship narratives and hetero- and homonormative appraisals of sexuality. For despite the mainstream embrace of Torres’s debut book that predictably reads the family from a common frame and the easy tendency to comprehend the text’s sense of “animality” from a surface level metaphorical trajectory, the talk argues that the multitude of species in Torres’ human-animal kingdom signify an array of queer sexual practices and subjectivities that take the risk of desire, exclusion and belonging seriously.

“Aztlán Unprotected: Reading Gil Cuadros in the Aftermath of a Pandemic”

**Julie Avril Minich**, University of Texas at Austin

For young, queer men of color in the United States today, the HIV/AIDS pandemic looks much as it did in the height of the crisis, yet public rhetoric continues to produce what sociologist Claire Laurier Decoteau calls the *aftermath narrative*, as if the “mystery has been solved; people infected have been blamed; the crisis is over in the United States and now persists only in ‘uncivilized’ locations in the ‘Third World’” (238). This talk engages disability theory to explore what gay Chicano writer Gil Cuadros, who depicts the pandemic’s early years in Los Angeles, teaches us in the era of its so-called aftermath. Cuadros explores the racialization of the virus, the consequences of treating a public health catastrophe as a private concern, and the political stakes of seropositive sexuality. Reading Gil Cuadros in the fourth decade of the pandemic prompts us to imagine different political futures for queer, HIV-positive men of color and to recognize health care and sexuality as human rights.

## [22. The Reader and the Text in US Latino Literature](#)

Our panel seeks to explore the relationship between reader and text and therefore falls under the wider rubrics of "Latina/o Visual Cultures and Literature" and "Affective States. How do Latina/o authors create moments of exchange between reader and text in their writing? What aesthetic / narrative strategies do they deploy to create what Roland Barthes terms a "punctum" or point of identification for their reader that can create alternative sites of possibility, engagement, and critique? And in what ways does this correspond to an ethos in formation: a practice rather representation of Latina/o identity?

“Digital horizons of marginalia: Annotating Junot Díaz's *Oscar Wao*”

**Elena Machado Saez**, Florida Atlantic University

In my presentation, I imagine the digital futures of US Latino/a writing, particularly in terms of how the shift from print to digital might be shaping market aesthetics in new and unexpected ways. The paradox of globalization, with the mixed blessing of global access paired with commodification, of community with marginalization, finds its parallel in the digital world of the internet. The internet is neither here nor there, an abstraction that circulates material goods, a marketplace of ideas and products, and space for public discourse that is not necessarily accessible to the entire public. This digital present is already informing the market aesthetics of US Latino/a historical fiction, with online readership communities producing expansive sets of metadata. Such metadata includes book cover images uploaded by readers as well as online annotations of literary texts. In order to think through how digital reception is influencing such writing, I analyze the annotated reference website created for Junot Díaz’s *Oscar Wao* and Díaz’s subsequent contribution to another online annotation project for his novel. While my discussion of these digital encounters between text and audience hopefully points to some new directions for the analysis of market aesthetics, I am equally invested in how US Latino/a writing can speak back to the field of the digital humanities. For example, how these creative experiments can illuminate the potential and pitfalls heralded by the digital age of literature, revisiting the questions of intimacy, access and literacy that animate my own research.

“Narrating Embodied Experience: The Body as Border that feels in Cristina Garcia’s *Dreaming in Cuban*”

**C. Christina Lam**, Queensborough Community College

In my presentation I focus on the ways Cristina Garcia’s *Dreaming in Cuban* invites readers to form empathic and embodied identifications with “alien” experiences to recover history by making the body a focal point. The most scathing social commentaries on the realities of economic and social oppression experienced by borderland subject are, I maintain, transmitted via representations of broken and disfigured bodies that register the skin, as cultural critic and scholar Sarah Ahmed proposes, “the border that feels” (45). The body repeatedly becomes witness to material and psychic realities when words fail. While much has been written on Latina authors, and in particular, their claims for space both figuratively and politically, there remains a lack of focused attention on the body as space and home-site. Working from the premise that Latina writing is never simply an aesthetic endeavor, but also historically and materially grounded in ways that are socially informed and informing, I re-read Garcia’s text with particular attention to the manner in which the body is foregrounded in this novel to make explicit trauma’s connection to the body while also advancing the body as a site of healing/knowledge.

“Documenting the Undocumented: The Drama of Epistolary Writing in Julia Alvarez’s *Return to Sender*”

**Maya Socolovsky**, University of North Carolina, Charlotte

In this paper, I explore the ways in which Alvarez’s young adult novel *Return to Sender* addresses, through its epistolary technique, the notion of a community of readers within and without the text. I argue that the epistolary form is especially appropriate for articulating the experiences of undocumented migrants in part because both are concerned with a subject who experiences temporality and spatiality in multiple ways. Critics claim that historically, epistolary narratives have always undermined systems of authority; Alvarez’s novel, I show, continues this subversion of authority by using letters as documents that decriminalize undocumented migrants. I examine how the novel’s epistolary features – the dramatization of writing, the tangibility of letters, the reader’s involvement, the orality of letters, and the community created – all in various ways call attention to the act of writing, and present the experiencing self (the character the events happen to) as a narrator, an author, and a reader, whose important work of recording and archiving migrant experiences legitimates them as parts of the U.S.’s geopolitical and cultural reality.

### [23. Afro-Latinidades: Race, Magic, and Narrativizing Identity](#)

“Rewriting Hispaniola: The “Buenos y verdaderos dominicanos”-*americanos*: Julia Alvarez and Junot Díaz”

**Megan Jeanette Myers**, Vanderbilt University

This essay examines the ways in which two Dominican American authors, Julia Alvarez and Junot Díaz, re-write Hispaniola’s past to offer alternatives to the often one-sided and biased Dominican national history. The paper is primarily interested in how Alvarez and Díaz carve a new space for Haiti and the Haitian population in their narrative recreations of history, writing against centuries of negrophobia and anti-Haitianism. On a broader scale, the project considers the ways in which members of the U.S. Latina/o diaspora reimagine race, problematizing how Dominican Americans in New York, for example, validate the refrain “Nosotros somos los haitianos de aquí.” I will not only consider the authors’ representation of Haiti and the Dominican-Haitian relationship in their works such as Alvarez’s *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* and *A Wedding in Haiti* and Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and *Drown*, but also both authors’ unique position as “spokespeople” for the Dominican diaspora, focusing on their public responses to Ruling 0168-13 of the Dominican Tribunal Court.

“Walking Without Skin: The Afro-Caribbean Magical Realist Tradition in Angie Cruz’s *Soledad* and Nelly Rosario’s *Song of the Water Saints*”

**Jill Toliver Richardson**, Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY

“Walking Without Skin: The Afro-Caribbean Magical Realist Tradition in Angie Cruz’s *Soledad* and Nelly Rosario’s *Song of the Water Saints*” explores the incorporation of a magical realist literary tradition tinged with Afro-Caribbean spirituality in Angie Cruz’s novel *Soledad* and Nelly Rosario’s *Song of the Water Saints*. This presentation contends that the Afro-Dominican women writers use magical realism as a narrative strategy to create alternate means to investigate the events of historical violence and the legacy of trauma resulting from these experiences. Magical realism allows Cruz and Rosario to expand their stories beyond the real, which permits them to express the ways in which the legacy of colonialism haunts and damages the human spirit, the body, the psyche and the family.

Additionally, magical realism demonstrates the profound affect of migration on those in the Dominican diaspora. Framed within the tradition of Afro-Caribbean spiritual practices, families are haunted, sometimes literally, by ghosts throughout the Dominican diaspora and by the legacy of the Trujillato and the trauma of historical violence. Cruz and Rosario's merging of Afro-Caribbean spiritual faiths with magical realism locates their characters' identities within an African cultural tradition. Consequently, this African identified space provides a form of resistance against the harsh realities of American racism, sexism and discrimination. Their female spiritual guides, healers and mediums aid the youngest generation of characters in their attempts to navigate a hostile American landscape.

“Principles Tastes in Afro-Latino Subjectivities: From *Ajiaco* to *Mofongo*.”

**Meredith E. Abarca**, University of Texas at El Paso

Cuban-American writer Cristina García in *Monkey Hunting* (2003) describes the somewhat eclectic belief system of Lucrecia, a mulatto ex-Slave, as being similar to an *ajiaco* stew. According to social scientist Don Fernando Ortiz, this dish defines what it means to be a Cuban. He argues that Cuban identity results from multiple ingredients that at the moment of being combined lose some of their original flavors in order to acquire new ones. Accepting the premise that food defines part of our identity, *ajiaco* is made with ingredients that derived from Europe, Africa and China, thus symbolizing a Cuban-ness based on a multicultural heritage. Through the analysis of ingredients, sauces, and cooking methods of a few selected dishes as presented in texts like *Biography of a Runaway Slave* by Miguel Barnet, *Geographies of Home* by Loida Maritza Pérez, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by Edwidge Danticat, I examine a component of Latina/o identity not always fully recognized in its culinary practices: the blending of Amerindian and African influences. Exploring the construction of self-representation through the lens of food offers a unique opportunity to shift the paradigm of understanding cultural identity as a vertical root that reaches to only one single point of origin. This leads to claims that Latinas/os have either African roots or Mestizo ones. However, when a dish embodies different historical and social memories its flavors point out to multiple roots leading to different origins. In the case of this study, these are African and Amerindian origins that have come together to produce flavors that are no longer African in origin not Amerindian, but simultaneously both. The inquiry driving this analysis is to break a historical social and racial divide between Blacks and Latinos both in the United States and in Latin America, a rift the culinary practices have surpassed.

“Writing the Afro-Latina Self”

**Theresa Delgado**, The Ohio State University

The African Diaspora experience in Latina/o literature in the U.S. has long been considered primarily with respect to Puerto Rican/Nuyorican/Boricua literature; writers from Piri Thomas to Nicholasa Mohr to Victor Hernandez Cruz and others have addressed this aspect of Puerto Rican experience, culture, identity and history in memoir, story and poetry. Recently, I have argued that African American, Puerto Rican and Mexican musicians participated in cultivating knowledge of African Diaspora in the Americas through music and film, particularly Willie Colón's album *El Baquiné de Angelitos Negros* (1977).<sup>1</sup> In new research focused on recent Latina/o literature, the multiracial and multiethnic character of Latina/os begins to emerge even more strongly. This paper explores the multiple layers of Latina/o experience of African Diaspora in Puerto Rican writer Marta Moreno Vega's 2004 memoir *When the Spirits Dance*, especially in light of the author's life-long work as a cultural worker. Vega's memoir explores Afro-Puerto Rican experience, history, and culture at a moment of possible obliteration, in order to affirm the historical legacy of African Diaspora and the rich and resilient cultures and subjectivities to which the African Diaspora gave rise. This paper will discuss the significance and content of this shift and the centrality of a Diaspora framework in reading contemporary Afro-Latina/o literature.

Moderator: **Jason Baumann**, CUNY Graduate Center

## **24. Transgressive Migrations in Chicana/o Literature**

“Border Performativity, Confession, and Possibility in Helena Maria Viramontes' *Their Dogs Came With Them*”

**Alma Granado**, Williams College

In a dystopic rendering of East L.A. in the 1960s, Helena Maria Viramontes' most recent novel, *Their Dogs Came With Them*, describes the neighborhood as highly controlled and enclosed within a series of fences and manned checkpoints that undoubtedly evoke border crossings. The interactions between the neighborhood's residents and

government officials are reminiscent of what globalization scholar Nancy Wonders has called “border performativity” in that these exchanges underscore the insidious nature of state sovereignty that is simultaneously reinforced and naturalized. This confessional mode of performance illuminates the border—and its reach into urban L.A.—as a site of anxiety. Just as the novel’s disruptive narrative structure mirrors the social stasis and urban isolation of the characters, I argue that the ambiguity surrounding moments of fantasy in the novel and specific characters’ struggles to create plausible and alternative narratives of these fantastical events parallel the confessional dynamics of border crossings. The migratory crossings depicted in *Their Dogs Came With Them* require the re-telling and/or creation of plausible narratives that legitimate characters’ mobility. Thus, I demonstrate that the need for these narratives, both literary and otherwise, is manifest in the novel as an internal conflict that posits skeptical fantasy as a site of imaginative possibility.

“Oscar Zeta Acosta’s Class Suicide”

**Elda Maria Román**, University of Southern California

This presentation reads Oscar Zeta Acosta’s two autobiographical novels, *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972) and *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1973) in relationship to Amílcar Cabral’s theory of “class suicide.” In his address to the first Tricontinental Conference of the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America, that took place in January 1966 in Havana, Cuba, Amílcar Cabral outlined his theory for revolutionary action, which included the help of a petite bourgeoisie that would have to commit “class suicide,” and identify with the working masses rather than with their own class interests. Informed by third world liberation struggles and Black and Chicana/o nationalism, Oscar Zeta Acosta’s novels dramatize scenarios along the lines of Cabral’s call-to-action, in which his middle-class protagonist renounces stability and material comforts in the service of revolutionary politics. However, even after committing class suicide and joining Chicano movement activism, Acosta’s protagonist continuously expresses class guilt over the distances between himself and other racialized minorities. In this presentation, I discuss the way in which upward mobility gets rendered as a kind of class trespass in Acosta’s novels and the narrative strategies Acosta employs to highlight and make sense of intra-group class differences.

“Racial Trauma and White Desire in Americo Paredes’ *George Washington Gómez*?”

**Jayson Gonzales Sae-Saue**, Southern Methodist University

This talk explores interracial sex in Americo Paredes’ novel *George Washington Gómez*. Rather than regard the protagonist’s desire for a feminine Anglo archetype according to models of class mobility, I instead consider his interracial sex as a matter of his racial trauma. As such, I’ll explore how Paredes’ benchmark novel about a young Mexican American coming of age in South Texas illustrates the protagonist’s pedagogy of racial difference, including his having to learn the uneven values of brownness in U.S. society and the history of almost unimaginable racial violence at the U.S-Mexico border. In this context, I’ll follow closely what Anne Cheng calls the minority’s internalization of the “white ideal” and its psychic construction of “white desire.” I argue that interracial sex in Paredes’ work symbolizes how the hero comes to learn the privileges of whiteness and how he learns socially to desire its ideal form. To bring this point to bear, this talk will also speak briefly to instances of interracial unions in other key works of Chicana/o literature. As such, it reveals a pattern of Chicano-Anglo liaisons and it uncovers an under-explored means of how this culture negotiates the historical violence of race in the community.

## [25. Chicana and Fronteriza Writers Counter Discourse: Rethinking Family, Community, and Landscapes](#)

“The Chican@ Family and the Self-Exile: Chicana Lesbians (Re)creating La Familia”

**Carolina Alonso**, University of Houston

After the Chicano Movement a new Chicano Nation was imagined and promoted, and in family was conceived as one of its most important components. This element can be seen in most of the Chicano novels, where family has a center role. In most canonic Chicano texts, the main characters experience an unceasing pressure to perpetuate and propagate family values. In most of these cases, the protagonists embrace their family like in Tomás Rivera *...y no se lo tragó la tierra* (1971) and in Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me Última* (1972). However, in feminists Chicano stories the female protagonists undergo, in terms of Michel Foucault, a constant policing. This can be seen in *Real Women Have Curves*, play written by Josefina López (1996), where the protagonist experiences the constant scrutiny of her family for her constant opposition to patriarchal rules and expectations. This leads to her leaving her community to pursue

her dreams away from her family. Nevertheless, in Chicana lesbian texts like *Desert Blood* (2005) written by Alicia Gaspar de Alba, the family policing increments. This essay will analyze the role of the family in canonic texts in comparison with that of Chicana lesbian texts, where the protagonists cannot embrace her family the way the male characters generally do. On the contrary the panoptic surveillance (as proposed by Foucault), to which they are exposed promotes a self-exile where the characters have to (re)imagine and (re)define the concept of family.

#### “Border Landscapes: Fronterizas Rethink Their Space”

**Maira Álvarez**, University of Houston

Most people seem to have an idea of the border by what the media and political representatives inform us; however, the information given to citizens is partial, and therefore incomplete. Mariana Ortega’s essay, “Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color,” mentions a type of “arrogant perception” from white feminism towards women of color. Following Marilyn Frye, Ortega mentions that “the arrogant perceiver is guilty of seeing with arrogant eyes, eyes that skillfully organize the world and everything in it with reference to the arrogant perceiver’s desires and interests” (59). By taking this concept of “arrogant perception” into the view of the border by outsiders, this study aims to examine a counter discourse by fronteriza writers who present fronterizos as subjects and a way of life along the border in their literary production. Fronteriza writers Lucrecia Guerrero’s collection of short stories, *Chasing Shadows*, and Norma Cantú’s book, *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera*, rethink personal spaces that challenge the United States militarize discourse about the border to unveil a space that is often erased.

#### “Chicanas, Cholas y Chisme as Community-Based Pedagogy”

**Trevor Boffone**, University of Houston

The question of Chicana feminist collective theater groups has been widely debated in Chican@, Theatre, and Women’s and Gender Studies, with scholars such as Charlotte Canning and Lizbeth Goodman focusing on groups from the 1980s such as Spiderwoman Theater, Concilio de Mujeres, Teatro Raíces, and Women in Teatro (WIT). However, these perspectives do not adequately address the issue of Chicana collective theater making in the 21st century as it relates to community, home, and place. My paper addresses the issue of contemporary feminist collective performance with special attention to the *Chicanas, Cholas y Chisme* Theater Festival in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles. Specifically, in my project, I will discuss mentorship and the creation of collective theater, and juxtapose them against theories of community and home-building, in order to reveal the previously misunderstood connections between Chicana experience, identity, and community. I argue that, despite the predominant shift from a collective and ensemble ethos to a more hierarchical model in the 1990s, contemporary feminist theater groups that privilege collective and ensemble-based creation more adequately represent the growing complexity of Chicana womanhood. In conclusion, this project, by closely examining the *Chicanas, Cholas y Chisme* Theater Festival, sheds new light on collective feminist theater by using theories on community and home building to explore how experience and identity are constructed in Boyle Heights.

#### “Chicanas Reconstructing and Redefining Community”

**Laura Zubiate**, University of Houston

The social and political dynamics of the border is characterized by the constant dehumanization of the subjects, particularly, the female subjects. The lives of the women in this geopolitical space are reduced in many instances to their bodies and the exploitation of them. Due to this objectification, the female characters are frequently left at the margin of communities. In this analysis I will explore the need and efforts of the female characters in *Rain of Scorpions*, by Estella Portillo Trambley, to form a community, or at least, the sense of community and belonging in this particular environment. I plan to analyze the concept of community within the relations of power, bio powers, and the social and economic powers. These short stories show many different experiences of women related to class and race. I will explore these differences and how class and race modify to certain point (only) the oppression and their capabilities of resistance. The definition of the concept of personhood and its relationship to gender is of great importance to this analysis, as well as the processes by which, a person is considered as such or demised as an object. These stories happen within the context of colonial relationships between a third world and an empire. While the whole Chicano community is greatly affected by these unequal relationships, the female characters suffer twice the consequences of being considered a second class citizen, within the concept of a nation within a nation and within the Chicano community itself. In *Rain of Scorpions*, Estella Portillo Trambley was able to show a variety of

“subversions of identity” and the fight from women to reinvent theirs and the preoccupation and aim for definition of their own bodies and spaces.