

Transcript

Speaker 1: [inaudible].

Speaker 2: Hello and welcome to the graduates, a radio show dedicated to graduate student research here at Berkeley. My name is Stephanie Garrison. I'm a graduate student myself and I'll be your hostess for the show [00:00:30] here on k a l x Berkeley. Okay. So today I'm talking to Kelly Rafferty, a Ph d student in the department of theater, dance and performance studies. So welcome Kelly. Hi. And we're going to be talking about reproductive technologies and feminist performances. So first, can you briefly introduce [inaudible]

Speaker 3: your work? Sure. Well, my work is primarily interested in the way that performance artists can create an interactive experience [00:01:00] for participants who can leave having, uh, an enriched or different experience of their body and experience with their body that's, that's empowered and that that resists some of the, um, the misogynistic and marginalizing work that's been done over the course of God knows how long to alienate ourselves from our bodies. And that sort of thing.

Speaker 2: Sounds therapeutic. And I know that in your dissertation you're looking specifically at feminist performances [00:01:30] that use reproductive technologies. So let's, let's actually get specific. What kinds of reproductive technologies are you actually referring to?

Speaker 3: Um, well this is one of the interventions that I'm trying to make with the project is by expanding what we can, what we conventionally think of as reproductive technologies. Usually you think of in vitro fertilization or uh, in semination or things like that. And part of what I'm trying to do is, uh, is look at how, um, contraceptives are reproductive technologies. Look at [00:02:00] how, um, certain elements from the history of gynecology, like the speculum was obviously not just a historical object, but, um, how it served as a, a specific kind of reproductive technology. And then I also look at, um, add technologies like tissue cultures or stem cell research as reproductive as well. Um, so those are, that's the range of, of contraceptives reproductive, um, cause they believe their reproductive and a couple of different ways they are reproductive technologies and that they prevent reproduction and they are involved [00:02:30] in our choices about reproduction.

Speaker 3: Um, and including, uh, contraception within a broader definition of reproductive technologies. Also helps highlight the way that, um, that women of color and specifically black women in the u s but, uh, women of color and um, and women with disabilities have been excluded from conversations, were initially and are less and less, more frequently or less and less, um, more recently excluded from conversations about

reproduction and technology. Um, so in, [00:03:00] you know, in the instant, during second wave feminism reproduction was a conversation that, uh, and, and contraception was a conversation that was happening, um, primarily in the public sphere around white women and middle-class women who were choosing not to reproduce in order to have careers or you know, or other things. And there was less attention paid to the way that certain women were not encouraged to reproduce. Um, so this is selective, pronate, Elysium and strong attention to that.

Speaker 3: And what are the performers actually doing with these reproductive [00:03:30] technologies on stage? They're doing a couple of different things. Um, and one of the pieces that I talk about, Annie sprinkles post porn modernist, and this is one of the earliest pieces that I talk about. Um, she uses a speculum in, uh, in a live performance where, so she, for people who don't know what that is, maybe you want to, um, so a speculum is the device that, um, that a physician will use on a woman when you go in for, um, a gynecological exam and, um, and it gets inserted and I'm kind of clicked open and it's a way for the gynecologist to see your cervix [00:04:00] and to take a pap smear and make sure everything's okay. So it's a, it's a tool of visibility and access. And, um, and interestingly enough, um, the speculum was invented by, um, by j Marion sims and he created the speculum through experiments on disabled slave women, um, in the south.

Speaker 3: And so they, they were subjected to repeated on anesthetized surgeries, um, in order to repair a fistulas. So, um, it has a really, um, sorted history. [00:04:30] The speculum does. Um, so Andy sprinkle uses the speculum in a live performance. So she, um, she do, she does on stage and then insert the speculum and invites, expect you to just come up and flash it or um, to, you know, shine a flashlight into her, um, into, into the speculum and to look at her cervix cause she wants people to be able to see what a cervix looks like. Um, so that's one way in which these technologies are being used. Another example would be, um, critical, critical art ensemble is one of the collectives that I talk about and they use, um, [00:05:00] they themed Mathais reproductive technologies in their work, specifically in vitro fertilization and a piece called flesh machine.

Speaker 3: And one of the things that they do is, um, is they take swabs of, um, tissue from the inside of spectators, cheeks and then they will do it like a DNA extraction and amplification. And so the, the DNA becomes a part of the, um, the p the, the work of art. And then also they will cryogenically freeze, um, people's tissues. And then they also [00:05:30] in several other performances had cryogenically frozen embryos. And they would auction off. Um, they basically tried to raise money to pay the rent on this, um, project tank. And then at the end of several performances, I think maybe at least maybe just one, but possibly more. Um, they didn't raise enough money to keep the tank running. So the embryo, um, you know, quote unquote died. Wow. Have you ever been to one of these performances? The Annie sprinkle one took place when I was, I think between the ages of like six and 11. They definitely [inaudible]. Yeah, [00:06:00] I didn't catch that. I want to know, but um, [inaudible] yeah. Um, no, so I haven't been to that one. I have worked with, um, the [inaudible] project and Petro Coppers until I was a part

of, um, some of the performances that, that, um, that I read about later on in the dissertation.

Speaker 2: Okay. So let's actually go through the argument that you're going to be making in your dissertation. And I think you're actually my first graduate that has a title of your dissertation, which is really exciting. Well, but it's still [00:06:30] a title, so I'm going to highlight that. And it's called connective tissues, feminist experiments with biology, technology and performance. And you are going to argue that reproductive technologies have become some of feminist performances, sharpest literal and theoretical tools. So first, what do you mean by literal tools? How have reproductive [00:07:00] technologies been used as tools to make feminist performances more successful?

Speaker 3: Success for me in this project is about creating a successful interaction between the spectator and the and the um, art event and creating this interaction they talked about before, where, where they have it completely, maybe not completely different, but a different understanding of their embodiment in a more empowered experience of embodiment. And so I think that one of the things I'm trying to argue in the dissertation is that these, [00:07:30] that when when performance artists use bring these technologies into the, um, into the theater or into the performance space, it ends up fostering better interactions and more interesting interactions. And so, um, what this is one of the things that I argue around the Annie Sprinkle, um, piece is that that the moment when she inserts the speculum in the speculum becomes this technology of participation. It just radically transforms the piece and it, and it invites the spectators to do all kinds of different things that they would not have done if the speculum wasn't there. In a similar, um, similar [00:08:00] case for the critical art ensemble piece, the fact that, um, that as a spectator, my tissue is, becomes part of the art object and I have a, I might have a different understanding of the way that my tissue, my body can or does circulate through biotechnological networks through corporate networks. I think that these technologies allow a kind of a level of participation that you just don't see in, in other kinds of work.

Speaker 2: Okay. Okay. So looking at the kinds of participation that [00:08:30] the audience can engage in reproductive technologies are very useful tools in a literal sense. So now thinking about them as theoretical tools, how have feminist performances using reproductive technologies re conceptualized the way that we understand the body technology, the interaction

Speaker 3: between them? Well, this is one of the things that, um, Charisse Thompson, who's [00:09:00] a professor of rhetoric and women's studies, um, here at Berkeley that she, she wrote a book called, um, ontological called making parents the ontological choreography of reproductive technologies. And she argues that, um, that reproductive technology and, and you know, feminist theorization of reproductive technology became this ideal subject matter. And it became the way that feminist articulated the turn from, um, you know, quote unquote second to third wave feminism and it kind of Arctic, it

became an impetus for this evolution in feminist theory. So [00:09:30] she's made, you know, that set of claims. And I think that, um, that for me, one of the reasons why I, well, I see reproductive technologies theoretically I'm doing a lot of interesting work for me, is that they become a way to, to draw together, um, and talk in the same space about issues that often get splintered or separated in academic discourse.

Speaker 3: So this project in particular is about thinking, um, embodiment, technology and spirituality. [00:10:00] You know, non-religious, um, spirituality. I can try, I'm still grappling for the right job. It's not quite spirituality. It's something like, give me back on that. If you think, yeah, give me, give me terms. I really need, I was thinking about some sort of digital double thing, but the double is just not working and I can't, I'm trying to figure out what this other sort of ghost emanation spiritual thing is. So anyway, um, so I'm trying to think those things together. And oftentimes, you know, the body and spirituality get thought of separately or technology in the body get thought of separately or they get thought of as hostile to one another. [00:10:30] Um, and so I think that reproductive technologies become a way to think about all of those things together because you know, obviously the body and technology are deeply intertwined here and, but then also in a lot of these performances we see how the, the choice or the, the choice to reproduce a choice not to reproduce ends up dealing with a lot of, a lot of these other worldly or spiritual or kind of existential question quickly.

Speaker 3: And so it, um, it just becomes this place to, to talk about things that don't get [00:11:00] talked about and also becomes a place to bring together, um, experiments and performance and um, and evolutions or, or progress or whatever you want to say in biotechnology. And then also in feminist theory. So it brings these three disciplines together in a different way that they haven't been before either. So it does a couple of different, um, tricks for me theoretically. So you going to name this use of reproductive technologies in feminist performances? Are you going to call it something, you know, make it a genre? I don't know. I think that [00:11:30] the, that the, the double spiritual term will end up doing that. It's going to be a label for that kind of performance that's about embodiment, technology and spirituality. Um, and yet we gotta get something shorter. Yeah, exactly. Um, and so it'd been like pouring over biology textbooks and cookbook. One of the suggestions that Carousel, I'll have a look at cookbooks and I thought that was a great idea. So it just gives me an to read cookbooks.

Speaker 2: Yeah, there you go. And doing research. That's good. I think that that's going to be the term that [00:12:00] kind of helps to label those things. Um, so yeah. Okay. So we'll keep thinking on that. So for those of you who are just joining us, you're listening to the graduates on Calix. I am talking today with Kelly Rafferty about reproductive technologies in feminist performances. Okay. So let's talk about some of the theories you use to understand all of this because I know you're having to source them from different disciplines, which is probably an interesting process for you. [00:12:30] But I know you use performance theory and feminist theory and you're also using theories from science

and technologies studies. So let's start with actor network theory. What is it and how do you use it?

Speaker 3: So after network theory, um, is particularly useful for, for me, um, because, okay. So Bruno Latour and Michelle Kenalog and John Law, um, create, I've created actor network theory and it's, you [00:13:00] know, there are plenty of other theorists who, um, who have developed the field, but I'm an actor. Network theory is particularly interested in, um, in the ways that and in phenomenon that don't, that aren't easily, um, divided into kind of cultural or, um, or natural fields. So, um, these kind of complicated hybrid phenomena, um, like one of the examples that, um, that Bruno Latour gives us is global warming in the way that it just affects all different areas of society [00:13:30] and all areas of science. And so, um, they're interested in tracing, um, the different actors within these, these large networks problems or situations, um, and looking at how, how hybrids and assemblages are created. So it's, it's very different from a lot of the trends in the humanities.

Speaker 3: Um, the theoretical trends in humanities that are interested in deconstruction and breaking things down. Um, this is very much about assemblages and hybrids and bringing things together and associations and connections. So, um, and it's also particularly interested in how, looking [00:14:00] at how, um, how both, you know, human beings and institutions and, um, and objects are actors within these networks. So this lens itself actually network theory lends itself really nicely to, um, performance studies and specifically to the new media performance that I'm looking at because, um, because performance studies has always been, you know, seriously multimedia and we've, we've, we're used to looking at how, how actors, you know, human beings, [00:14:30] um, perform with objects and institutions and environments. Um, so there's a, uh, like a natural affinity there between acting network theory and performance and you know, looking at, at theatrical performance. Um, and then also there's a train the actor network theory allows us to take a train dyed towards exactly how technologies work in that field.

Speaker 3: And I feel like I'm not thrilled with all of the work that's out there in performance studies about, about new media performance. And so I think that this will help enrich [00:15:00] that a little bit. [inaudible] are there other people that are using actor network theory and performance studies the way you're using it? Not that I know of. Oh Wow. So can you give an example of applying actor network theory to one of the performances that you talked about already? How that might work? Well, I think one of the things that we can see if we apply actor network theory to the critical art ensemble, um, piece that I talked about, which is the one in which a spectator's asked to if you pass a donor screening test and you, I'm [00:15:30] not going to take anybody's yeah, exactly. Only if you pass the screening test then you get to um, perform exactly and need a little draw your blood and extract your DNA and um, and it circulates within the piece itself.

Speaker 3: Um, and so in my analysis of, of this work, I draw attention to the, to the way using, um, kind of the training that our actor network theory provides and looking at how, um, how institutions and, um, and objects and technologies and humans are all working together. I look [00:16:00] at how, um, some of the slippages that happen in, in credit card ensembles performance there, the way that over the course of the performance, they end up equating, um, blood with reproductive materials. And so they end up equating the DNA that they extract from blood to, um, sperm and eggs because the, the donor screening test that you take is, is as a screening test that determines whether you are fit to donate eggs or sperm. And it's not the same thing as donating DNA. And so I use actor network theory and I especially specifically [00:16:30] used Kara's Thompson's ontological choreography, which is, uh, you know, comes from actor network theory to, um, to look at at some of those slippages and look at what the effect the slippages end up having on the quality of their critique.

Speaker 3: What do you think they would say if you sent your analysis to them? He should, I think hopefully at some point I'll get to have a conversation with them. They ended up coming into a lot of the same conferences. So hopefully someday we can, we can talk about that for, let's [00:17:00] talk about care's Thomson's theory of, or concept of ontological choreography. Sure. So ontological choreography is, um, is her way of limited, probably going to butcher this, but it's her way of talking about how in reproductive technology clinics, um, how all of these different elements that would originally ordinarily be thought of as ontologically separate get, get choreograph together to produce parents and children. And so she looks at at and really great detail, um, about how things like, [00:17:30] um, like the schedule, like the s the, the scheduling time slots that, that clinics have, how they end up fitting, um, fitting women's biological cycles, which don't work on the same sort of 24 hours, you know, linear timeline into, into that space and how different sorts of, um, of protocols and for how physicians and clinicians interact with patients end up producing certain feelings about, about gender and, and, um, and maleness [00:18:00] and femaleness or you know, masculinity and femininity for the patients and how they help repair, um, gender positions, which get, get damaged in the process of, of, of suffering through it and fertility.

Speaker 3: So she looks at, at how all these really great nuanced things end up constructing parents in the end. So did she come up with any new calendaring? No. No. She just, she just shows the Nice work that goes into reconciling those calendars or not reconciling those calendar to the Times. [00:18:30] Alright, so we will be right back

Speaker 2: on next week's show. I'll be talking to Sarah Lopez from the architecture department about the impact of migrant remittances on the architecture and infrastructure of rural Mexico. So please join me for the graduates every Monday from 12 to 1230 on Collins. And please visit our Facebook page. Search for the graduates collects in quotes [00:19:00] on facebook.com you can become a fan. You can write on the wall, you can

check the guests of future shows or suggest yourself as a future guest. So don't be shy. That's the graduates k a l s on Facebook.

Speaker 3: Welcome back. Today I'm talking to Kelly Rafferty about reproductive technologies in feminist performances. So do you think that [00:19:30] these kinds of performances have the potential to make people think about the technologies differently or even design them differently? It's hard to be too optimistic about that. But I know that one of the other pieces that I write about is, um, is called glass body. And it was made by Anna first and she works in the UK. And, um, and she created this piece in collaboration with, um, with physicians and clinicians at a hospital in the UK. And so they were, and it [00:20:00] was installed within the hospital. And so there were a lot of physicians who came to the, to the show and clinicians who came to the show, um, families who were undergoing different sorts of, uh, reproductive treatments. And this wasn't one of the biggest, um, rubric Technology Hospitals in the U K one of the ones that was well known for that kind of work.

Speaker 3: And so I think in that instance, it's quite possible that, that she could have had an effect on the way that physicians interact with their patients when they understand, because it [00:20:30] was, the piece was about her experience with IVF. So they might understand the work that they do and the way that, that families respond to, to their work in a, in a different way that hopefully would influence how they, how they use their technologies in the future. Yeah. I, at a certain point it's like you might well just, you know, put the surgery on the stage and have the doctors watch what they already do. Okay. So clearly the technologies themselves are [00:21:00] politically charged and that's incorporated into the performances. But even the way artists access the technologies carries political baggage. So is that also incorporated into the work? Yeah, this is something that must be monetized in critical art ensemble's flush machine.

Speaker 3: They made a website for a fake biotech company called Biocom. And so they definitely address, um, the, the industry behind, um, reproductive technologies. Um, and [00:21:30] the issue of access to the technologies is, is really interesting because, um, as with a lot of new media art, it's, it's really expensive and difficult to get access to new art. And so these new technologies to make the art. So it ends up being a lot about about class and funding and things like that, which is what the art is trying to talk about exactly the cases anyway, which is why a lot of the pieces don't actually use, um, like you don't, they're not making, except in the critical art ensemble instance, they're not like making embryos [00:22:00] on stage. Um, they're like in one of the, um, one of the pieces I talk about by Deb Margolin who was one of, you know, the kind of the first and, and some, one of the most important feminist performance artists.

Speaker 3: Um, she, she seemed Matteis is ultrasounds in her piece, but she uses this plastic screen that she just drops from the, that just rolls down from the ceiling to represent the television and uh, and an ultrasound screen. Um, and so it's, I think it's actually hysterical that [00:22:30] that's what she, that's what she ends up using. It's this really

low tech, just plastic screen that unrolls. Um, and then in an 80 sprinkled piece, it's just a, it's a basic speculum, but as many people know that access to the speculum and taking the speculum back and women's hands was a big part of the women's health, um, you know, self-help movement in the late sixties and early seventies. So, um, so in a way this, this, um, dissertation ends up being about kind of reclaiming low technologies as new media, um, and, and looking at [00:23:00] the politics of access to new media.

Speaker 3: So if video projections and interactive websites are now conventional new media technologies and speculum syringes, ultrasounds, tissue cultures, stem cells are unconventional. New Media with the next frontier, the weapons of mass destruction. Oh God. Um, legal substances I think for, for some new media artists, bioart is [00:23:30] the new frontier. And so you're using tissue cultures and stem cells. Um, it's not really done that wide, widely. So I think it really is the, the new frontier. Um, yeah, I think creating living organisms like critical or like, um, tissue culture and art project is doing, um, is, is kind of the new frontier in VR in this. And then that's where the, the dissertation, at least for now is going to end up. Um, I think it, wow. One of the things that worries me about that is that right now it's [00:24:00] starting to look like a, a boys with toys, clothes.

Speaker 3: And I feel like even within that, there's those p the people who are, who are criticizing the work are not necessarily doing it from a feminist perspective or looking at the way in which this, this work emerges from a, a genealogy of feminist body art and feminist performance. Right. Which is what you bring to how you look at these performances. And I know that you're also involved in several performances on campus. So do you incorporate your academic [00:24:30] work into anything you produce? I've done a couple of, directed, a couple of, of more standard plays that, that deal with like physicality and embodiment, interesting ways. But then I've also devised a couple of pieces and, um, the first piece that I devised at Berkeley was called barbies that matter on the discourse of limits of, of plastic. And, and it was, they're based on these really hysterical poems by Denise Duhamel and they, one of them was about, um, Barbie has a religious fanatic and Barbie Barbie as reproductive technology [00:25:00] making babies out of plastic.

Speaker 3: So I kind of started there and then I also, um, created, uh, a piece with some of Cara's Thompson's undergraduates a few years ago in a rhetoric class. And we, um, we created a piece called don't copy me site specific clones and we use the, the reading and discussion that we had had over the course of the semester on stem cell research to, um, to create a really funny, um, and, and interesting piece about, um, about cloning and our own relationships to, to, to [00:25:30] reproduction and copying in our academic and personal lives. And so you have a good time with this? Oh yeah. It's a lot of fun. Good. So, okay, so the last question, how has, uh, how has your work, you know, how have you incorporated it into your, your, the way you think about your Ba, I won't ask you which re reproductive technologies you use that are the people around you.

Speaker 3: Do they want to ask you about reproductive technologies? Are they nervous about it? How [00:26:00] have you kind of, people love to talk about the stuff? I go to conferences or, or you know, give talks around here and people just love to talk about and they love to talk about the way it gets taken up in Hollywood. And, um, so I ended up having great conversations with people about, it's probably about their reproductive experiences or, um, or they ask me about what my plans are and I have no problem talking about that. But what do you want to talk about? Oh, I just, I don't have any reproductive plans in the near future getting married in a couple of weeks or in a cup. Yeah. In a couple of weeks. And we're just gonna wait on that [00:26:30] for a little bit. So hopefully it all works when it's time to do that.

Speaker 3: Otherwise I won't have a problem using reproductive technologies to a certain point. Um, but, uh, but I think to your larger question about how it's affected my understanding of embodiment, I think as I started working on, on performance art that that changes people's relationships with their body. I started, I think taking better care of my body and also assume when I started thinking about disability and learning more about this ability studies, I, [00:27:00] um, I learned that I had a, a heart condition that I needed and I just learned how to take care of myself better. And I've learned the way that, um, that for me like sports and nutrition contribute to my scholarship. The better I take care of myself, the better my work is and the better I am as an instructor. And, um, and it's been a really interesting journey learning how to deal with the stress of graduate school and time management and um, and also learning how to manage time between being an artist in a, an a scholar, [00:27:30] uh, and, and taking care of my body. And being really on top of that has been a huge part of it in a way that I'd never expected. So not only are the performances potentially therapeutic for the audience members, but also for the scholars who study them. Oh yeah. That's great. Good. Well, thank you Kelly. It's been a pleasure talking to you. Thank you for having me.

Speaker 2: And if the topic of bodies in new media arts piqued your interest, there will be a new media arts festival [00:28:00] here at Berkeley from June 1st to third called Berkeley Big Bang Oh eight with the panel specifically dedicated to embodiment on the second day of the festival on June 2nd which will include talks by graduate students here at Berkeley for details about the embodiment panel and the festival in general, visit the website of the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, [00:28:30] which is d a m p f a.berkeley.edu/events/education/big bang. So yes, this will be a big bang of new media arts and you should definitely check it out. You've been listening to the graduates, a radio show dedicated to graduate student research on [00:29:00] k a l ex Berkeley background music was produced by Chris Peck. You can check them out at my space.com/chris Pat. My name is Stephanie Garson. Visit us on Facebook search for the graduates collects. You can download our podcasts from iTunes university and join me next Monday from 12 to 1230

Speaker 1: [inaudible].

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