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2-303 Lansdowne Ave  
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416 849 2864  
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Nikole Hidalgo McGregor

***Wan-ding***

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Nikole Hidalgo's *Wand-ing* follows a familiar premise. The carefully crafted stop animation short opens to a gorgeously intricate papercut title card; a Queen Anne inspired Victorian house that sits atop a lonely hill. Inside, an old crone hovers -- wand in hand -- over her cauldron before being beckoned away by the witching hour. She drops her wand as she is dissolved into the steam of the bubbling stew. A young girl prances into the scene, full of mischievous good nature. After picking up the forgotten wand and flicking it over the cauldron, the girl finds herself alone in the house -- having blown up the world surrounding it accidentally. The entire video is scored to a charming track of lilting harpsichord.

The archetypes of the Western witch tale are all present: The old woman, the young girl, the cauldron, the wand. However, there is one simple deviation that marks *Wand-ing* as a work outside this canon: the characters are not white. Hidalgo has explicitly expressed that as a person of Latin American descent, she feels frustration that her community is not represented in these narratives. She says; "despite European values and ways of life being imposed onto us hundreds of years ago, and that are now integral parts of our own beings and cultures, we lack representation in these very settings"<sup>1</sup>. Being denied a place in the canon of storytelling also translates to

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<sup>1</sup> Email from Nikole September 2018

contemporary culture; in a study conducted in 2016 by the University of California, Latinx folks only made up 3% of speaking roles in Hollywood films<sup>2</sup>.

*Wand-ing* brings attention to this problem by creating recognizably Latinx characters within the rigid archetypes of the fairy tale. Although it may seem like a simple solution, this insertion points to a complex navigation in what post-modern philosopher Gayatri Spivak calls the “double-bind”. Introduced as a concept that encourages aesthetic thought without negating ethics, Spivak introduces the double-bind as the “space that allows us to survive in the singular and the unverifiable”<sup>3</sup>. *Wand-ing* calls this theory to mind in its ability to exist in an in-between space within the polarities of “us” and “them”. The representation of the self and the other so recently dominated by a hegemonic white supremacist vision and history begins to chip away as a result of an internal force; a powerful statement on where Latinx bodies are allowed to be seen. The insertion of the characters marks *Wand-ing*'s difference from the European witch tale, but the conventions of this structure are still evident. Existing within the double-bind of European/ other, *Wand-ing* represents the power in naming oneself as a part of both cultures.

In her essay *Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming black female subjectivity* Lorraine O'Grady speaks to the rigid binary that pervades art history in portraying the “other”. She speaks to the blurring of boundaries that dissolve difference into sameness in the productive efforts of a globalized world, a universal “we”. O'Grady rallies against this “we”, claiming: “we need to dissolve the false ‘we’ into its real multiplicity. We must be willing to hear each other and to call each other by our ‘true-true name’... To name ourselves rather than be named, we must first see ourselves”<sup>4</sup>. Hidalgo works toward a true representation of her experience in *Wand-ing*: a need to see a reflection of herself in popular Western media, the implications of it being denied, and yet still existing as a

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<sup>2</sup>Carroll, Rory. “Hollywood basks in diversity praise but Latinos ask: Are we invisible?” *The Guardian* (London), January 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press), 2. 2012.

<sup>4</sup> O'Grady, Lorraine. “Olympia's Maid” *New Feminist Criticism* (Icon Editions) 154. 2003.

consumer and creator of culture. This “renaming” continues in the tradition of the double-bind, allowing for a new understanding of subjective multiplicity within the structure of the witch tale.

Hidalgo has stated that Latinx culture is never found in the Hollywood mainstream: “Even though Chiloe has had witches with cauldrons for centuries and colonial Lima had the “tapadas”, dressed in lace and silk with some of them practicing witchcraft, we are ignored from movie theaters and tv screens because we are too “exotic”, too unbelonging.”<sup>5</sup> In *Wand-ing* she crafts an understanding of the cultural exchange between a dominant colonial vision and the culture and peoples it aims to send to the periphery. The transfer between the two is reminiscent of Fernando Ortíz’ theory of transculturation. Ortíz aims to view the exchange between European and Latinx culture as not a system of loss between one dominant culture and one peripheral one, but a system of transference as a result of displacement. In other words, “transculturation stresse[s] the cultural contact [as a] two-way, dialectical process”.<sup>6</sup> The give and take process is evident in *Wand-ing* because of its creator; someone who has had equal cultural experience in both European and Latin American culture. In creating this work, Hidalgo brings her own experience as a person on the periphery into the “mainstream”, creating a film that explores both cultures by inserting one beside the other.

*Wand-ing* presents a new understanding of an old trope. The animated short plays within a familiar structure, productively undoing and redoing expectations of what a classic tale can mean. Utilizing the strategies of inhabiting the double-bind, naming and seeing oneself, and understanding the transference of culture as a two-way process, *Wand-ing* encourages its audience to grapple with the complexities of representation in a world that still faces the “us” and “them” mentality of colonization.

-Dana Snow

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<sup>5</sup> Email from Nikole September 2018

<sup>6</sup> Davies, Catherine. “Fernando Ortíz’s Transculturation” *Postcolonial Perspectives on Latin American and Lusophone Cultures*. (Liverpool, Liverpool Press) 154. 2000.

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