

The UNC Department of Communication
and Arts @ The Core present

I Was Never Alone

Written by Cassandra Hartblay

Directed by Joseph Megel

February 5th & 6th, 2016

Swain Studio 6

The Department of Communication in partnership with Arts at the Core is excited to present *I Was Never Alone*, a new play that focuses on the personal narratives of seven adults with disabilities living in contemporary Russia, presented as a series of monologue-portraits.

It will be workshopped in Swain Studio 6 from January 31-February 6 with performances on the 5th at 7p.m and the 6th at 2p.m. There will be a discussion with the playwright, the actors, and the director after Friday's performance, and a discussion with a panel of scholars after the Saturday afternoon performance. The narratives are drawn nearly verbatim from translations of interviews with Russians with a range of disabilities during playwright Cassandra Hartblay's dissertation fieldwork.

For US audiences, the play sheds light on assumptions about what daily life is like in contemporary Russia, and asks the audience to contend with discrimination against people with disabilities in their own lives. For Russian audiences, it represents a key emergence of disability-theater, in a culture and society where people with disabilities are still rarely depicted outside of the role of charity-seeking needy poor. And for all audiences, it resonates with universal themes of love, relationships, coming of age, and a sense of belonging.

“Performance ethnography is an important genre of research because it focuses on opening a space for discussion and dialogue,” says Cassandra Hartblay, playwright and ethnographer of *I Was Never Alone*. “So often researchers summarize what they've learned in the field in text, and there is little room for audiences "back home" to engage with the work in a way that changes it. Holding the staged reading and talk back sessions at UNC will be an exciting moment for me as an ethnographer because I will get to hear what people are hearing in, and taking away from, the stories that I get to tell.”

The event is co-sponsored by Performance Studies, Arts at the Core, and the Moral Economies of Medicine working group in Medical Anthropology.

All events will be held in the Black Box Studio Six Theater in Swain Hall on the UNC-CH campus. There is no charge for tickets, with a \$5 recommended donation at the door.

About the Artist

Cassandra Hartblay is an interdisciplinary scholar with a focus on ethnographic praxis and disability studies. Her work centers on the voices and perspectives of adults with disabilities in Russia and the former Soviet Union. Cassandra's research in Russia takes a critical perspective to trace the way that disability acts as a global category of legal, medical, and social significance, with specific implications for sociality, citizenship, personhood, and notions of access and justice in postsocialism. Her work draws on theoretical insights from cultural and medical anthropology, infrastructure studies, queer/crip theory, digital studies, design anthropology, and performance studies. During her time as a Postdoctoral Fellow in Ethnographic Design, Cassandra will be working on her book project, an ethnography of local and global ableisms in contemporary Russia, and developing an ethnographic play script based on the personal narratives of adults with a range of disabilities living in community settings in a small Russian city. Cassandra's work on these and related subjects has appeared in a variety of publications, including Disability Studies Quarterly, the Canadian Journal of Disability Studies, Brown Journal of World Affairs, and the interdisciplinary blog Somatosphere. She was the 2013 recipient of the Zola Award for Emerging Scholars in Disability Studies, and, most recently, a research fellow at the Kennan Institute at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars in Washington DC.

Press Contacts: Joseph Megel | 919-843-7067 | megel@email.unc.edu

Performance Studies: <http://comm.unc.edu/areas-of-studies/performance-studies/>