

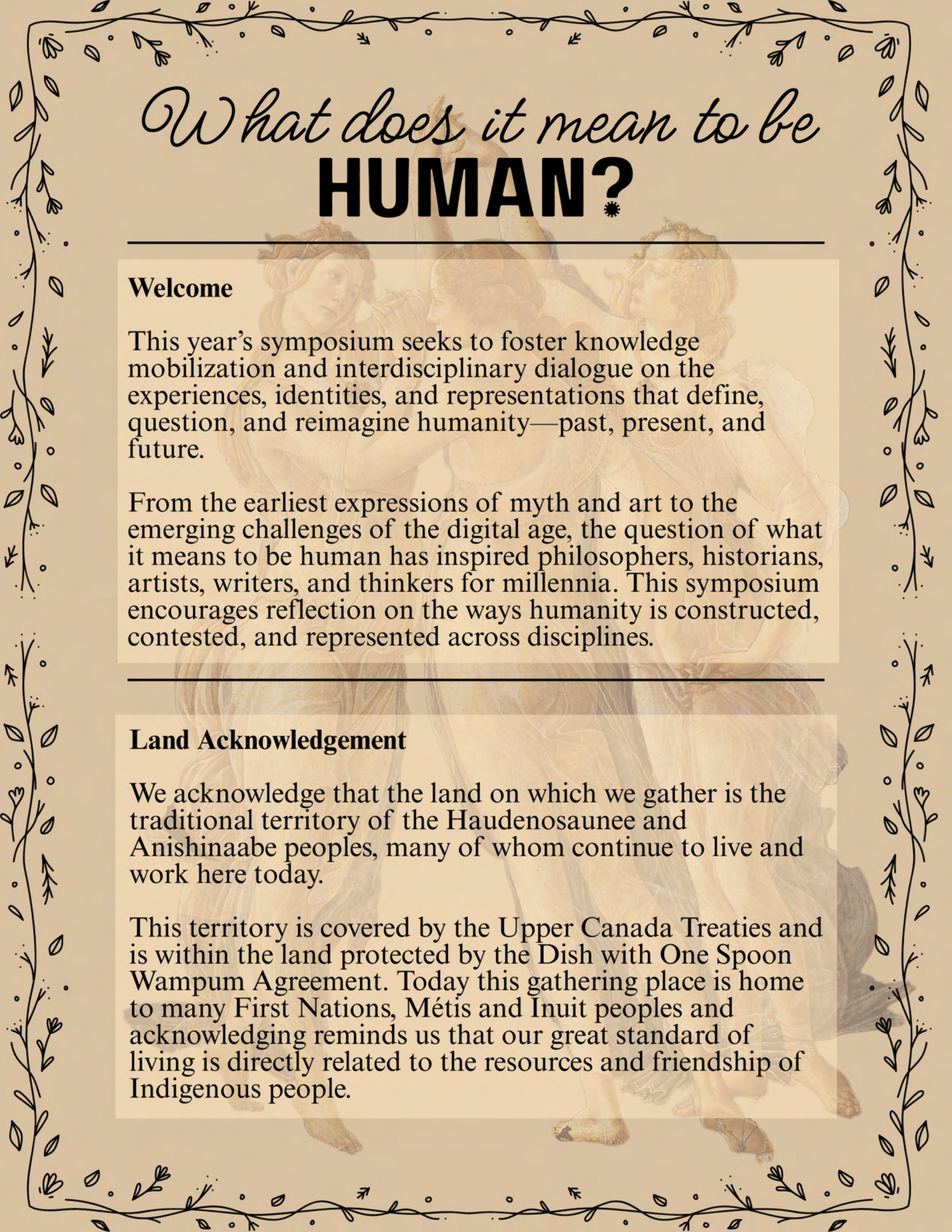
Humanities Graduate Student Symposium

February, 7th 2026

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN?

The SCHEDULE

10 am	<u>Opening Remarks</u>
10:10am	Panel 1: Gender, Gaze, and Disrupted Subjectivities
11:10am	<u>Break 1</u>
11:20am	Panel 2: Mediation, Spectatorship, and Posthumanism
12:20pm	<u>Lunch</u>
1pm	<u>Lightning Talks</u>
1:40pm	<u>Break 2</u>
1:50pm	Panel 3: Ritual Space, Embodiment, and Relational Becoming
2:50pm	<u>Break 3</u>
3pm	Panel 4: Memory, Histories, and Collective Worlds
4pm	<u>Closing Remarks</u>



What does it mean to be **HUMAN?**

Welcome

This year's symposium seeks to foster knowledge mobilization and interdisciplinary dialogue on the experiences, identities, and representations that define, question, and reimagine humanity—past, present, and future.

From the earliest expressions of myth and art to the emerging challenges of the digital age, the question of what it means to be human has inspired philosophers, historians, artists, writers, and thinkers for millennia. This symposium encourages reflection on the ways humanity is constructed, contested, and represented across disciplines.

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the land on which we gather is the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples, many of whom continue to live and work here today.

This territory is covered by the Upper Canada Treaties and is within the land protected by the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Agreement. Today this gathering place is home to many First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples and acknowledging reminds us that our great standard of living is directly related to the resources and friendship of Indigenous people.



LAUREN BERRY (SHE/HER)
MA IN HISTORY, BROCK

BIO

Lauren Berry completed her bachelor's degree at MacEwan University with a major in history and a double minor in classics and French. After completing her degree, she went on to work in a museum in British Columbia. Currently, she is in the second year of her master's in the department of history at Brock. Her research focuses primarily on morality, biographies, and the theatre in eighteenth century England.

ABSTRACT

Taking The Lead: The Actress-Author in England 1730- 1810

THE STORY

What does it mean to be human? The clearest representation of human experience is in our own stories, as recorded in literary works, biographies, and autobiographies. In eighteenth-century England, a moment of burgeoning new genres, actresses in particular picked up their pens. It was also the time when celebrity was first developing, and audiences did not separate the public persona from the private person of the actor.

In this paper I argue that, through literary means personal writings humanized actresses who were often denigrated due to their profession. By writing their experiences they wielded their celebrity to implicitly and explicitly defend themselves and their actions and take control of disparaging narratives targeting their gender, class, and profession. I do so by examining works by or about actresses like Sophia Baddeley, Charlotte Charke, Catherine (Kitty) Clive, Ann (Nan) Katley, Anne Oldfield, Mary Robinson, and Margaret (Peg) Woffington. All women that had to overcome tremendous obstacles to raise themselves with varying degrees of success, tackling stigma due to their profession, sexism, harassment, and poverty. By examining their works including biographies, autobiographies, published fiction, and plays we see how actress-authors humanized and endeared themselves to audiences and the wider public. This includes their celebrity and how they mobilized it to their advantage, to expand beyond public-facing personas and offer tantalizing glimpses of the people underneath.

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LÉO BEAUDOIN (HE/THEY)
MA, BROCK CLASSICS

BIO

Léo holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Classics with a specialization in archaeology and ancient history from Concordia University in Montreal. His undergraduate research interests are focused on gender and sexuality, and more precisely, on depictions of same-sex relations in Archaic and Classical Greece.

ABSTRACT

Caught in Her Stare: Gaze, Desire, and Longing Between Women on Attic Vases

THE STORY

Related to my broader research on female homoeroticism, this project explores how, and if, erotic desire among women is represented in all-women symposia (banqueting). It examines the gaze between women in Attic pottery wares as an indicator of erotic desire between them. The power of the gaze is linked to erotic desire, as Sappho emphasizes the intimacy between two people when she writes: “For whenever I look at you even briefly / I can no longer say a single thing.” (Sappho fr. 31.7-8, transl. Julia Dubnoff 2018) Whether it be between men, or both men and women, the gaze is incorporated in vase-paintings to highlight eroticism (as seen in Tuscano 2013; Cantarella and Lear 2008). Nancy Rabinowitz’s chapter (2002) looks at desire between women in vase-paintings, but she places her focus outside of the symposium. This project thus builds on her work by analyzing glances between women at the symposium to see whether all-women banqueting scenes could illustrate eroticism. Analyzing red-figure vases dated to the Late Archaic and Classical periods, I will compare the erotic gaze identified in male homosexual and heterosexual couples with shared glances between women to highlight the possibility that women’s interaction could be erotic. This analysis adds to recent discussion on the representation of female homoerotic desire. It provides another perspective to the view that such vases solely illustrated humorous sexual fantasies for men or depicted female friendships. It also speaks to the agency of women in banqueting contexts.



ZIXUAN LIAO (SHE/HER)

PHD STUDENT, INTERDISCIPLINARY HUMANITIES, BROCK

BIO

Zixuan Liao is a PhD student in Interdisciplinary Humanities at Brock University. Her research interests span feminist theory, the semiotics of images and language, and the application of phenomenology and psychoanalysis in art analysis. Her doctoral project examines the representation of the mother-daughter relationship in contemporary artworks by female artists. Through this work, she aims to not only deepen academic discourse on maternal subjectivity but also to contribute to broader conversations around motherhood, family dynamics, and gender roles in society.

ABSTRACT

Mother, Daughter, Art: Reframing the Mother Image through Feminist Art Practices

THE STORY

In the recent two decades, artwork and art exhibitions themed around feminism, mothering, and activism have proliferated. Even so, there are central issues in this trend, including the relatively low acceptance of the mother as an artist and the marginalization of artworks that deal with maternal issues. This phenomenon uncovers the discrepancy between the mother as an artist and the representation of mother and mothering in contemporary art, which demands a more nuanced subdivision of the mother-centered issues in visual culture. Focusing on this divergence, I draw on Bracha Ettinger's redefinition of woman-artist and Elena Marchevska's idea of maternal art to examine art expressions that authentically reflect mothering experiences. I argue that the depiction of mothers or motherhood by women artists, especially daughter artists, provides a unique resonant lens. My presentation will introduce contemporary maternal artworks across various media by women artists of various races, nations, and cultures, such as Sophie Calle's video art *Couldn't Capture Death* (2007) and He Chengyao's performance art *Mama and Me* (2001). These artworks demonstrate their distinction from dominant art historical paradigms, which have romanticized and stereotyped the image of mothers and motherhood to serve the patriarchal society. In contrast, feminist art practices emerge through shared structures of repression, affect, and psychic linkage that characterize embodied feminine subjectivity.



LUCIE MACKINTOSH (SHE/HER)
CLASSICS MA (BROCK)

BIO

Lucie Mackintosh (she/her) is a second-year MA student in Classics and Archaeology (Text and Culture). Her work centers on ancient Greek language and literature, especially the intersections of gender and translation in the reception of epic poetry. Her thesis examines how modern interpretive frameworks shape our understanding of queerness in Homeric narrative.

ABSTRACT

**Queering
Heroism: Paris
as a Gender-
Disruptive Figure
in Homer's Iliad**

THE STORY

Though commonly dismissed as the poem's weakest warrior, Paris serves as a critical site where the Iliad negotiates—and ultimately polices—questions of gender, temporality, and what it means for a life to register as meaningful within an epic framework. I reimagine Paris not as the poem's failed hero, but as a figure who exposes its anxieties surrounding gender, time, and the kinds of lives the Iliad recognizes as valuable. Heroic identity in archaic epic is built on a linear, future-oriented temporality—arming, action, risk, and the pursuit of a legacy secured through death. Paris disrupts this structure. His retreat from battle, his attachment to private pleasure, and the poem's persistent aestheticization of his body align him with what queer theorists term “queer time”: a nonlinear, present-focused mode of living detached from reproductive futurity. Paris inhabits not the forward thrust of Achilles or Hector, but a loop of delay, erotic intensity, and repetition. Through close readings of Paris' arming scene, battlefield encounters, and domestic episodes with Helen, I argue that the poem frames his masculinity as performative and hollow—an aesthetic costume that never develops into heroic action. His queerness emerges not through orientation, but through narrative function: his heterosexuality is non-generative, his shame externally imposed, and his actions fail to accumulate toward glory. He becomes a figure whose way of living does not register within the epic's value system. Set against Hector's stabilizing heteronormativity, Paris reveals the ideological limits of the Iliad's model of the human. The contrast shows which masculinities the poem can dignify and which it renders deviant. By tracing this tension, I argue that Paris exposes the epic's discomfort with non-normative temporalities and its unease over what forms of identity, desire, and life can count as fully human within an epic world.



EMMA-JANE HILL (SHE/HER)

MA, ENGLISH & FILM STUDIES AT WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

BIO

Emma-Jane Hill obtained her Bachelor of Arts from Toronto Metropolitan University in Media Production with a concentration in Screenwriting in 2020. She is currently an MA student in English and Film Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University and is completing a Major Research Paper on queer memory and temporality in television and film.

ABSTRACT

Are You Somebody Too?: Memory, Identity and Embodiment in Ridley Scott's Blade Runner and Joss Whedon's Dollhouse

THE STORY

This paper explores how Ridley Scott's Blade Runner and Joss Whedon's Dollhouse question what is seen as a 'real' person or identity, and how this privileging of the 'original' collapses in examining formulations of memory, emotion and embodiment. It poses the question: what makes someone 'real' or 'human' and how much do we privilege origin over experience and emotion? Drawing on Alison Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory, Jean Baudrillard's concept of the hyperreal, and N. Katherine Hayles's work on embodiment, alongside neuroscientific research, this paper argues that identity and authentic personhood emerge not from the origin of memories but from how those memories are lived, felt, and enacted within the body. Both texts imagine posthuman subjects whose identities develop through the same mechanisms that shape human consciousness: the strengthening of neural pathways, the persistence of emotional memory, and the interdependence of mind and physiology. This paper demonstrates how prosthetic memories generate genuine emotional responses, moral agency, and interpersonal bonds. These narratives destabilize the binary between original and artificial, instead presenting identity as palimpsestic, accumulative, and embodied. The human is not fixed but emergent and formed through continual interaction between experience and the body. Ultimately, Blade Runner and Dollhouse invite a reimagining of humanity that embraces posthuman identities as fully real, ethically significant, and deserving of recognition.



DEREK VEENHOF (HE/HIM)
GAME STUDIES

BIO

Derek Veenhof is an MA student in Game Studies at Brock University whose Major Research Project examines virtual concerts in video games. His research focuses on authenticity in popular music, platform capitalism, participation, and mediation. His interests are informed by an undergraduate background in Media & Communications with a concentration in Digital Culture.

ABSTRACT

Authenticity After AI: Reclaiming Realness in Digital Culture

THE STORY

This presentation addresses what it means to be human today by considering how rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies, and expanding use and integration within digital culture impact selfhood through the lens of authenticity. Contemporary digital culture, marked by platform capitalism, algorithmic governance, constant mediation, and misinformation strains our sense of what is real. As AI continues to shape digital culture, important questions arise about agency, community, and emerging risks of cultural homogenization. It forces us to ask: Who are we becoming, and what should we do about these technologies? How do we stay grounded and authentic in mediated environments? This talk focuses on cultural incentives driving AI acceleration while considering expert commentary from industry and acknowledging caveats and biases therein. Longstanding issues within digital culture, exacerbated by increasing social media and smartphone use, may be amplified by AI, accelerating existing conundrums within digital culture. To contextualize, I draw from ideas on posthumanism, and research on authenticity. I explore concepts like technodiversity (Hui), self-authorship (Davidov & Russo-Netzer), and reflections about the self and relationship (Jiddu Krishnamurti). With this synthesis, I frame authenticity as a relational, situated, co-created process between individuals and audiences rather than an inner essence or commercial aesthetic. I argue that reclaiming realness amidst misinformation, synthetic images and video, and other problematic AI outputs requires renewed attention to locality, embodied presence, friction, communal meaning-making, and conscious resistance to homogenizing technological defaults.



ECE ÇIZMECI (SHE/HER)

PH.D. STUDENT - INTERDISCIPLINARY HUMANITIES:
CULTURE & AESTHETICS

BIO

Ece is a third-year Ph.D. student of Interdisciplinary Humanities at Brock University, specializing in “Culture and Aesthetics.” Her research, tentatively titled “Becoming-Other: Post-Anthropocentrism, Domesticated Animals and Tenderness in Contemporary Films and Art Exhibitions,” merges critical animal studies, affect theory, and posthumanism(s) to examine how creaturely assemblages in visual art and cinema reshape the sensible. She investigates how these mediated encounters can generate affective intensities that destabilize human exceptionalism, and offer post-anthropocentric lines of flight for “becoming-other.”

ABSTRACT

Straying from the Human: EO (2022) as a Cinematic Syn-theōria

THE STORY

Jacques Derrida reminds us that “animal is a word that men (humans) have given themselves the right to give,” a naming that consolidates the anthropocentric hierarchy through which “the human” assigns other beings the places it deems fit and defines itself by marginalizing others. Jerzy Skolimowski’s *EO* (2022) makes this dynamic visible. Taking the protagonist donkey Eo as a “stray” (Creed) — a liminal other who can catalyze alternative modes of being and expose what the dominant order cannot see — I argue that the film reveals how the anthropocentric order positions nonhuman animals within human social spaces and punishes them when they transgress those allotted roles. Through its “cinematic Umwelt” (Uexküll; Pick) *EO* stages a multiplicity of more-than-human perceptual worlds and refuses a singular and flattened image of “the human.” Via vignettes experienced from within Eo’s perspective — oscillating between cruelty, exploitation, and care — the film opens an affective space in which viewers can stray from habitualized anthropocentrism and sense other ways of being. The film’s monochromatic “excess” sequences mobilize the “pensive image” (Rancière), yet reorient it toward a post-anthropocentric perception: a suspended interval, a zone of indeterminacy that makes room for amplified, plural sensibilities and meanings. Focusing on emblematic sequences, I posit the viewing experience of *EO* as a practice of “syn-theōria,” a communal form of seeing with and through others (Calarco) that unsettles human exceptionalism. By reorienting perception, the film helps disclose the perceptual work required to respond to the ecological crises produced by anthropocentric regimes.



JOHN HECKMAN (HE/HIM)
BROCK INTERDISCIPLINARY HUMANITIES

BIO

John R. Heckman is a PhD student in the Interdisciplinary Humanities Department who studies conflict visuals and media. His research combines history and media theory to showcase how war and civil strife travels through various digital and analog environments. From 19th-century battlefield imagery to 20th-century televised warzones and today's algorithmic feeds, his work traces the visual grammar of violence and the evolving aesthetics of speed, trauma, and perception.

ABSTRACT

Smartphones as Prostheses of Crisis: Interfaces of Spectatorship and the Human Condition

THE STORY

What does it mean to be human in a world where conflict is mediated through the screens that we carry with us every day? This presentation will examine the smartphone as both prosthesis and interface, a technological extension of the body that redefines our relationship with contemporary imagery. Drawing on theories of mediatization and visual culture, I argue that smartphones act as prosthetic devices that shape human perception, collapsing the distance between embodied experiences and mediated representations. At the same time, the smartphone interface positions us as spectators, constantly inviting us to scroll, share, and react. These micro engagements transform the act of witnessing into participatory actions of digital spectatorship.

Focusing on conflict visuals that appear in our newsfeeds, I explore how smartphones reconfigure the boundaries between presence and absence, interest and detachment, empathy and compassion fatigue. In this sense, the device becomes more than a tool of documentation; it also becomes a site of ethical negotiation – to view, to ignore, to share. Smartphones mediate our interactions with violence and strife, memory and mortality.

My presentation will position the smartphone within broader discussions around embodiment and representation while contributing to furthering dialogue around what it means to be human in a digitally saturated world. Does this technology not only extend our access to information but also constrain our capacity to understand what is occurring as we assume the position of spectator in a world marred in polycrisis?



KATIE MAZURKIEWICZ (SHE/HER)
MA CLASSICS, BROCK

BIO

Katie Mazurkiewicz is a first-year MA student in the Classics department (Text and Culture) and is passionate about all Classics-related topics. She is currently analyzing Tiberius' natural disaster relief methods and how his deviation from religious tradition impacted his relationship with his governing body and the Roman people.

ABSTRACT

Ancient Pederastic Relationships: Education at What Cost?

THE STORY

In ancient Greece, pederasty was idealized as an educational relationship between a young boy and an adult man. The adult man, the erastes (pl. erastai), was supposed to be a role model who taught his younger counterpart, the eromenos (pl. eromenoi), how to be an upstanding man and citizen. Although there may have been educational elements, both ancient and modern scholars fail to transparently address the disturbing sexual nature of this relationship. Today, some scholars praise pederasty as a mutually beneficial relationship, and others, whether uncomfortable with or dismissive of the topic, treat the sexual aspects briefly. Thus, boys' experiences as sexual partners in pederastic relationships have seldom received attention.

This research demonstrates that pederasty in Classical Athens empowered citizen men as abusers to subject young boys to a perpetual system of sexual abuse under the guise that their companionship was purely educational. Using ancient discussions and depictions of pederasty in literature and pottery, and modern studies of child sexual abuse (CSA), this project advocates for and uplifts the non-existent voices of eromenoi in ancient Athens. Overall, it discusses CSA sensitively but openly to challenge the notion that pederastic relationships were mutually beneficial for the erastes and eromenos.



KELLIAN GORDON (SHE/HER/ELLE)

PHD STUDENT IN FRENCH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE, MCMASTER UNIVERSITY

BIO

Kellian Lilia Gordon holds a B.A. in French Studies (with distinction) from Brock University and an M.A. in French Literature from the University of Toronto. She is currently a first-year PhD student in French Language & Literature at McMaster University, specializing in plays on the French and Haitian Revolutions from the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. She participated in the documentary *Voices of Francophone Identity and Insecurity* (2025) and is a recipient of the Board of Trustees' Spirit of Brock Award (2022) and the Brock Kaleidoscope Black Excellence Award (2019).

ABSTRACT

Coloniser and Colonised: Métis Figures as Mediators of Humanity

THE STORY

Through *Volkswagen Blues* (1984) by Jacques Poulin and *Candide ou l'Optimisme* (1759) by Voltaire, I analyze the narrative significance of Pitsémine and Cacambo, two métis figures whose intermediary position sheds light on humanity not as a fixed essence but as a process in constant negotiation. I ask in which ways the representation of métis characters serves as a literary tool to examine humanity as an intersection of colonial power, cultural contact, and the construction of identity? In both pieces, the métis characters act as narrative mediators accompanying the protagonists – Jack and Candide – in their respective quests, all while evolving in an unstable space situated between coloniser and colonised. Drawing on the fictionalization of métissage, the theory of Créolité, and Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, this study argues that métis figures serve as sites of cultural encounter and narrative authority. Cacambo's role as a guide in *Candide* underscores the tension between cultural assimilation and submission within colonial hierarchies, while Pitsémine in *Volkswagen Blues* reflects the complexities of métis identity in a contemporary, postcolonial North American context. By placing Poulin and Voltaire in dialogue across centuries, this study demonstrates how métis figures challenge colonial narratives that limit who may be recognized as fully human. Ultimately, the paper argues that cultural hybridity, as embodied by Pitsémine and Cacambo, offers a powerful literary framework for reimagining humanity as plural, relational, and historically situated.



REGINA FIDELIS ILAGAN (SHE/THEY)
PHILOSOPHY PHD STUDENT, MCMASTER UNIVERSITY

BIO

Regina Fidelis Ilagan is a second-year Philosophy PhD student attending McMaster University. Her areas of interest are in philosophy of love, philosophy of emotions, and desire with sub-focuses in philosophy of race and feminist philosophy. Her academic projects work to put these areas of philosophy into discussion and highlight points of interest at the intersection of these bodies of literature.

ABSTRACT

How South East Asian Sex Workers Become Monsters

THE STORY

The industry of sex tourism in Southeast Asia (SEA) thrives on the sexual exploitation of SEA women. Specifically, SEA sex workers function as the industry's main and hypersexualized selling point. In this hypersexualization, SEA sex workers are in turn objectified and presented as products. I argue that in becoming such products, SEA sex workers fulfill the criteria of Jerome Cohen's societal monster and when paired with their consumability as sex products, they experience extreme objectification. Furthermore, this exploitation of their perceived monstrosity leads to an extreme disrespect of their personhood as they become dehumanized. To provide an account of how SEA sex workers undergo the process of becoming monsters, I look to Cohen's *Monster Culture (Seven Theses)* to detail how his framework applies. Through their monstrosity, SEA sex workers become entities whose taboo desirability can be explained through their hypersexuality that is deemed and perceived as grotesque, yet fascinating. Secondly, I look to Alison Suen's work *The Construction of a Consumable Body* to explain how SEA sex workers function as sex objects for their clientele's desires. Moreover, I touch on how the effects of their objectification are expounded further through their racialized bodies. In taking advantage of their identities that land at the intersection of their femininity and race, the SEA sex tourism industry is able to find uptake through appealing to problematic racial stereotypes and colonial norms. At the cost of SEA sex workers' respectability and membership to humanity, the SEA sex tourism industry sells their constructed monstrosity as consumable while also pandering to problematic audiences for further appeal. As such, this paper illustrates the SEA sex workers' immoral position and how they become labelled as monsters.



MARIENZA MISERERE (SHE/HER)
PHD HISTORY, MCMASTER

BIO

Since completing her Honours BA in History at TMU and an MA in History from McMaster University, Marienza is now a PhD student at McMaster under the supervision of Dr. Jessica van Horsen, specializing in urban history, queer archival studies, and oral histories. Her research interests include queering urban spaces, particularly streets as sites of protest, community, and celebration, and emotionology, relating to the expression of joy, love, and lust.

ABSTRACT

We Are Humans: Queer Voices Expressing Humanity in San Francisco, 1966- 1968

THE STORY

“We are humans and thus unique in our ability to love,” is how Vanguard editor Keith St. Clare began the ending paragraph of his piece on queer equal rights. Located in the slums of San Francisco, the ‘queer ghetto’ known as the Tenderloin District was the social pariah, a target for intense police brutality and discrimination throughout the mid-twentieth century. But beyond their daily experiences of homophobia and transphobia, this community was also the site of grassroots activism, social organizing, and love. Vanguard: The Magazine of the Tenderloin was a handcrafted zine that began in 1966, publishing the voices of Tenderloin residents as a form of resistance and community building. Poems, editorials, and artwork lined the construction-paper pages telling stories of love, lust, and loneliness. To engage with the question of “what does it mean to be human?” from the perspective of queer voices, this paper explores humanity as expressed in the Vanguard through an analysis of their published works. This paper discusses the philosophy of humanity and humanity’s capacity for love, arguing that being human means feeling a unique, complex, nuanced and varied range of emotions. This paper then concludes that

For the queer people in the Tenderloin District, being human meant existing and continuing to love each other despite the insistence that they were less than human and ‘unnatural’ in their love.



COLIN SPENCER (HE/HIM)
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO/ MA IN ENGLISH

BIO

Colin Spencer returned to academia at Brock University in 2022 and is now attending the University of Toronto for the MA in English program (2026). Colin's interests focus on human(centric) hermeneutics of the world, particularly regarding alterity or figures of the Other—hence his precise interests lie in the (dis)similar nexus of animal studies (inter-creatural relations), science and technology (human-incepted entities), and the possibilities for new ways of seeing that arise from such connections.

ABSTRACT

Ontology of Alterity: Animal & Artificial Life and the Narcissistic Gaze

THE STORY

As humancentrism actively seeks to remake the world in the image of its own self, with the concomitant phenomena of exponential species death yet equally proliferating creation of artificial life/intelligence. Human relationality to Other-life is thus imperative; it is worth re-examining the positing of Rene Descartes of the human as agentic and the animal as mere automata. The title of this proposed project is “Ontology of Alterity: Animal & Artificial Life and the Narcissistic Gaze”, which aims to posit that narcissism should be elevated in ontological primacy as underlying humancentrism and its generative extensions, drawing specifically on the biorobotics concept of the uncanny valley: that true “affinity” is incredibly similar but not identical—humancentrism thus seeks the (re-)production of the self similar. Conversely, taking as its main site animal theorist Jakob von Uexküll's positing of a dyadic difference between animal and human are simply in degree: 1) the human ceaselessly expands its own spatial world, and 2) while all creatures view the world with themselves at the centre, it is only the human that misrecognizes this as likewise the universe. This project thus hypothesizes that this amounts to a narcissism continuum, which extensively reverses Cartesian ontology and instead posits not the animal but the human as automaton, for its ceaseless drive to generate a self-similar world—and that this applies not only to the human, but monadically to its own self-generated entities ranging beyond creatural relationality: from the physical to institutional (corporeal); and ideas and logical modalities (noncorporeal)



SARAH GRENIER (SHE/HER)
MA CLASSICS, BROCK

BIO

Sarah Grenier is a first-year master's student in the department of Classics and Archaeology completing a thesis within the Classical Art and Archaeology stream. Her research focuses on gender expression in early Roman Imperial Portraiture, with a particular interest in the use of space and social interactions in the ancient world. She is active in the field and has completed archaeological excavations in Italy and the Republic of North Macedonia.

ABSTRACT

Space, Experience, and Connection: the Structure of the Andron and Social Bonding at the Symposium

THE STORY

Symposia, elite male drinking parties of Classical Greece were consciously designed, both in behavioural practices and physical structure, to promote democratic ideals of equality and community (Corner 2014). Yet, within the andron – the space custom built for hosting symposia – physical characteristics such as placement, size, and orientation of furniture instead served to perpetuate and reinforce preexisting social hierarchies and status differentiation. This study demonstrates that the key methods of reinforcing hierarchy within communal gatherings – thus the battleground for the symposion – are control of sightlines, noise levels, couch placement, and conversation. Present scholarship (Lynch 2007; Corner 2011) tends to emphasize how the regulation of space at the symposion reflects democratic ideals, but few explore how the host, through the careful manipulation of physical space, perpetuates aristocratic divisions under the guise of egalitarianism. It is in the duality of space in the andron where the constant tension between egalitarian and hierarchical modes of social conduct can be seen. For example, the arrangements of couches around the room allow for continuous sightlines between participants, but there were certain couches that were more prestigious (Ault 2000). The results of this study were gathered through a close analysis of space by creating a scale model of the andron and investigating vase-paintings and texts. Through the examination of consciously regulated human behaviour and the manipulation of space, this study investigates human nature and how we create and maintain communities and cultural norms.



ANNA ROSHNI JOSE (SHE/HER)
PHD INTERDISCIPLINARY HUMANITIES, BROCK

BIO

Anna Roshni Jose is a third-year PhD student in Interdisciplinary Humanities at Brock University. Her research focuses on the representation of non-spectacular forms of domestic violence in Malayalam cinema. Her research interests include feminist film theory, gender studies, trauma studies, embodiment studies and postcolonial studies.

ABSTRACT

The Politics of Embodied Habituation: A Study of the Domestic Spatiality in Malayalam Cinema

THE STORY

Domestic violence, particularly the non-spectacular forms, within marital relationships remains the most pervasive yet socially invisibilized and concealed reality of a large proportion of Indian womanhood (Bhattacharya, 2004). As cinema is the most accessible medium of cultural communication in India (Butalia, 1984), it plays a vital role in articulating, representing and shaping the public understanding of domestic violence. In this regard, contemporary Malayalam cinema, in particular, provides an incisive lens through its highly aesthetic portrayal of everyday familial spaces, rendering invisibilized violence cinematically perceptible. This paper examines how Malayalam movies such as *The Great Indian Kitchen* (2018) and *Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey* (2022) visualize the invisible wounds of embodied habituation, a significant form of invisible embodied harm that sustains domestic violence in heteronormative patrivorilocal marriages in Kerala. By drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's spatial phenomenology and Staci K. Haines's *Generative Somatics*, this paper develops the concept of the paradox of belonging by examining how familial space functions as a living system that conditions ambiguous patterns of belonging in both a woman's natal and conjugal households. This paper argues that such invisible wounds eventually develop into harmful bodily habits and patterns that often escape social, legal, and cultural discourses. This study is significant in order to tackle the increasing cases of domestic violence by using movies as pedagogical tools to enable women to develop a connection with their own body, which the systems have urged them to disconnect from.



NAOMI DAVIS (SHE/HER)
MA PHILOSOPHY, BROCK UNIVERSITY

BIO

Naomi is a philosopher-writer currently pursuing an MA in Philosophy, with undergraduate degrees in Sociology and Philosophy. Her research engages phenomenology, ontology, and alterity and informs her developing framework, Perceptual Resonance Theory. She is also interested in the role of religious ideology and how political and social structures shape lived experiences. Naomi supports student learning in philosophical writing and plans to pursue a PhD in Interdisciplinary Humanities, with a commitment to relational ontology and other ways of knowing.

ABSTRACT

What Does it Mean to Be Human? Relational Attunement, Resonance, and Shared Becoming

THE STORY

Descartes famously exclaimed that which, for him, confirmed existence itself: “I think, therefore I am,” but I am more than a thought. I have biological capacities that are uniquely human, yet I am not biologically determined. I am historical, but not reducible to my context. Human understanding emerges through sense impressions, relational inheritance, and the freedom to respond—developing a moral capacity that exceeds simulation. Drawing from Marx’s notion of historical becoming and Sartre’s existential freedom, I propose that humanity is a capacity for attunement: to choose, to reorient, to recognize the Other not as a threat but as a fellow bearer of humanness. This is not Heidegger’s *Befindlichkeit*—attunement as moodedness. While both are ontological, I offer a different attunement: ethical and relational, responsive and situated, capable of reorientation and repair. Responding to accounts of rupture and autonomy, this paper unfolds through conceptual critique and speculative reframing to offer a reattunement of what it means to be human. Perceptual Resonance Theory is a reimagined ontology worked through attunement, perception, and relational resonance. By refusing the severing logic of modern subjectivity—which holds the Other in negative space, as absence, threat, or shame—it affirms a mode of encounter in which the Other is not defined by negation but met, in that space between. A space of subjectivity where difference becomes attunement—emergent, shifting, and relational—and ‘human’ names not an essence, but a field of shared becoming: relational, responsive, and alive.



COLIN MACNAIRN (HEIHIM)

PHD PHILOSOPHY, MCMASTER UNIVERSITY

BIO

Colin's work generally focuses on morality, ontology, politics, and their intersections. His most recent publications include, "Liberty, Affect, and The Rise of Populism" (2025), "Moral Realities: Continuity, Narratives, and the Normative Self" (2025), "Survival, Value, and the Foundations of Ethics," (2025) and "American Populism, American Personhood" (2026). His recent conference presentations— at universities around the world – have had their general topics ranging from moral theory to Marxism, metaphysics to materialism, sustainability practices to scientific postures.

ABSTRACT

On Tarriance and Control of Meaning as Purpose

THE STORY

This essay examines the paradoxical human impulse to control meaning by scripting permanence into finite existence, a compulsion that manifests in religious, political, and personal forms. Drawing from Jeff Noonan's account of "tarrying with meaninglessness," it argues that the attempt to secure significance through purpose – whether divine destiny, national myth, or personal legacy – ultimately negates the fragile sources of value in lived experience. By distinguishing between meaning, as the contingent significance of finite practices, and purpose as a teleological imposition oriented toward eternity, the essay clarifies how conflating the two leads to what Noonan calls a "superabundance of meaning," wherein finite life is subordinated to transcendent narratives. Engaging Camus, Dostoyevsky, Charles Taylor, and George Grant, the analysis situates this pathology within both existential and historical contexts, showing how modernity's will to mastery intensifies the compulsion to control meaning. Against this, the essay advances a materialist ethic of finite affirmation: by tarrying with meaninglessness, one recognizes mortality as the condition of valuation and grounds ethical life in shared vulnerability, care, and presence. Contemporary conflicts and nationalist movements illustrate the dangers of purpose-driven control, where finite lives are sacrificed for imagined permanence. Alternatively, tarrying, affirms finitude as the only ground for meaning and solidarity.



JACOB GILL (HE/HIM)
BROCK PHILOSOPHY

BIO

Jacob Gill [he/him] is a graduate of Brock University, currently pursuing his Master's in Philosophy, in particular contemporary continental thought. His work seeks to examine the concurrent conditions of Western society inducing the ever-increasing crisis of mental health, impacting individuals and the collectives they comprise, as well as the loss of societal participation facing younger generations.

ABSTRACT

**SOMA and
the Strange
Territories of
Human-ness**

THE STORY

In considering the question “What does it mean to be human?” we are faced with a conundrum which has intrigued thinkers for millennia. Most of all, the answers to this question have seen countless iterations, in some ways developing or radically changing as history progresses, while others remain steadfast in their positions. What is certain is that we have yet to settle upon a definitive answer, and no doubt each individual contains their own variation of a position, assuming they even share a stance with others. Nevertheless, it is likely that we contain, in some manner, pre-conceived notions as to what “being human” means. In attempting to consider the question itself, what must first be interrogated are these given notions we presume to be a natural part of our humanity. Only by examining the sites of in-humanity and considering, equally, the glaring nebulosity of humanity itself can we prime ourselves for a proper investigation. The story presented in Frictional Game’s 2015 psychological horror, *SOMA*, offers this very interrogation. In a setting of copied consciousnesses, cybernetic organisms, and machines that think themselves alive, how might we meaningfully differentiate ourselves from such constructs? *SOMA* sets the grounds for unique set of challenges to address concerning humanity, and the works of philosophers Georges Bataille and Erich Fromm may present a response to such challenges, or, at the very least, a new sort of consideration toward deriving a more essential definition of what it means to be human. In particular, both thinkers consider the human being and its problem as an I, as an individual separated from others and separated from the very nature they spring forth from and yet forever inhabit. It is only the human whose existence it comes to find problematic, and so we may investigate the ramifications of such uniquely human thought. What does humanity risk in running from the question of its being, and what might it gain in reconciling with the problem it so dreads.



MAYA PHILLIPS (SHE/HER)

MA ENGLISH AND CULTURAL STUDIES, MCMASTER UNIVERSITY

BIO

Maya Phillips is a graduate student of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University, and she holds a B.A. in English and History from Bethel University in Saint Paul, Minnesota. From studying Māori literature at the University of Otago in Dunedin, Aotearoa New Zealand, to writing for Textura magazine in Haryana, India, she works to retell previously one-sided stories.

ABSTRACT

Killing the Indian and the Man: A Historical Analysis of the Crisis of Masculinity Facing Native American Men

THE STORY

Centuries of colonization, systematic oppression, and cultural appropriation have produced a mass crisis of masculinity among Native American men in the United States, evidenced by Native men's disproportionate experience of violence, isolation, and substance abuse, which are employed to prove masculinity or hide emasculation. This paper examines historical definitions of masculinity across various Native American societies, traces the systemic emasculation of Native men by European settlers, and critically analyzes the lack of attention and resources allocated to Native American men and women working to restore agency to their communities and restore the self-worth of Native men. Centuries of forced assimilation peaked with boarding schools, which were promoted as a way to "kill the Indian and save the man," as expressed by Richard H. Pratt, and traditional standards of masculinity among Native American communities were delegitimized and promoted as animalistic or effeminate through stereotypes applied by European settler society. Native masculinity has become incompatible with the white-supremacist masculinity of mainstream US culture, and Native American men are forced to choose between presenting themselves either as Native—emasculated and subjugated in the European American imagination—or as men—giving up a key connection with their history and community to be seen by European Americans as almost as masculine as themselves. The only means of solving this centuries-old crisis of masculinity, which is given attention by some Native communities and organizations but remains widely ignored among broader society, is separating "Native" from its stereotypical connotations and "men" from its Eurocentric definition, allowing Native men to embody both their Native and masculine identities.



STEPHANIE LEWIS (SHE/HER)
PHD, WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

BIO

Stephanie Lewis is currently a PhD student at Wilfrid Laurier University in the English and Film Studies program pursuing work in posthuman folklore. She received her BA in Film and Media Production at Humber College and MA at the University of Guelph in European Studies with a research focus on myths and fairytales.

ABSTRACT

Blood Memory: Interconnectivity, Reconciliation and Embodiment in Indigenous Graphic Novels

THE STORY

Posthumanist discourse encourages thought beyond Western binaries such as Cartesian dualism to embrace a more interconnected worldview, thus the concept of embodied memory becomes not only possible but necessary for understanding memory as not limited exclusively to the mind. In many Indigenous cultures, the practice of 'blood memory' or 'bone memory' suggests a form of social and culturally informed embodied memory that, like postmemory, is transferred intergenerationally, but goes further to relay ancestral lived experiences as if one's own. While several scholars reduce this phenomenon to a product of active imagination informed by rich oral cultures, we are led to believe, by creative interpretations seen in a selection of Indigenous-made graphic novels, that blood memory is not only spiritual and psychological, but embodied. Through an examination of these graphic novels such as Michif writer Katherena Vermette's *A Girl Called Echo* and multiple works written or adapted by Cree author David Alexander Robertson, this paper aims to not only support the existence of embodied memory, but advocate for a more interconnected and communitarian lifestyle where blood memory can be fostered as a tool for personal, cultural, and historical reconciliation and a balm for colonial, capitalist, and anthropocentric scars. Furthermore, this paper raises awareness of the mistreatment and marginalization of Indigenous peoples and the wisdom of their worldviews, marking their inclusion here as an exemplar of 'posthuman memory' seen as radical forms of memory experienced by the subaltern subject previously denied the categorization of 'human' as traditionally understood (privileged, Eurocentric, white male).



JESSICA SOMERSALL (SHE/HER)

MA IN THEATRE & PERFORMANCE STUDIES, YORK UNIVERSITY

BIO

Jessica Somersall (She/Her) is a Master's Candidate in Theatre and Performance at York University & Centre of Latin American and Caribbean studies. She is a Toronto-based emerging writer, performer, and theatre-maker whose work explores social justice, intergenerational memory, and the lives of Black Caribbean women. Her writing appears in *Intermission Magazine* and *Consensual Humans*, reflecting on identity, lineage, vulnerability, and love through personal storytelling and cultural inquiry.

ABSTRACT

Theatre as Healing: Reimagining Ambiguous Familial Histories in St. Kitts and Nevis

THE STORY

As a Black Caribbean Canadian woman, I inherit both the privilege and the pain of tracing my lineage only in fragments, severed where colonial disruption obscured Afro-Caribbean genealogies. My father was born in St. Kitts and Nevis under British rule and immigrated to Canada at thirteen; my mother was born in Canada to Jamaican parents. The question “Where do you come from?” has therefore always been layered marked by ambiguity, memory, and the imaginative labour required to reconstruct what was displaced. My Major Research Paper in Theatre and Performance investigates how colonization, naming practices, and ancestral fragmentation can be examined through performance and creative storytelling. Drawing on oral histories from St. Kitts and Nevis, this project traces my earliest known ancestor and constructs a speculative yet grounded narrative of familial lineage. The work merges archival research with a creative performance text, positioning storytelling as both archive and offering across time. Grounded in social justice, equity, and decolonial practice, this research asks how theatrical storytelling might function as a restorative method for Black Afro-Caribbean communities navigating ruptured ancestry and inherited loss. The methodology weaves Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s decolonizing frameworks, imaginative ethnography, and research-creation, alongside Black performance theory and Black fugitivity. Through these lenses, performance emerges as resistance, world-building, and an embodied archive of memory. This work contributes to scholarship and community by centering Afro-Caribbean memory as a site of reclamation. Through performance, fragmented genealogical traces are transformed into shared remembrance, healing, and cultural restoration across generations.

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