

FEMINIST GENDER & SEXUALITY STUDIES

Unsettling Citizenship: The 2020 Weiss Memorial Lecture

By **María Frías Vellón**

More than 100 people gathered in Judd Hall for the 33rd Annual Diane Weiss Lecture, given this year by Siobhan Somerville. Somerville is the author of *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*, published by Duke University Press, and Associate Professor of English and Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her lecture was titled, "Unsettling Citizenship: Naturalization, Indigenous Dispossession, Queer Reading." Somerville's talk analyzed the U.S. naturalization ceremony through the early 20th century history of indigenous dispossession.

Dr. Somerville began her lecture by presenting an image of immigrants taking the oath of citizenship at a Federal naturalization ceremony in Middletown, Connecticut. Despite seeming timeless and inevitable, Somerville argued that the naturalization ceremony is a recent historical development unique to the U.S. naturalization process. Her analysis asked what "ideological work the ceremony does in public understandings of the U.S. administration of citizenship and nationalism." Somerville recounted the history of the naturalization ceremony and its transformation from a "dreary courtroom transaction" to a "gripping scene" capable of inspiring the collective imagination of citizens and non-citizens alike.

In 1906 through the Naturalization Act, Congress decided that citizenship would be granted by the Federal Government, but it was not until 1946 that the Department of Justice produced the *Gateway to Citizenship*, "a book that would become the standard script for today's naturalization ceremony." Importantly, this guide "imagines potential citizens arriving a nuclear family, on the threshold of an industrial city, presumably ready to take..."

[Continued on Page 2]

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 [Unsettling Citizenship:
The 2020 Weiss
Memorial Lecture](#)
- 3 [Letter from the Chair:
Victoria Pitts-Taylor](#)
- 5 [New Faculty Update](#)
- 6 [FGSS Fall Symposium
on Transfeminisms](#)
- 8 [Faculty Notes by Dr.
Heather V. Vermeulen](#)
- 14 [Drag Queens &
Radical Faeries &
Judys, Oh My!](#)
- 16 [Alumni News](#)
- 18 [Senior Research](#)

[Continued from Page 1]



Dr. Siobhan Somerville presenting in Judd Hall

their place in a modernized capitalist workforce.” In short, the manual stresses the importance of establishing a uniform ceremony that produces an emotional effect in all spectators. Ultimately, the goal of the ceremony is to “heighten emotions” and evoke patriotism, nationalism and loyalty for the benevolent nation. Somerville argued that “by folding naturalization into a history of immigration, the Federal state... has successfully yoked naturalization to this narrative of desire, a romance in which the immigrant is imagined as longing for an attachment to the State through citizenship, a love that is required in the naturalization ceremony.”

Notably, however, the narrative that tethers the naturalization ceremony to immigration obscures a history of U.S. settler colonialism. Until 1924, despite the 14th Amendment conferring citizenship to all born in the United States, Native Americans as a group were considered ineligible for U.S. citizenship, due to their “presumed allegiance to their tribe.” Naturalization was reserved for white immigrants. However, individually, Native Americans were sometimes extended access to citizenship, often in efforts by the Federal Government to acquire tribal land. Through the passing of the Dawes Act in 1897, if Native Americans (called “American Indians”) renounced their claim to collectively held tribal lands, they could receive individual land grants. Any remaining lands were declared surplus and sold to non-Indians. The Dawes Act also conferred citizenship to “every Indian born within the territorial limits of the United States, who was voluntarily taken up within said limits, his residence separate, and apart from any tribe of Indians therein, and has adopted the habits of civilized life.”

Importantly, in the 1910s, “an elaborate ceremony [was designed] to be used to mark publicly the granting of land patents and the conferral of citizenship on American Indians.” This ceremony was demeaning, racialized and gendered. Somerville described how “at the culminating point of the ceremony, Indian men were asked to shoot a bow and arrow for the last time. The presiding official then marked that moment by proclaiming ‘you have shot your last arrow. That means that you are no longer to live the life of an Indian. You are, from this day forward, to live the life of the white man.’” A similar ceremony was designed for Native American women, except it entailed different props. Native American women were told: “you have chosen the life of the white woman and the white woman loves her home...” In Somerville’s assessment, the ceremony symbolizes “the transformation of kinship and property arrangements producing [the] white heteronormative family as necessary site of the transmission of private property and national identity.” It also “effectively produces American Indians retroactively... as a kind of queer figure in relation to the normative demands of the State.” Although the ceremony was met with disdain and resistance by Native Americans and white spectators, “it is significant that [the State] imagined the ritual for admitting Indians to citizenship as a kind of prototype for a Federal naturalization ceremony.” A lengthy question and answer period followed Somerville’s lecture, raising issues of state formation, settler colonialism and access to the rights extended through the citizenship that are especially urgent given the current political climate. ■

Letter from the Chair:

Feminist Teaching and Learning in a Pandemic

Victoria Pitts-Taylor

The pandemic has made this an exceptional time to be teaching and learning. The social inequalities that shaped our lives before the pandemic have been further exposed and exacerbated by the public health crisis and the economic devastation of Covid-19. Unsurprisingly, the pandemic is having uneven effects. As the novelist Arundhati Roy writes in her essay [The Pandemic is a Portal](#), “The tragedy is immediate, real, epic and unfolding before our eyes. But it isn’t new. It is the wreckage of a train that has been careening down the track for years.” Or as Ruth Nyambura of [African Eco-feminists Collective](#) puts it, the pandemic is “Part of a long and growing list of crises that we have been experiencing” under global neoliberalism. Even so, the scale and speed of the inequality is startling to many. Some of the ultra-rich have already made billions in profits in the first months. Meanwhile, the social and economic impacts of quarantine and isolation are being felt in deeply gendered, racialized ways, and the death toll is stratified by race and class. As Kimberlé Crenshaw noted in [The Intersectional Failures that CoVid Lays Bare](#), “the dramatic maldistribution of survival resources” is a significant part of the catastrophe. There is much to learn from intersectional and transnational feminist and queer activists, scholars, and artists who are organizing, writing and creating in response to this crisis.

Here at Wesleyan we are responding in various ways while trying to continue our work as scholars, teachers and students. We are still studying, taking and grading exams, writing and reading



papers and honors theses, and hosting public (virtual) events, while being scattered across the country and the globe and isolated from each other. We have had to transform our courses to digital, dispersed, online formats, and do so in ways that recognize the inequalities in our circumstances. Our students are joining class from their families’ homes, from temporary residences, or from other people’s couches. Not all of the homes and shelters are conducive to learning, and a few students are unable to join at all. They may have to work to support their families, take care of siblings, care for sick family members, or deal with a host of other obstacles. The intersectional differences in our scholarly community that may have been at least partly obscured before are laid bare now.

A colleague recently sent me the [statement on feminist pedagogy in a time of pandemic](#) created by FemTechNet, a network that produces feminist

practices for online learning informed by feminist principles of accountability, collaboration, collectivity and care. These cyberfeminists insist that online learning is radically different: “migrating a class into domestic space changes all interactions.” They remind us to be skeptical of techno-solutionism, and alert to the ways technologies are “complex systems with divergent values and cultural assumptions.” Beyond awareness of uneven access to online platforms, we need to find ways to subvert rather than reinscribe hierarchies of privilege and precarity. This challenge has always been part of feminist pedagogy, but as the ordinary ways of doing things in the university are upended, we are pressured to take it up anew.

This newsletter chronicles our efforts this past year as we manage the exceptional circumstances in the present and as we face uncertainty about the future. There are still events and people to celebrate. In these pages, we welcome new core faculty Hari Krishnan (Dance) and Patricia Rodriguez Mosquera (Psychology), and introduce our new Visiting Assistant Professor for 2020-21, Heather Vermeulen. We chronicle three FGSS events held face-to-face, including our Fall Symposium on Transfeminisms, the annual Dianne Weiss Lecture given this year by Siobhan Somerville, and a panel on queer histories of sound and dance that coincided with the CFA’s Taylor Mac performance. Prof. Vermeulen also reports here on a hugely successful conference on Trans* Revolutions she co-organized for and with Wesleyan’s Center for Humanities. Trans* Revolutions was quickly transformed into a digital format, and offers a model for dispersed scholarly events that remain meaningful and engaging. We also update you on some of our alumni, who have been busy the past year working, organizing, studying, performing, and teaching. And we congratulate our seniors, the class of 2020, with whom we gathered through

our computer screens to celebrate Honors theses and senior essays.

One of those honors theses, written by Jessica Brandon ’20 (and tutored by Professors Abigail Boggs and Christina Crosby), offers a mode of radical hopefulness. Brandon writes, “As we attend to this current moment, we can speculate about what else is and has been possible not as a way out, but a way through... Dreaming cannot be the first to go in the name of survival, as it may be necessary for it.” We have always needed radical creativity, but reading Brandon’s thesis reminds me to reach for it now.

In solidarity,

Victoria Pitts-Taylor

**FEMINIST
GENDER & SEXUALITY
STUDIES**
THE 33RD ANNUAL DIANE WEISS '80 MEMORIAL LECTURE

**UNSETTLING CITIZENSHIP:
NATURALIZATION, INDIGENOUS DISPOSSESSION,
QUEER READING**



FEBRUARY 20TH • 4:30PM-6PM • JUDD 116

Current debates about citizenship and naturalization in the U.S. focus on immigration, obscuring other histories of naturalization that have been central to the racial, sexual, and colonial imaginary of the federal state. Drawing on interdisciplinary queer approaches and archival research, this talk traces a genealogy of the familiar naturalization ceremony not through immigrant histories, but to early twentieth-century sites of indigenous dispossession.



SPEAKER
SIOBHAN B. SOMERVILLE

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, ENGLISH / GENDER
AND WOMEN'S STUDIES

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Wesleyan University

Poster for the 2020 Weiss Lecture.
See Page 1 for details.

New Faculty Update: FGSS Welcomes Psychology & Dance Professors into the Core Faculty

The FGSS Program would like to extend a warm welcome to Dr. Hari Krishnan and Dr. Patricia Rodríguez Mosquera, both of whom became members of the FGSS core faculty this year. Like our affiliated faculty, core faculty regularly cross-list courses and invited to tutor theses. In addition, core faculty also participate in the governance of the FGSS program, collaborating on curricular development, event programming, faculty hires, and other important undertakings. In addition, FGSS welcomes Dr. Heather Vermeulen as Visiting Assistant Professor of FGSS for the 2020-21 academic year. We are delighted to be joined by Professors Krishnan, Rodríguez Mosquera, & Vermeulen.



Dr. Patricia Rodríguez Mosquera

Dr. Patricia M. Rodríguez Mosquera is a Professor of Psychology at Wesleyan. She directs the Culture and Emotion Lab housed in Judd Hall. Her research focuses on how cultural and social contexts shape emotions. Her lab employs a multi-method approach, with an emphasis on emotions that arise from acceptance or deprecation like happiness and pride versus shame and humiliation. Using a culturally-sensitive methodological approach, her research also covers a wide range of cultures, with a special focus on under-studied populations in psychology (e.g., Mexican American women; Muslim minorities in the U.S. and Europe). She also partnered with the Center for the Arts to

conduct a year-long study as part of Muslim Women Voices at Wesleyan. Her work contributes to the fields of social psychology, cultural psychology, and affective science (the study of emotion). In 2020-2021, she will offer courses on culture in psychology, research methods, and emotion.

Dr. Heather Vermeulen

Heather Vermeulen is currently a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow at Wesleyan's Center for the Humanities and has taught several courses at Wesleyan already. Professor Vermeulen received her Ph.D. in African American Studies and American Studies and a Graduate Certificate in Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies from Yale in 2017. She co-organized the Trans Aesthetics conference that took place in March 2020, described elsewhere in this newsletter. Dr. Vermeulen will teach Sex and Gender in Critical Perspective, a Gateway for the FGSS major, as well as two seminars, Queer and Trans Aesthetics and Litanies for Survival, Plots for Revolution.



Dr. Hari Krishnan

Dr. Hari Krishnan is a Professor of Dance at Wesleyan as well as the artistic director for inDance, an innovative Canadian dance company. Much of his work takes up issues of sexuality, sensuality and queer desire, and is informed by theories of gender performativity and hybridity. His ethnographic research and choreography draw on the experiences of a wide range of subjects — from traditional courtesan dancers, to queer South Asian immigrant men, to victims of environmental pollution — to address broad issues of social justice. His work brings together multiple dance traditions, cultural reference points, and fields of study. His book entitled *Celluloid Classicism: Early Tamil*

Cinema and the Making of Modern Bharatanatyam has recently been published by Wesleyan University Press. In Fall 2020, he will teach Dance Composition, and in the Spring 2021 he will teach a course on the traditional and the modern in Bharata Natyam, a classical South Indian dance.



FGSS Fall Symposium on Transfeminisms

By [María Frías Vellón](#)

The 2019-2020 FGSS Fall Symposium focused on the topic of Transfeminisms. As FGSS Chair Victoria Pitts-Taylor described in her introduction to the Symposium, transfeminism can be considered a political stance, a theoretical framework, a set of histories and practices, or a call to action. Emi Koyama writes in “The Transfeminist Manifesto,” published in 2001, that transfeminism is a movement “by and for trans women who view their liberation as linked to the liberation of all women and beyond.” But attention to transfeminism can more broadly recognize the feminist work of trans activists and scholars over multiple decades and in multiple cultural and geopolitical contexts. The Symposium, held on October 25, 2019, featured ethnographer and American Studies scholar Claudia Sofía Garriga-López and political scientist and sociolegal scholar Paisley Currah.

Claudia Sofía Garriga-López took to the podium first. Dr. Garriga-López, Assistant Professor of Queer and Trans Latinx Studies at California State University (Chico), described her long-term participatory research with trans, feminist, and queer activists and artist groups in Quito, Ecuador. Dr. Garriga-López situated her discussion with an historical overview of transfeminism as an “autonomously emerging movement that happen[ed] in different places at the same time.” She explained that “in the first decade of the 21st century, [it] took shape as a transnational social movement, through a network that combined political activism, scholarship, artistic expression and radical sex subcultures.” Originating in Spain (as *transfeminismo*) in the 1980s as a call for the inclusion of transwomen in feminist politics, today transfeminism is more geographically and theoretically expansive. Citing Sayak Valencia, Garriga-López identified four foundational influences of transfeminism: U.S. women of color feminisms; anti-capitalist subcultures from Spain; “the global movement to end the pathologization of trans and intersex people”; and “the sustained commitment to the empowerment of migrants and people living in conditions of poverty or social marginalization.” Transfeminism serves as an intervention in exclusionary feminist practices (such as those that exclude transwomen). It centers anti-capitalist, anti-establishment, sex positive, body positive, queer and intersectional politics and community-based activism.

Paisley Currah, Professor of Political Science and Women's & Gender Studies at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, followed with a talk on the state's contradictory roles in sex classification. Currah is a founding editor, with Susan Stryker, of the journal *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, and co-editor of *Corpus: An Interdisciplinary Reader on Bodies and Knowledge*, as well as the volume *Transgender Rights*, which won the Sylvia Rivera Award in Transgender Studies. Currah's book *Sex is as Sex Does: Transgender Identities, Sex Classification, and the State*, is forthcoming from New York University Press.

In his talk, Dr. Currah argued that "transphobia" is insufficient as an analytical framework to understand "the use of sex as a technology of the government." He defined sex as "literally the M or the F produced by the government, backed by a force of law" and identified "fascinating" contradictions in how the state regulates sex, gender and bodies. He argued that different governmental agencies define sex differently not because some are more transphobic than others, but rather because the state is "a bundle of conventions, practices and norms that exist in different places and do different things." To illustrate, he referenced a 1999 court case in Texas where a transwoman whose husband died in the hospital sued for medical malpractice. The hospital's lawyers opted to refute the validity of the couple marriage's, claiming that the plaintiff's trans identity meant they had a same-sex marriage. The court ruled in favor of the hospital. Currah explained this phenomenon by proposing that marriage serves a different purpose than identity documents. Identity documents are a means of surveillance whereas marriage is a method of ensuring "property and status is passed down through generations," upholding both racism and socio-economic inequality. Thus, changing one's sex on a government-issued ID does not affect the state's ability to surveil; arguably it heightens it. At the same time, dissolving a marriage to deny a trans person their right to property, financial benefits and custody of children enhances the state's control over the distribution of resources and wealth. *The lectures were followed by a panel discussion open to the audience.* ■



Dr. Currah and Dr. Garriga-López

Faculty Notes by Heather V. Vermeulen

Currently a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for the Humanities, I will return to Wesleyan next year as a Visiting Assistant Professor in FGSS, which is an honor and a joy. My work tacks back and forth between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century archives, particularly from the Anglophone Caribbean, and African Diasporic literature and visual culture, from slave narratives to contemporary art. My training in African American Studies, American Studies, and Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies inspires my interdisciplinary, intersectional, long historical, and diasporic approach to the study of colonization, slavery, and their afterlives, particularly the inter-relatedness of ecological catas-trophes and racism, classism, settler colonialism, sexism, ableism, and homophobia. Guided by black feminist theory and queer of color critique, I turn to archives as a source for tracking these shape-shifting power formations, as well as glimmers of opposition, and to the arts for the alternative imaginaries they make possible. I am at work on a book project, *Queer Kin-Aesthetics and the Plantation Grotesque*, based on my dissertation research, and a second study that seeks to develop ecological methodologies, or methodological ecologies, through engagements with the work of contemporary artist Ellen Gallagher. ■



Untitled

(Drawing or Doodling for a Virtual Newsletter without a Word Limit)

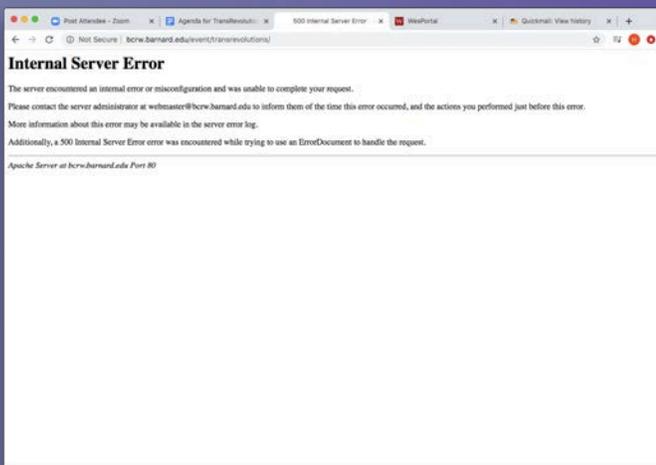
Internal Server Error

When asked a couple of weeks ago if I'd like to contribute something to the FGSS newsletter, I figured I would write a reflection on the *Trans*Revolutions* symposium, originally planned as a two-day, on-campus event. When Covid-19 hit, I thought we'd have to cancel the program altogether, but one of the artists, Tourmaline, suggested that we transfer it online. She pointed out that this was a disability justice issue and going virtual not only would make the conversation more accessible but also might inspire other event organizers to follow suit.

Through the generosity and care of Natasha Korda and Erinn Savage at the Center for the Humanities, Hope Dector at the Barnard Center for Research on Women,

and the participating artists—Elliot Montague, Emma Frankland, Texas Isaiah, Tourmaline, and Vick Quezada—*Trans*Revolutions: A Virtual Symposium* came together as a live-streamed and recorded two-hour event. Last I checked, the YouTube video had 1,411 views. The seating capacity of the lecture space in Russell House (which I'd booked for the on-campus version) is 80.

I had planned to organize this essay around one particular image: the error message from when the *Trans*Revolutions* webpage crashed, minutes before we were supposed to go “live.”



Screenshot of “Internal Server Error” page on author’s laptop screen, accompanied by Zoom, Google Docs, WesPortal, and Moodle Quickmail tabs.

I had shared a short reflection on the “Internal Server Error” the day after the symposium, so I figured I’d do some light editing and send this off. But the time of that writing seems like forever ago now. Perhaps it makes more sense to quote an excerpt from what I wrote then:

*an image I’m taking with me is a screenshot of the “Internal Server Error” message that appeared when the Trans*Revolutions event site crashed. put*

another way: an image of when the “internal” and institutions’ “internal service” were overwhelmed by care-web-workers tuning in, across, with, and through the symposium, an archival trace of the forms of collectivity and sociality made possible because, this time, it was the “internal server” (the on-campus symposium, the one I’d planned) that was made impossible, rather than the more-accessible, less-hermetic event, the one often framed as “impossible” or “too much work” or “less intimate,” “less formal,” etc. I’m so grateful that Tourmaline suggested an online version and pointed us to amazing folx with the technology to make this happen in under two weeks! ¹

The invocation of “care webs” is a nod to Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha’s essay collection *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*.² It’s been on my mind throughout the Covid-19 crisis. I attached a pdf of excerpts to the email I sent my students in “Queer and Trans Aesthetics” following the announcement that Wesleyan was going “remote.” We read *Care Work* last fall in “Litanies for Survival, Plots for Revolution,” which, in retrospect, feels like a kind of training for what has unfolded this spring.

Better Nights

Though I didn’t realize it at the time, the last exhibition that I saw in-person (before quarantine) was Mickalene Thomas’s multi-room installation *Better Nights* at the Bass Museum in Miami.³ My partner and I were on a last-minute getaway, and I had made a last-minute decision to offer a new seminar, “Queer and Trans Aesthetics,” to accompany *Trans*Revolutions*. I was working on the syllabus and, like most faculty, I suspect, was worrying over how to approach “Add/Drop Period,” an uncertain (in retrospect, a very quaintly

1. Heather Vermeulen, Facebook post, March 28, 2020, 1:03pm (EST) 2. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018). 3. For more information on Mickalene Thomas’s *Better Nights*, see <https://thebass.org/art/mickalene-thomas/>

uncertain) two-week stretch when students come and go, readings may be assigned but may not be read, and yet some sense, even some rhythm, of the course takes shape. I always feel pressure to “get things underway,” especially in a seminar that meets only once per week.

Nearly every surface, from top to bottom, of the low-lit space was covered in mirrors that endlessly reflected and refracted the exhibition’s transient visitors as well as the installation’s semi-“permanent” furniture and potted “house” plants, the latter arranged on shelves suspended from the ceiling. With course-planning on the brain, I thought perhaps I’d begin “Queer and Trans Aesthetics” with *Better Nights*. While I knew that Thomas was a black queer artist who often works figuratively (i.e., making photographs and paintings of her lovers, friends, and mother), my students might not. It seemed like the perfect way to approach “queer” and “trans” (aesthetics) as something enacted, unfolding, both ephemeral and residual, rather than a nameable, locatable “what” dependent upon “knowing” or “figuring out” the artist’s “identity” and/or that of the subjects they portray. Moreover, amid the ongoing, shapeshifting catastrophe that had/has been the current U.S. president’s administration—and all of the “past” catastrophes that made/make it possible—the temporally, referentially, and affectively ambiguous notion of “better nights” felt right. Was the phrase meant to be understood as an admission of nostalgia or an assertion of loss? Did the words diagnose time out-of-joint or theorize an entanglement of hope and despair? Was “better nights” a modified noun or a command? A benediction or an incantation?

Using my cell phone, I filmed a bit of *Better Nights* for future reference. Evelyn “Champaign”



Installation view of Mickalene Thomas, Better Nights, Bass Museum (Miami, FL), Dec. 1, 2019–Sept. 27, 2020. Author’s photograph.

King’s 1982 hit “[Love Come Down](#)” rippled and ricocheted around the room, its orgasmic energies baptismal—sonic and haptic accompaniments to the mirrored architecture, engendering an aesthetic that I can only describe as club-cathedral-gothic-glam. King’s upbeat chorus—“Baby, you make my love come down | Ooh you make my love come down | Make it come all the way down | Oh, you make my love come down”—was hypnotic, her joy contagious. Even the red “EXIT” signs (institutional safety requirements, more-permanent installations) seemed conspiratorial, adorning the space with glimmers of an otherwise, illuminating escape routes to an elsewhere. Or, better put, they illuminated the room itself as one such place.

Writing this essay from North Bennington, Vermont, the late-April weather a vertiginous mix of pouring rain, light snow, gusty wind, and brilliant sunshine, my mind contrasts (or connects) the feel of *Better Nights* with the animated diagrams featured in a March 14th social-distancing article in the *Washington Post* titled, “Why outbreaks like coronavirus spread exponentially, and how to ‘flatten the curve.’”⁴ In the graphic designer’s

4. Harry Stevens, “Why outbreaks like coronavirus spread exponentially, and how to ‘flatten the curve,’” *The Washington Post*, March 14, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/world/corona-simulator/>, accessed April 22, 2020.

visual translation, “healthy” pale blue dots-in-transit turn orange as they slide into “sick” ones. Purple dots stand for those who have “recovered.” How queer.

While Thomas’s *Better Nights* explicitly references the 1970s party scene archived in her late mother’s fading Polaroids, it is haunted by the HIV/AIDS crisis of subsequent decades, so I suppose my reluctant Covid-connection is neither unwarranted nor unanticipated. In the context of quarantine, a reflection on the (affectively) cavernous room’s lingering sense of emptiness, loneliness, and isolation re/shapes Evelyn King’s confessional flirtation: “No sleep last night | Been dreaming of you | Please hold me tight | ’Cause I can’t help the way that I feel | I just can’t help the way that I feel...”

After the Party

One week after *Trans*Revolutions*, I watched *Covid-19: Trans Lives and Trans Studies*, an online symposium sponsored by the Center for LGBTQ Studies. In response to a question about how Covid-19 was affecting their teaching, the scholar, artist, and activist Treva Ellison explained their opposition to grading and the power/punishment logic behind it. When it came to attendance, participation, and assignments, they were trusting that their students knew what they needed, rather than taking a standardized and inevitably punitive approach. Among their pressing pedagogical questions was: “how do we grieve together online?”

I had planned for the second half of “Queer and Trans Aesthetics” to unfold in response to *Trans*Revolutions* and students’ final projects, which they’d outlined in proposals submitted

just prior to “break.” The idea was to organize the syllabus collectively, around questions they wanted to engage together. As a kind of prompt, I’d assigned excerpts (“TBD”) from Joshua Chambers-Letson’s *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life*, to think about where to head next, and how, and why.⁵ The book, inspired in large part by the loss of Chambers-Letson’s teacher and friend José Esteban Muñoz, asks how “minoritarian performance” might fashion spaces from which to oppose the death-dealing machinations of a white supremacist queer-and-transphobic ableist racial capitalism. In its “new” context, the reading was timelier than I could have imagined, and crushingly so. The notion of a “fallen” party and the desire—and imperative—to imagine and realize alternative political formations in its wake (new “communist parties,” lower-case “c” and plural) were, and remain, pressing topics, to put it mildly. In “Queer and Trans Aesthetics,” we were and are grieving, in shared, contiguous, overlapping, and disparate ways. Together, perhaps. Inevitably, online.

It’s good to see their faces. (Your faces). We gather for a shorter amount of time now, which is necessary, if frustrating. Pre-Covid, I’d thought of failure as inevitable and generative. I’d told my students that “we” would fail one another, that classrooms are messy spaces, at best. I’d explained that, for me, practicing how to think together is as integral to a seminar as becoming more familiar with its topic.

If I’m being honest, most virtual classes have felt like “failures” of another sort. Or perhaps this situation requires different terms. But, at present, a better word for this feeling escapes me.

The meetings that have felt most meaningful have been those for which students made and shared

5. Joshua Chambers-Letson, *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2018)

creative responses to their experiences and listened to one another. I'm a firm believer that art theorizes, and their work certainly did—better than any text I could have assigned in those first couple weeks. There's no proceeding "as usual"—not that "proceeding as usual" was ever the seminar's objective. Re/setting the syllabus has meant turning to artists and scholars who, in various ways, anticipated this "present," which is to say, those whose work might reframe this crisis as *not* an entirely "novel" one, even if the particular strand of coronavirus is.

Thanks to the Creative Campus Initiative's generous funding of virtual artist visits in the wake of museum and gallery closures, I was able to organize an online lecture by [micha cárdenas](#) last week and, tomorrow [edit: two hours from now; edit: yesterday], a talk by [Jen Liu](#). Both artists work in, across, and through "virtual" realms. In fact, they trouble divisions between the "virtual" and the "real," underscoring the false (and, often, nefarious) "logic" structuring such binaries. Not surprisingly, an intersectional approach to gender is integral to their projects.

I think it's still possible to hold something like "class," if the contents, aims, and formats are responsive to—or try to be responsive to—the differently-unfolding and spatially-resituated present. Each one of the themes and motifs my students identified in Liu's film [Pink Slime Caesar Shift](#) (2018), provoked insightful readings of her work and provided a means of processing (why it resonates with) the present. Tuesday was a better day. Wednesday was a little rough. But it's not as though our various engagements with Liu's art came to a close "Exit" by "Exit." During office hours on Thursday, a student remarked of their Instagram account (part of their revised project

for our seminar), "I appreciate it as an archive of my better days."

There are two classes remaining, the second/last of which is reserved for presentations. Instead of a "final," constructed stage-by-stage and fine-tuned over the course of the semester, students will share what has been meaningful to them about this term. Some will present a doable revision of the project they'd outlined previously, or a reflection on how it feels to contemplate their past plans in a drastically altered present and in the face of an uncertain future. Others will share a creative "side"-project through which they've been processing this moment—embroidered scraps of cloth, screenshots of social media posts, texts, and virtual gatherings, assemblages of quotes, playlists, and images that have offered some sense of orientation. I have no doubt that their work will be compelling (regardless of how the class itself unfolds), and that our time together will feel too short—to me, at least. I'll click "End Meeting" and I'll miss them. I'll check in with my colleague-friends.

In Lieu of a Conclusion, a Doodle or Drawing and a Stink Bug

Over the past month or so, many of my students have been drawing. I have, too, though I'm more likely to call my version "doodling." Perhaps doing so is a form of self-deprecation. I prefer to think of it as an effort to disrupt the negative connotations of "doodling," which reflect a (capitalistic) productivity-oriented conception of (straight) time from which the doodler (improperly) deviates.

(A "doodle," asserts the *OED*, is "an aimless scrawl made by a person while [their] mind is more or less otherwise occupied."⁶)

6. "Doodle" (noun), definition 3, Oxford English Dictionary Online, <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.wesleyan.edu/view/Entry/56792?rskey=0MCZ3N&result=1#eid>; accessed April 23, 2020.

If an essay, even an outline, implies something a bit more physically and psychically proximate to and assured of “the real thing,” something intended to be carried out as planned, then perhaps a drawing (or a doodle) happens, as scholar Saidiya Hartman might say, “in the space of the interval.”⁷ Perhaps, to invoke Tourmaline’s remarks during *Trans*Revolutions*, both drawing and doodling are ways of “dreaming out the world that we want to live in.”

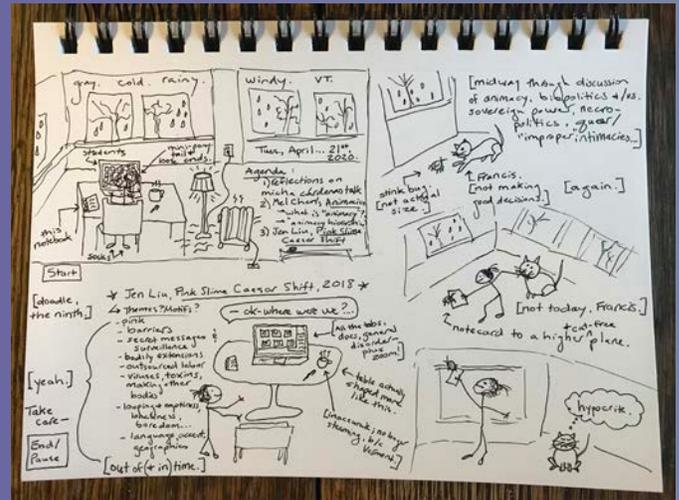
My newsletter contribution is “due” today [edit: yesterday]. There’s no way I’ll “finish” it. And it will [edit: might] feel like a “failure.” Unless, perhaps, I reapproach writing (and teaching) as drawing and doodling. *While I’m at it, why not include a doodle?* I thought, three days ago now, when I really, *really* did not feel like writing. Instead, I doodled (or drew) scenes from that afternoon’s class, which featured cameo appearances by our cat and our resident stink bug. The latter rejoined me the following day, crawling up my computer screen as I drew this in-conclusion.

Of course we are “more or less otherwise occupied.” We’re losing touch and keeping in touch, holding one another and dreaming of being held, spinning care webs and spinning out. We’re grieving.

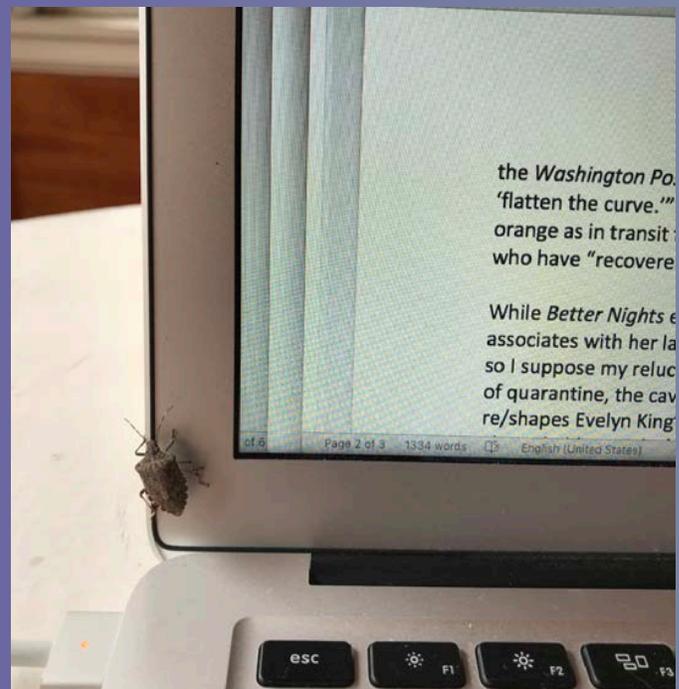
We can’t help the way that we feel.

Thank you all. Please take care.

Yours queerly,
Heather ■



Photograph of author’s doodle or drawing from “Queer and Trans Aesthetics,” Tuesday section.



Photograph of stink bug crawling up author’s laptop with Word document version of this essay onscreen.

7. Saidiya V. Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 26 (June 2008): 1-14 (14). As it happens, during her remarks for *Trans*Revolutions*, Tourmaline cited “Venus in Two Acts” as a touchstone for her work. It’s one for mine as well and a student requested we read it for class.



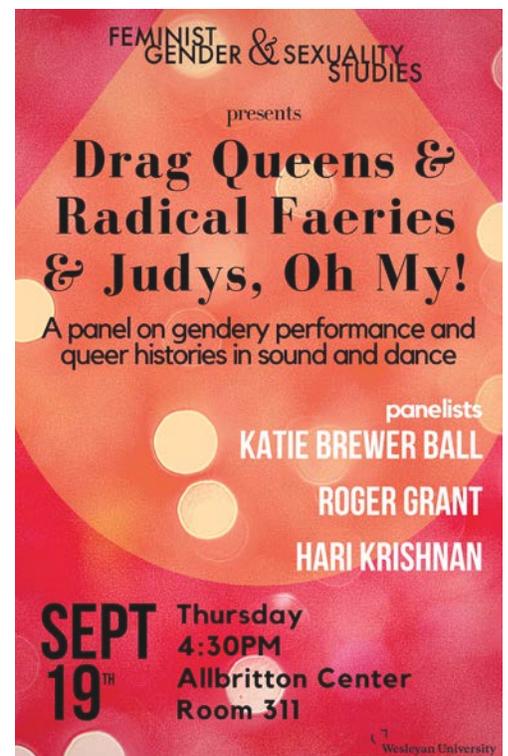
Drag Queens & Radical Faeries & Judys, Oh My!

By [María Frías Vellón](#)

The Connecticut premiere of the performance artist Taylor Mac’s “24-decade History of Popular Music (Abridged)” at Wesleyan University in September 2019 was an occasion for the FGSS program to explore interdisciplinary scholarship on queer performance, aesthetics and the arts. On September 19th, Wesleyan professors Roger Mathew Grant, Katherine Brewer Ball and Hari Krishnan lectured at an event called “Drag Queens and Radical Faeries + Judys, Oh My!: A panel on gendery performance and queer histories in sound and dance” to a packed audience in the Allbritton Center.

Professor Roger Grant kicked off the event with a talk titled “Hyperbole and Unseriousness in Taylor Mac’s Musical Performances.” Grant, Associate Professor of Music, is a historian of the Enlightenment and a theorist of music and culture. His most recent book, *Peculiar Attunements: How Affect Theory Turned Musical*, was published this year by Fordham University Press. In his talk, Grant emphasized how Taylor Mac (who uses the pronoun ‘judy’) employs hyperbole and the distortion of sound in *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music* as an “experiment in radical storytelling” in which judy is “set on squashing sentimentality.” Grant argued that by way of exaggeration and misrepresentation, the show demonstrates that it is our struggles, past and ongoing, that make us who we are as nation.

Next up was Katherine Brewer Ball, Assistant Professor of Theater, FGSS & AFAM, as well as faculty at the Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance. Professor Brewer Ball’s



current book project, titled *The Only Way Out Is In: The Racial & Sexual Performance of Escape*, traces contemporary literature, theater, and performance works by Glenn Ligon, Tony Kushner, Sharon Hayes, and Junot Diaz. Brewer Ball also curates performance and art events, including the NYC performance salon, *Adult Contemporary*, and publishes non-fiction. Brewer Ball spoke about Morgan Bassichis' performance of "The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions: The Musical" (2017), an adaptation of a 1977 book of the same title. The book, which she described as "part fable, part play and part revolutionary manifesto," reminds us of the importance of forms of kinship and affinities that transcend biological and heteronormative constraints. The performance is a humorous and radical attempt at queer world-making, one that is anti-capitalist, communal, unorthodox, and glamorous.

Hari Krishnan, Associate Professor in the Department of Dance and FGSS, gave a presentation titled "Queering Text, Queering Movement: Understanding 'Judy' through my choreography." Professor Krishnan showed clips of several of his performances and choreographies and described how Taylor Mac's work has helped him understand his own endeavors. He noted that Judy's fierce attitude resonated in his piece titled *Uma* (2006), which is a "a contemporary tribute to...the art of female impersonation in South Indian dance." In this performance, Krishnan challenges traditional gender expectations by refusing to let *Uma* "replicate the typical Indian woman archetype" and reimagining overtly sexualized and normative, traditional performances. ■



Hari Krishnan, Katie Brewer Ball, and Roger Grant

ALUMNI NEWS

Benjamin Hicks, Class of 2019 Benjamin recently moved from an assistant position at HBO into coordinator role on the marketing team where he is working on several campaigns including the network's first unscripted drag series *We're Here*, as well as *We Are Who We Are* (Luca Guadagnino's kindred follow up to *Call Me By Your Name*). Benjamin is helping to launch a few HBO Max titles including the ballroom competition series *Legendary*. He feels fortunate to have that foundational knowledge Wesleyan's Feminist, Gender and Sexually Studies provided and how it has helped to inform his practices.

Rachel Williams, Class of 2019 Rachel is living in Segovia, Spain teaching English at a primary school to children from second to sixth grades. Having entered the COVID-19 quarantine in mid-March, she has been working from home, cooking, and catching up on plenty of reading.

Alexandra "Zandy" Stovicek, Class of 2017 Zandy is wrapping up her second year at Yale School of Nursing. Like many, her coursework has been moved online and her clinical experiences are postponed during the global pandemic crisis. She has earned her RN degree and is currently training to become a midwife and women's health nurse practitioner. She has delivered three babies so far as a student. The picture provided was taken just after Zandy delivered her first baby! Zandy works part-time as a nurse at Planned Parenthood, which is also where she volunteered when she was the leader of the Wesleyan Doula Project.



Alexandra "Zandy" Stovicek '17



Jackie Soro, Class of 2014 Jackie Soro is a Philadelphia-based artist, performer, and teacher. Her onstage work centers largely in the feminist performance art sphere, in collaboration with local artists and theater companies to create both original ensemble works and solo performances. Her recent projects include *Killjoys Kastle: A Lesbian Feminist Haunted House* (Icebox Project Space), the *Bearded Ladies Cabaret's* original musical *Contradict This!* (LaMama Experimental Theater, NYC), and the Arden Theater Company's Barrymore Award-winning production of *Fun Home*. Offstage, Jackie remains committed to queer organizing and collective living, continues to write and guerilla-distribute feminist zines, and coaches young adults in music and performance with *Girls Rock Philly*.

Jackie Soro '14



Allegra Heath-Stout '12

Allegra Heath-Stout, Class of 2012 Allegra is in her fourth year of working at JOIN for Justice, the Jewish Organizing Institute and Network, in Boston. She directs a community organizing fellowship for Jewish young adults. This year they launched a new track within the fellowship focused on developing the leadership of disabled Jewish organizers and training all of our fellows to work against ableism. Having focused on disability studies and disability activism at Wesleyan, Allegra was thrilled to get to do this work now! Allegra's partner, **Laura Heath-Stout '11**, came home early from a post-doc in Texas just as coronavirus was starting to turn life upside down. They are very grateful to have each other and their communities during this crisis.

Jackie Manginelli, Class of 2019 Jackie works as an Investigator at the Civilian Complaint Review Board, a New York City agency that investigates police misconduct. She lives in Greenpoint, Brooklyn with two other Wesleyan alums, and is adjusting to working from home. Jackie has been spending her time in quarantine trying to learn how to code through an online class, and practicing her book-binding skills.

Allison Hsu, Class of 2019 Allison is getting a Master's in Performance Studies at NYU Tisch School of the Arts. Her current research is on Asia-futurism and performance art, bridging feminist/queer theory, critical race theory, new materialism, and embodiment. She is also working as an assistant to Eiko Otake, an interdisciplinary performing artist and choreographer whose class, "Delicious Movement", she took at Wesleyan for her FGSS concentration.

Dylan Heuer, Class of 2018 Dylan is living in New York City, and has adjusted her life to be able to quarantine with her family in Wester Massachusetts. She is working as an audio producer and in the past year she has produced radio stories about protests in response to ICE, the connection between a city council election and a local compost center, and a podcast series about the revival of the American cider industry which explores themes of land justice, regenerative agriculture, and terroir.

Sofi Goode, Class of 2017 In January 2020 Sofi started working on the Development team at The Trevor Project, raising funds to support crisis intervention services for LGBTQ youth. The Trevor Project has seen a massive increase in youth reaching out to them in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as folks are quarantined in unsupportive environments and facing uncertainty about their health, their economic security, and their future. Sofi plans to go to graduate school in the near future, and was thrilled to be accepted in the London School of Economics' Gender, Development, and Globalization program. With the uncertainty around COVID-19 and her new job, she is likely to defer but is excited to return home to a Gender Studies department and continue learning.



Sofi Goode '17

Carol B. Ohmann Award Recipients

Best Thesis **Campus Sex as Sex Education: Imagining Sexual Study within the Neoliberal Arts** by Jessica Brandon '20

Jessica Brandon, a co-coordinator of Adolescent Sexual Health Awareness at Wesleyan, argues that sex at the university is both entangled in the neoliberal power relations of the university and a resource for alternative world-making. In one chapter, Brandon analyzes Wescam, a matchmaking site invented by a Wesleyan student years before Tinder. Brandon addresses how it reproduces the neoliberal sexual subject by encouraging users to “maximize



Fall '19 Senior Seminar with Professor Crosby and Members of the Class of 2020

experience while minimizing risk.” But if the university and the technology produce neoliberal forms of self-maximizing labor, resulting in a reduction of sex’s relational possibilities, the thesis also endeavors to imagine things otherwise. In another chapter, Brandon argues for “crushing” as a queer, collective practice that entails different ways of sexually relating. She writes, “The crush as concept-metaphor enables the imagination of sexual subject formation that is not indentured to risk-management or self-realization, but rather carries potentialities and pleasures.” Ultimately, by drawing from queer and feminist theory as well as abolitionist university studies, Brandon’s thesis brings together a vision of “sex as an edificatory force” and of the university as a potential site of the pluralist appropriation, rerouting, and reconfiguration of knowledge.

Best Essay **Canceling Cancel Culture: Carceral Feminism, Crime Logics and the Possibility of Restorative/Transformative Alternatives at Wesleyan** by Gina Savoy '20

Gina’s senior essay explores sexual assault and the student-elaborated practice of “canceling” the accused at Wesleyan. Despairing of an effective institutional response to sexual violence, students demand that “perpetrators” be excluded from social life. This centers survivors, but also reinforces the punitive politics of carceral feminism. Gina’s essay is both well-supported by scholarly research, and deeply motivated by her activist commitments to working toward a new response to sexual harm. She uses the principles of restorative/transformative justice to explore how students could develop a different approach to sexual harm, and work toward creating the “accountable community” necessary to support the hard process of transformative change.

Senior Essays

Sexual Violence on TV: A Feminist Query Beyond Good Representations by María Frías Vellón

Afro-Caribbean Religion and Copresence: How The Mind, Body and Spirit Make Worlds by Maya Lane

Melodrama, Femonationalism, and Migrant Sex Work by Lynn Liu

Canceling Cancel Culture: Carceral Feminism, Crime Logics and the Possibility of Restorative/Transformative Alternatives at Wesleyan by Gina Savoy

Opening Windows: Friendship as Freedom, Radical Relationships as Revolutionary by Ava Thornton

2020 Senior Thesis Writers

ARIELLA REYES

Becoming Undocumented: Mapping the Migration of Latina Women to the United States through Contemporary Visual Media

Advisor: Professor Laura Grappo **Inspiration:** In the fall of my freshman year I took a class called Latinidad, which was my introduction to Latinx studies. Since then, I've always been interested in Latinx studies and all of its intersections. My parent's immigration stories were also a source of inspiration. **Favorite Discovery:** My favorite discovery was that there was a lot of scholarly work & theories surrounding immigration and other intersections. For example, the book *Captivity Beyond Prisons: Criminalization Experiences of Latina (Im)migrants* by Martha D. Escobar has been my favorite find so far while doing research. **Dream Reader:** Mae Ngai **#Hashtags you would give to your project:** #immigrantwomen #representation #media

JESSICA BRANDON

Campus Sex as Sex Education: Imagining Sexual Study within the Neoliberal Arts

Advisors: Professor Abigail Boggs & Professor Christina Crosby **Inspiration:** My project was inspired by my experience as a member and coordinator of Adolescent Sexual Health Awareness (ASHA), Wesleyan's student-run sex education organization. Teaching in our curriculum in high school and workshops on-campus provoked larger scholarly questions about sexual subject-formation, Wesleyan's campus sex culture, and what we are educating ourselves towards when we teach and learn sex. **Favorite Discovery:** Professor Heather Vermeulen recently recommended that I check out "Space Dates," a collaborative project by Canadian queer artist-activists Jessica Whitbread and Morgan M Page that explores safer sex culture, HIV non-disclosure criminalization, and sexual communities of queer women. It provoked a lot of questions relating to my thesis from a performance art and activist perspective. To read the project statement and learn more about the piece, check out http://jessicawhitbread.com/project/space-dates_ **Dream Reader:** Adrienne Maree Brown. **Any other work related to FGSS?:** I am a member of the Wesleyan Doula Project, an abortion doula collective that provides in-clinic support to patients. I am also a sexual assault survivor advocate through the Women and Families Center (WFC) in Middletown, and my involvement in ASHA also connects to the major. **#Hashtags you would give to your project:** #wessex #AbolitionistUniversityStudies

LILY DAVIS

"Be my rebel girl": Locating Women in Music, History, and Revolution

Advisor: Professor Su Zheng **Inspiration:** A course I took my junior year on queer theory and performance art strategies with Professor Katherine Brewer-Ball got me interested in the Riot Grrrl Movement and its political and artistic implications. **Favorite Discovery:** I discovered that the title of the Nirvana album, Smells Like Teen Spirit, was actually inspired by the Kathleen Hanna who was the lead singer of the riot grrrl band, Bikini Kill, when she graffitied the phrase on Kurt Cobain's house as a joke! **Dream Reader:** Honestly, I would love Gayle Wald to read my thesis. She is the author of so much of the literature I read as research for my thesis, writing about topics like the forgotten life of Sister Rosetta Tharpe, the first crossover gospel artist and the Riot Grrrl Movement. She is really an expert in the subject areas I have written about, and I think it would be SO amazing to hear her thoughts on my work. **#Hashtags you would give to your project:** #womeninmusic #riotgrrrl #girlsolidarity



Feminist Gender & Sexuality Studies, Members of the Class of 2020

Contributors



Lena Mitchell
LenaGMitchell.com



María Frías Vellón

María Frías Vellón, Writer

Lena Mitchell, Designer

Nicole Potestivo, Editor

Heather Vermeulen, Faculty Notes