

CULTURAL AND AREA STUDIES

Research Project
<p>Title of the presentation</p> <p>Self-Fashioning and Sewing Dissent: Re-existence in the Text(ile)s of Afro-Caribbean Female Artists</p>
<p>Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended)</p> <p>This dissertation aims to illuminate the ways in which women deploy textile practices to forge their identities, resist oppression, and transmit their stories. Although fiber arts have been instrumentalized by patriarchal and colonial forces throughout history, women have reappropriated such crafts to fit their needs. These tactics prove all the more crucial for women who confront intersecting forms of violence. By examining textile practices in the works of Afro-Caribbean female authors and artists, this study explores the following questions: how do these women wield fiber arts as tools for self-expression? Can such acts of (self-)creation be considered a form of existence as resistance, as these women (re)weave the identities that colonial and heteropatriarchal forces seek to unravel?</p>
<p>Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints</p> <p>The theoretical framework of this dissertation mobilizes decolonial, Black feminist, and Caribbean thought in its application of the concepts of bricolage (de Certeau 1980) and self-fashioning (Greenblatt 1980) to Afro-Caribbean women's identity formation. Of particular interest is Adolfo Albán Achinte's (2013) concept of "re-existence," which affirms the importance not only of resistance against the colonizer but of imagining, re-membering and weaving alternative futures. This framework is deployed alongside a methodological approach that analyzes the works studied on both a thematic and structural level and takes seriously the ways in which texts may be considered textiles woven from words, and textiles as texts waiting to be read.</p>
<p>Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project</p> <p>This dissertation examines the works of Afro-Caribbean authors Marlene NourbeSe Philip [<i>Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence</i> (1991) and <i>Zong!</i> (2008)], Edwidge Danticat [<i>The Farming of Bones</i> (1998)], Erna Brodber [<i>Nothing's Mat</i> (2014)], and Jamaica Kincaid [<i>See Now Then</i> (2013)], as well as those of multimedia artist Ebony G. Patterson [<i>where we found them</i> (2014) and <i>...when the cry takes root...</i> (2020)]. In addition to works of fiction, poetry and visual art, the study draws on non-fiction sources such as author and artist essays, interviews and documentaries. As evoked previously, this particular constellation of works was selected not only for its thematic focus on textiles, but also for certain formal characteristics that call to mind processes of stitching or weaving.</p>
<p>Results obtained so far</p> <p>While data collection is still ongoing, preliminary results indicate that the authors and artist studied deploy fiber arts thematically and structurally as tools for self-expression and "re-existence." In the narratives analyzed, textile practices enable women to affirm their identities on the individual and community level, as well as to heal from trauma. In addition, the works demonstrate a range of formal characteristics that mirror textiles: patchwork aesthetics structure short story collections, fuse prose and poetry, and inspire mixed media practices; "code-stitching" (Ramazani 2015) weaves together multiple languages within one text; dehumanizing historical text(ile)s are unraveled, their words (and silences) rewoven into new works that render audible the voices of the marginalized.</p>

Title of the presentation Defying Marginality: Iranian Women's Resistance to Dominant Power Relations
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) My Ph.D. thesis focuses on Iranian women's narratives of resistance in art, media, and literature and how they contribute to the formation of transnational solidarity ties. The project is grounded in the concept of individual and collective "resistance" to patriarchal oppression in a theocratic society such as Iran. Drawing on Iranian women's acts of resistance as articulated or illustrated in memoirs, graphic novels, interviews as well as social media posts, the study conceptualizes the ways in which resistance under patriarchy and theocracy is enacted and translational solidarity is produced.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints Three distinct modes of analysis have been selected for the project. Narrative analysis is particularly useful for examining how stories of resistance are constructed and conveyed. For graphic novels and artistic works, visual analysis is essential, as it involves examining imagery and symbolism to understand how visual narratives complement textual ones. Finally, thematic analysis is employed to code and categorize the thesis's key themes, including gender-based oppression, identity, resistance, homeland, and solidarity. The primary theoretical framework draws on theories of resistance, complemented by a gendered perspective, to examine how individuals and groups oppose, challenge, or subvert dominant power structures, ideologies, and social norms.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project The following books are part of my primary sources for the thesis: 1. <i>The Rose Hotel: A Memoir of Secrets, Loss, and Love from Iran to America</i> (Rahimeh Andalibian) 2. <i>White Torture: Interviews with Iranian Women Prisoners</i> (Narges Mohammadi) 3. <i>Woman, Life, Freedom</i> (Marjane Satrapi) 4. <i>Woman, Life, Freedom: Voices and Art from the Women's Protests in Iran</i> (Malu Halasa)
Results obtained so far The thesis consists of five chapters and the primary sources are analysed thematically across the chapters: Chapter One delves into the historical/socio-political context and the theoretical framework of the project, Chapter Two focuses on resistance to gender oppression by authority figures at home; Chapter Three examines embodied and performative forms of resistance; Chapter Four explores the intersection of art and activism, and Chapter Five addresses alternative knowledges and digital activism. The conclusion centres on raising awareness, and solidarity with Iranians inside the country. Through this project, which itself is an act of resistance, I seek to examine how a sustained focus on resistance to violence and oppression can enable the forging of solidarities across borders.

Konstantin Helm (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany)

Research project
Title of the presentation Compromised Communities: Spatial Practice in Conservative Britain in the 1980s and 2010s
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) In my PhD thesis, I am interested in spatiotemporal formations shaped by the most recent periods of Conservative government in the UK (1979-1997 and 2010-2024). It is my hypothesis that the politics and related social developments of these periods have influenced distinct strategies of representing and organising space in cultural production. I focus on cultural products I categorise as anti-authoritarian – not just in the sense that they oppose Conservative policy, but depict identities, communities, and sentiments in conflict with larger normative agents such as Britishness, nation, and the project of neoliberalism. Specifically, I examine works related to and produced by members of the Black British and British Asian, queer, and radical Left communities.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints My thesis adopts a cultural materialist position, arguing that modes of translating between formal contexts are historically emergent and can be helpful to account for aesthetic shifts. I explore spectral currents in the works I study via Mark Fisher’s adaptation of Derrida’s “hauntology.” Fisher argues that neoliberal capitalism has succeeded in rendering itself irreplaceable, with visions of radical change frustrated by a cultural formation which muddles any certain sense of the present. My approach combines a hauntological reading of my primary material with the methods of conjunctural analysis developed by Stuart Hall and other British cultural scholars. This allows me to analyse cultural production as an articulation of distinct historical, political, economic and social circumstances.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project My point of departure is Jay Bernard’s 2019 poetry collection “Surge.” This collection structurally and systematically collapses temporal distinctions between the 1980s and the 2010s. Based on this, I incorporate other cultural products interested in time and spaces as sites of resistance and control, such as Lola Olufemi’s “Experiments in Imagining Otherwise” (2021) and the Black Audio Film Collective’s films “Handsworth Songs” (1986) and “Twilight City” (1989). In accordance with my methodological framework, I analyse these works alongside contemporary legal documents, governmental reports and inquiries, as well as statements by public officials, selected news items, and objects from community archives.
Results obtained so far I have begun to show distinct and deliberate aesthetic and political links between Black British cultural production from the 1980s and 2010s, demonstrating thematic convergences not just with prominent works of art like “Handsworth Songs” but also with under-researched ones like “Twilight City.” Here, political and cultural continuities between Thatcherism and the 2010s and early 2020s become distinctly visible, as are the spectral legacies of Empire and its reverberations across communities (multiply) marginalised via race, gender, desire, or socioeconomic status. In my theoretical research, I have started developing a framework that links the emergence of the spatial turn in theory to the concurrent rise of the law-and-order society in the late 1960s, as proposed by Stuart Hall et al.

Research project
Title of the presentation Toward more-than-human cinema
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) My dissertation, titled “On Animal Subjectivity in Film: Multispecies Documentaries and the Cinematic Umwelt”, examines the genealogy of ecocinema by tracing its roots in avant-garde and ethnographic filmmaking, multispecies documentary practices, and the tangible turn toward more-than-human cinema. It argues that more-than-human cinema constitutes a radical aesthetic and ethical practice that decentres anthropocentric narrative structures and cultivates ecological consciousness not through explicit environmental messaging, but through aesthetic and perceptual reorientation. By foregrounding relationality and the agency of the non-human world, more-than-human films prompt viewers to reflect on entangled ways of being.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints The dissertation adopts an interdisciplinary approach combining close film analysis with theoretical inquiry. Methodologically, it employs detailed formal and aesthetic analysis of thirteen selected non-fiction films. The analysis focuses on cinematography, sound, framing, depth of field, mise-en-scène, and narrative structure so as to examine how these films foreground an ethical and aesthetic orientation toward — and a sustained commitment to — the more-than-human world. The theoretical framework draws primarily on ecocinema studies and more-than-human theory, informed by scholarship on slow and animal cinema and phenomenological approaches to perception and reciprocity.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project The primary corpus of the dissertation consists of thirteen contemporary non-fiction films produced between 2000 and 2024. The early 2000s are represented by James Benning’s triptych <i>Sogobi</i> (2002), <i>13 Lakes</i> (2004), and <i>Ten Skies</i> (2004), followed by the key works from the Harvard Sensory Ethnography Lab, including <i>Sweetgrass</i> (2009) and <i>Leviathan</i> (2012). The core filmmakers in the corpus include Andrea Arnold (<i>Cow</i> (2021)); Ana Vaz (<i>Apiyemiyekî?</i> (2019) and <i>It’s Night in America</i> (2022)); Michelangelo Frammartino (<i>Le quattro volte</i> (2010) and <i>Il Buco</i> (2021)) and Viktor Kossakovsky (<i>Aquarela</i> (2018), <i>Gunda</i> (2020), <i>Architecton</i> (2024)). Together, these works represent different stages and tendencies within ecocinema, including slow cinema, avant-garde practices, and ethnographic filmmaking.
Results obtained so far The research conducted thus far indicates that the radical aesthetic and ethical orientation of more-than-human cinema aligns closely with contemporary theories of decolonisation and degrowth. I explored these connections in the chapter “Can Ecocinema Contribute to the Narrative of Degrowth?”, forthcoming in the <i>Hermes 2024</i> collective volume (published by UCL), where ecocinema is situated as a practice of slowness, attentiveness, and care — values that closely correspond to degrowth philosophy. At the conference <i>You Are Here</i> , hosted by the Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier, I examined gardens as spaces of entanglement between botanical science and colonial violence through Ana Vaz’s <i>Atomic Garden</i> (2018), Salomé Jashi’s <i>Taming the Garden</i> (2021), and Jumana Manna’s <i>Foragers</i> .

Research project
Title of the presentation Posthuman Biopolitical Literacy: YA Dystopian Fiction as Cultural Laboratory in Postnormal Times.
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) This PhD project investigates contemporary Young Adult Dystopian Fiction as a crucial cultural site for navigating postnormal times – an era characterized by complexity, chaos, and contradiction where traditional scientific and political frameworks appear to fail in addressing urgent problems, while the ones necessary for understanding human agency and subjectivity become inadequate. The thesis argues that recent YA dystopian fiction moves beyond cautionary and didactic functions to foster “posthuman biopolitical literacy” – the capacity to critically engage with capital-controlled technoscience as it reshapes traditional biopolitical governance and increases the imbalance of social power, while developing alternative forms of affirmative and transformative agency and subjectivity.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints Using integrated frameworks from Sardar’s postnormal times theory, Braidotti’s posthuman ethics, and Foucauldian biopolitics, this research employs textual analysis with close reading, comparative and discourse analysis to examine how YA dystopian fiction develops new forms of subjectivity and agency for navigating our times, where multiple global challenges occur, ‘old orthodoxies are dying, new ones have not yet emerged, and nothing really makes sense’ (Sardar, 2010). Drawing on Braidotti’s transversal subjectivity and affirmative ethics, the methodology analyzes how these texts challenge binary technoscience narratives while transforming negativity and anxiety under neoliberal capitalism into generative possibilities for collective resistance and alternative more just futures.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project Dimaline, C., & Fairbrother, M. (2018). <i>The marrow thieves</i> . Unabridged. Toronto, Kobo Originals; Dimaline, C. (2021). <i>Hunting by Stars</i> (A Marrow Thieves Novel). Amulet Books; He, J. (2021). <i>The Ones We’re Meant to Find</i> . Roaring Brook Press; Rodriguez, R. (2019). <i>Alita: Battle Angel</i> . Twentieth Century Fox; Rothenberg, J. (2019). <i>The Kingdom</i> , Henry Holt and Co. (BYR); Sewitsky, A. (Director). (2019). <i>Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too</i> (season 5 episode 3) [TV series episode]. In Black Mirror, Netflix; Spielberg, S. (Director). (2018). <i>Ready Player One</i> . [movie] Warner Bros; Suvada, E. (2017). <i>This Mortal Coil</i> . Margaret K. McElderry Books; Suvada, E. (2018). <i>This Cruel Design</i> . Margaret K. McElderry Books; Suvada, E. (2020). <i>This Vicious Cure</i> . Margaret K. McElderry Books.
Results obtained so far Preliminary results include the development of an integrated theoretical framework combining Sardar’s postnormal times theory, Braidotti’s posthuman ethics, and Foucauldian biopolitics, as traditional frameworks prove inadequate for understanding our times and its challenges and the new forms of subjectivity and agency. From this framework emerges the working concept of ‘posthuman biopolitical literacy’ as both an analytical framework and a form of engagement that YA dystopian fiction potentially fosters, allowing critical engagement with technoscience advances by questioning the power relations within which bio-infotechnologies have developed. This approach enables the development of alternative forms of affirmative and transformative agency and subjectivity.

Research project
Title of the presentation Commodifying Culture: Cultural Appropriation in Fashion Entrepreneurship
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) My PhD project investigates cultural appropriation in business and fashion through a humanistic approach to entrepreneurship. It examines how cultural elements, particularly clothing, textiles, and visual symbols, are transformed into entrepreneurial products, and how this process creates tensions between innovation, cultural identity, and ethical responsibility. The project addresses three core issues: Cultural Ownership and Identity. Power Imbalance and Misrecognition. Entrepreneurship, Value Creation, and Ethics.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints My project uses a qualitative, interdisciplinary methodology grounded in thematic and discourse-analytic approaches. It examines how cultural meaning, ownership and value are negotiated within global fashion and entrepreneurship. The theoretical framework draws on cultural appropriation theory, postcolonial and decolonial perspectives, and humanistic entrepreneurship. My standpoint is community-centered and ethical: cultural elements should be used in ways that ensure recognition, reciprocity and respect for cultural origin.
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project My project draws on several types of material: a corpus of attested cultural appropriation cases in the fashion industry used for comparative analysis; brand statements and digital activism, which form the discourse examined in relation to origin acknowledgement, labelling, and ethical entrepreneurial practices. (Other resources obtained could be included such as: qualitative fieldwork data from Côte d'Ivoire, including interviews and observations on the cultural meaning of pagne; and English-language fashion communication on social media, etc.)
Results obtained so far My findings reveal major conceptual gaps: For example, cultural appropriation has no stable definition, which makes it difficult to establish criteria or a scale for assessing its gravity. This definitional fluidity is reflected in my empirical data, where public reaction is consistently triggered by the lack of origin acknowledgement, mislabeling and exclusion of cultural owners. The absence of ethical and/or legal frameworks regulating attribution or benefit-sharing further hinders the evaluation these practices.

Research project
Title of the presentation A Critical Ethnographic Exploration of Freelance Professionals in English Language Teaching
Main topic of and main issues in the PhD project (incl. the thesis proposed or hypothesis defended) The growing disruption in the field of English language teaching (ELT) through gig economy models has contributed to an increase in freelance English teachers who market directly to learners. These teachers operate beyond the traditional institutional frameworks, shaping the ELT industry in unique ways. However, their professional practices and their perspectives on conventional teaching principles remain unexplored. This study investigates how such teachers define their roles, construct their identities, and negotiate language ideologies through their actions, and considers the implications of these practices for contemporary ELT.
Methodology, theoretical perspectives and standpoints To examine these questions, the study adopts an ethnographic research design. The investigation will begin with a survey of freelancing ELT professionals who perform a variety of complementary roles as well as teaching English. The objective of the survey is to describe the current state of the freelance landscape in ELT. Following the survey, the ethnographic exploration will focus on a small number of participants. The data will be analyzed using qualitative discourse analytic (Gee, 2010) and narrative approaches (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) within the frameworks of critical language pedagogy (Crookes, 2021) and English as a Lingua Franca theory (Cogo et al., 2021).
Data/corpora/materials in the PhD project Survey questions will gather information on participants' qualifications, work experience, motivations, and perceptions. The majority of the items will be likert-scale questions, with optional open-ended responses for participants who wish to elaborate. Approximately 100-120 participants from diverse segments of ELT are expected to complete the survey. The ethnographic study will focus on six core participants who teach English independently to contribute to at least 50% of their income. Data will be collected using qualitative methods adhering to ethnographic principles, including periodic semi-structured interviews over the course of one year, teaching materials and promotional content, and reflective journals.
Results obtained so far The results of the survey are anticipated to help characterize the motivations, satisfaction levels, and practices of various freelancing stakeholders of the industry. The aim is to capture a reflection of the gig economy and its effects on the individuals that contribute to it. The ethnographic study seeks to show what values, concerns, and ideologies become salient in freelance English teachers' accounts of their professional lives. Furthermore, because freelance teachers are situated outside traditional institutional frameworks, their work often challenges conventions of the profession while still remaining at the periphery. The study aims to reveal the nature of this rich and complex function they perform within the domain of ELT, consequently reshaping it.