

Senior Thesis Abstracts Fall 2022

Callan Daniels

This thesis will investigate two theatrical adaptations, *Oedipus El Rey* by Luis Alfaro, and *A Tempest* by Aimé Césaire. Specifically, looking at how both plays use a four-prong approach of use of language, shifts in the characters identities, incorporation of folkloric or cultural reference, and shift to the plot and/or ending to functionally change the impact and messaging of the play, as well as how it interacts with the specific cultures it grounds itself in. The plays will be analyzed for their use of this approach, and along a symptomatic, genre, and reception analysis. By analyzing the success of these plays, it will theorize this four-pronged approach as a method or guide for adaptations of canonical theatrical text which attempt to ground themselves in different locations, cultures, or hemispheres.

Kimberly Fragola

Eminem's three facades; Marshall Mathers, Slim Shady, and Eminem, each work through the fundamental pillars of respectability politics to avoid responsibility for their reckless cultural ignorance. self-presentations of respectability culminate through tools of self-censorship/self-editing, and cultural assimilation vs. cultural appropriation. These acceptances/denials of respectability politics dictate who can perform which identities, when and where. White cis men are drastically more prepared to succeed in our capitalist racist patriarchy, especially with the conservative atmosphere surrounding the turn of the twenty first millennium.

While other demographics certainly do culturally appropriate or offend, they all have some social arena where they must adhere to certain respectability politics. Cis straight white men don't have the same moral obligation. In the Last twenty-five years of American history, Eminem's lyrics have narrated the uptick in middle-American young white men claiming 'reverse-discrimination' while blaming minoritized communities for their misfortune. This is why it's crucial to study which normalized political and social beliefs are encouraged and understood, especially through an artist that mirrors the most powerful group in American society.

Respectability Politics is intrinsically intertwined with gangster rap and hip-hop cultures. Because of its imposing nature on the black community, along with other minoritized groups, the active defiance of these politics of respectability establish a credibility of hardness and lack of conformity that aligns with those subcultures' growing refusal to be ostracized by the normative white cis patriarchy. The co-opting of this defiance by white rappers like Eminem is inherently problematic most importantly because of the lack of imposition respectability politics has had on their identities, both historically and currently. While he constantly claims discrimination in both the subculture of gangster rap and American society as a whole, Mathers does not have the same.

Paul Heffernan

As traditional advertising channels such as TV and radio are sharply declining, outdoor advertising has surprisingly enjoyed steady growth in recent years. Outdoor advertising, also called out-of-home advertising (OOH), is defined as any form of advertising consumed outside of the home. Billboard revenues increased by double digits in 2022, followed by street furniture, made up of bus shelters, buses, train stations, public toilets, kiosks, and even trashcans. Transit and place-based advertising also expanded as cities recovered from the pandemic. Outdoor advertising dominates urban areas, where eighty-nine percent of the U.S. population is projected to live by 2050. Therefore, more attention should be given to outdoor advertising as a representation of our past, present, and future culture. Outdoor advertising inherently creates controversy as well, regarding issues like free speech, political debates, and income disparity, issues that are not going away in the future. My work seeks to analyze

billboards as a technology that is changing what it means for us to interact with the built environment. I employ a symptomatic analysis to fully understand contemporary controversies in outdoor advertising, as well as a production analysis of current and future marketing techniques being integrated into OOH media and what this can tell us about American culture.

Ethan McNamara

American exceptionalism is the ideology that believes America is essentially different from every other country. It enforces the incorrect presumption that the United States is inherently different from every other country through its culture and politics. This differentiation is based on ideals of White male superiority, as America is directly linked to White masculinity through this definition. One method of maintaining this exceptionalist rhetoric is through its production of literature. The 'Great American Novel' (GAN) centers primarily around White masculinity, particularly in the K-12 school system. These novels often include themes that depict White men as the universally relatable protagonist, reinforcing White masculinity as the literary and cultural standard. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is a contender for the GAN while uprooting these conventions by telling a Black woman's story of slavery, violence, grief, and loss. Despite its place on the list of 'great American novels', the novel is widely contested and banned in the American school system. This paper is based on specific research questions, which are the following: How is the selection of 'great American novels' shaped by American exceptionalism? How does American exceptionalism inform the production of literature reinforcing racial and gendered biases? And how does Toni Morrison's *Beloved* challenge American exceptionalist notions around race, class, and gender?

Sydney Muller

From the swimsuit clad fashionista of the 1960s to the working woman of the 1980s and 2000s, Barbie has pervaded American culture by rooting herself into our early years of development. Throughout history, Barbie has symbolized much to many by reflecting changing cultural values and beliefs, especially with the rise of feminism. Along the way, she has amassed a number of fans and critics who follow different discourses about Barbie's impact as a representative of American culture. How have these shifts over time affected the American people? This study analyzes Barbie dolls from 1959, 1980, 1985, 1992, and 2016, noting how they function as major phases in Barbie's evolution. With a combination of discourse, symptomatic, and production analyses, I illuminate the ways Barbie dolls and the choices behind their designs have reflected our changing culture—and how polarizing reactions to her establish her ambiguity. The goal of this paper is to reveal Barbie, not as simply a positive or negative influence, but as a pervasive example of American culture that reveals the ways in which notions of feminism and progressivism have changed over time.

Aaron Shellow-Lavine

America is stuck in a feedback loop of media and political rhetoric which misconstrues the drivers of crime, promotes false interpretations of criminality, and strengthens the ever-growing incarceration-focused police state. Activists refer to this system of language colloquially as *copaganda** but the phrase has largely gone un-explored in academic settings. For many marginalized communities, being subject to such race-class coded rhetoric has become a way of life, as popular television programs and news outlets have adopted countless terms and phrases which are nefariously pro-police and anti-human. The language of *copaganda* shifts what Americans think of as indicators of safety away from reality and distracts from the root causes of crime, instead proposing that over-policing and mass incarcerations are the only ways to keep our neighborhoods safe. This paper explores one historical moment which saw the development of key terms and ideas which are commonplace in contemporary examples of *copaganda*. From the 1994 Crime Bill through *Cops*, the laws of the land and popular media have driven

Americans to see those struggling to survive as nothing more than criminals worthy of punishment. This research utilizes a multimodal approach, using a critical discourse analysis to identify and track the impact of neoliberalism in several spheres of U.S. culture, and a dual symptomatic-reception analysis of various TV shows and media coverage of current events, interrogating who is represented as criminal and for what reasons.

Bobby Stratts

In the modern day, sports are currently ruled by men. Names like LeBron James, Lionel Messi, Steph Curry, and Tom Brady ring true to most American ears. But when the names Brandi Chastain, Brianna Scurry, Julie Foudy, and Megan Rapinoe, most would say they know none of the names or only know the last one if any. Yet, they're some of the most influence female athletes of not only their generation, but of their entire sport of women's soccer. Women's sports, although common today was not prevalent almost fifty years ago. In fact, it was only in 1971 that females were granted the same right to athletic facilities and sporting events that men did. Teams started to form, and from there a cultural shift would take place over the entire course of women's sports. One of the team that was founded was the United States Women's National Soccer Team (known commonly as the USWNT). In their beginning, they were nothing more than a group of college girls trying to elevate the program and themselves to the next level. Little did they know that the group of them who were chosen to be the first players for the program would go on to be a part of one of the most successful national teams in the world, men or women. With four Olympic gold medals and four Women's World Cup titles, they are without a doubt successful. However, they were not treated as the champions they proved to be on the field. Programs like the United States Soccer Federation and multiple news media corporations and publishers like *ESPN*, *SportsCenter*, and *Sports Illustrated* would slight the female athletes for simply not being men and focusing more on their appearances and looks rather than how they would perform. On top of this, the USSF didn't establish the same contract for the women's team as their male counterparts. This robbed them of millions of dollars they could have earned from their wins. If this was and still is the standard for women's sports and female athletes, what is it going to take to change? Which team will be the first to take a step in the right direction and show that the spotlight belongs to them?

Maelcum Thayer

Beginning from their establishment in Gothic literature, vampires have always represented the Other: people of color, Jews, sex workers, and queers have always inhabited the illegibility of the vampire. By taking on this label through identifying with representations of the vampire in film, there's a potential for the transformation of a subject that allows for retooling kinship, embracing non-normative forms of being, and existing beyond thresholds of static identity. Employing the philosophy of becoming posited by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, I argue that analyzing the figure of the queer vampire through its transformative, 'becoming' potential both problematizes and reinforces its function as a discursive figure in media. This reading of queer vampire media (particularly lesbian vampire exploitation films and their antecedents) reveal the political potential for identity and community formation of becoming-vampire in a posthuman framework, and allows for the phenomenon of Real Vampires that emerges from Goth subcultures and the advent of queer/vampire/Goth subjectivities.

Liz Tybush

Tools used to mitigate transmission of COVID in spaces like higher education ended up creating additional access gains for people with various disabilities. Furthermore, the increased use of these tools appeared to be increasing awareness of accessibility. However, with a societal push to "return to

normal” despite the ongoing threat that COVID places, these access gains are under threat as many of these tools are seeing a decline in use or going un-used entirely. Scholars and experts examining COVID and its mode of transmission argue for the continued use of tools that provide adequate filtration of virosols—virus-laden aerosols—in the air, in combination with other mitigation strategies, to create environments that are safe for work, study, and more. Furthermore, surveys and research of students across educational tiers shows that inadequate remote and tech-supportive policy and tech resources are the main barrier toward creating a remote environment that is satisfactory and equitable. In this paper, I argue for the continued use of three tools specifically—the Corsi-Rosenthal Box (or CR Box, a DIY air filter), remote options (policies to support work and study, whether supporting the remote modality or the acquisition of resources to make remote satisfactory and productive), and cloud collaboration tech (such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams). These tools, used in an exo-pandemic way, can keep some of these access gains and allow disabled individuals continued access to work spaces and classrooms. To do this, I use a production analysis, a close reading of texts, and a reception analysis. I also look at work from of disability scholarship, as well as examine contemporary disabled voices reacting to the “return to normal” push. I do most of this work within the micro-community of education. I conclude that CR Boxes and remote option support via policies and tech are not just satisfactory mitigation measures for preventing the spread of COVID, but are curb-cuts that can lead to an overall increase in the well-being and health of all individuals. The use of these tools is also a demonstration of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA) by creating spaces and modalities that support all people, including disabled people, who span the gamut of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, faith, and more.

Raven Jade Villa

In American history and culture, as transgender politics and transgender women became more visible, the violence and backlash they experienced increased tenfold. As conversations and discourses around transgender issues and transgender women circulated society, a conservative form of religion and politics worked to undermine the progress toward transgender recognition in the social, political, and legal landscape. A deep dive into LGBTQ history, especially as it pertains to transgender people/women, demonstrates that the gendered paradigms of America have inhibited transgender women from taking part and exist in the American social fabric. The confluence of religious, legal, social, and political forces is working to subjugate transgender women in modern day. However, when this history is compounded with the histories of anti-Blackness and Black women, it reveals how the interlocking oppressions of race, gender, class, and queerness relegate Black transgender women to a different experience in America. Black feminist thought served as the theoretical framework to engage with transgender, especially Black transgender women’s, history and experiences. At heart, this research centered transgender women, especially Black trans narratives, through Tracey “Africa” Norman and Laverne Cox. By shedding light on their (her)stories, it showed how they have re-articulated and self-defined the transgender identity and transgender women back on the cultural map of the American history and culture.

Alex Weinreb

In contemporary baseball, it is difficult to avoid seeing some semblance of a bat flip or home run celebration. The phenomenon of a bat flip occurs immediately following a batter’s feat of hitting the ball so far over the outfield wall that they have no doubt it will be a home run, hence its common referral as a “no-doubt home run.” New waves and demographics of fans and players have embraced this display of emotion and passion on the field, but historically this has not always been the case, as proper social norms were established early on in the sport’s history guised under the term “unwritten rules,” preventing players from acting in ways that deviated from these norms. In this paper, I highlight

multiple case studies that display this trend, including the public praise and adoration that Babe Ruth received as the face of the sport while representing the embodiment of the “new primitive male,” as well as the hate and dismissal that Hank Aaron’s received for being a Black man trying to break their white hero’s home run record. These trends and the sentiment that unwritten rules are essential to the sport is challenged in contemporary Major League Baseball, with players like Fernando Tatis Jr. pushing unwritten rules that sought to control players behavior. His willingness to bat flip and act in ways that deviate from the social norms within the game represents a broader development in American culture where people of all different races, classes, and genders feel more comfortable being themselves unapologetically. What may seem like just a five second moment provides meaningful and important insight into American culture at any given period.