



Keywords: liminal spaces, nature/art nexus, art/politics nexus, Hamlet, Ophelia, *As You Like It*, *Timon of Athens*, Lavinia, Hermione

The Presence of Liminal Spaces: From Nature to Art to Politics

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RELEVANCE/RATIONALE

Our panel interrogates binaries -- nature/art, nonhuman/human, art/politics, fiction/fact, visual/verbal, present/past -- that have characterized Western intellectual traditions from classical Greece and Rome to our postmodern moment. How do Shakespeare's texts dramatize these epistemological boundaries and margins and intervene upon these traditions? How do these dramatizations and interventions resonate with our "real" 21st-century worlds?

4 APPROACHES/PRESENTERS

1. "Mimicry and Cognitive Ethology in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*"

Craig Dionne explores Hamlet's ideas of moral growth ("assume a virtue, if you have it not") from the perspective of cognitive ethology. Even though mimicry was denounced as animal-like, rhetorical training released the unbounded potential of the coevolved primate brain. Hamlet's word-coinage and his spontaneous citing of myths reflect not only the "arithmetic of memory," but the recursive nature of the self-replicating cognition of our species.

2. "Landscapes that Matter: Ophelia and the Visual Culture of a World in Ruins"

Remedios Perni analyzes the appropriation of the Ophelia figure in literary and visual texts that represent the relationship between the female body and landscape. She focuses on waste, decay, monumental ruin, dystopia, and toxicity in relation to both the female body and the environment. Ophelia's (dead) body has become not only an icon for denouncing violence against women but also a site for discussing human/nature connections today.

3. "A Natural History of Social Distancing: Shakespeare's Escapes to the Woods in Spring 2020"

Miguel Ramallete Gomes combines the contemporary experience of hygienic walks in crowded woods with the historical description of the masses as swarms or viruses, as well as with the repurposed concept of *natural history* in the Frankfurt School. Gomes enquires what type of *polis* emerges in escapes to the woods in *As You Like It* and *Timon of Athens*, where social distancing is sometimes sought and often direly fails.

4. "Romancing the Stone"

Evelyn Gajowski interrogates the nature/art nexus by tracing a through-line from the Vatican's *Belvedere Torso*, through the Louvre's *Venus de Milo*, through Taymor's Lavinia as a grotesque inversion of an idealized female statue on a pedestal, through Lynch's film, *Boxing Helena*, culminating in Hermione's statue. Gajowski views these subjects through the lens of her environmental activism, trying to prevent the conversion of riparian ecosystems into concrete.