

Conflict and Negotiation in American Culture(s)



Abstracts & Bios

2nd HELAAS Young Scholar Symposium

March 7-8, 2020

Museum of Byzantine Culture
Thessaloniki

helaas.enl.auth.gr/yss2

Abstracts

1. **Name:** Ioanna Gympaki

Title: The Conflict between Emotion and Reason in Rational Choice Theory

Abstract: Late modernity ushered in an era in which humans have been assumed to be rational actors with self-centered motives and profit-guided behavior. That is, they are considered as individuals who act exclusively on personal interest thanks to the information and knowledge they possess. Various social theories have been developed which intend to interpret, explain, and predict human behavior across multiple modes of expression. Rational Choice Theory reflects this attempt to restore humans back to the control and power over their lives after decades of irrational events beyond the scope of their comprehensibility and command. What does Rational Choice Theory support? Which statements does it suggest and which does it undermine? Which are the limits of rationality and the requirements to be fulfilled so that a person can be judged as rational or irrational? Are humans by default rational beings who, to a greater or lesser extent, exhibit logical behavior or do they commit systemic mistakes, indicative of the irrationality of their nature and its emotional orientation? Can the struggle of emotion against reason be negotiated or resolved, or does reason always have to triumph over the experience of emotion? In this presentation, I will attempt to examine James Coleman's Rational Choice Theory, which has changed hitherto established perceptions in American culture as to the motives of human behavior. The theory has collided with some psychoanalytic notions, which have been applied into social and political life. By building on the concepts of identity and identification expressed in group behavior, as established by Sigmund Freud, enriched by Jacques Lacan, and further analyzed by Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, I suggest that Rational Choice Theory fails to take into account the conflict triggered by emotions and pathos at the constitution of subjective and collective identities.

2. **Name:** Katerina Marazi and Kelly Pasmatzis

Title: *Killin' Jews and Nazi Hunters: Re-storying Postmodern Identities in *Inglourious Basterds* and its Greek Subtitles*

Abstract: Film allows for the illusion of unification in representation as the pervasion of the apparatus (e.g. camera) into the reality of the artistic representation can appear minimal. Classical Hollywood films “conceal” the means of production to promote a unified vision of the represented reality, claiming a false sense of immediacy. Tarantino’s *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), a postmodern/historical pastiche, challenges this “unification” and promotes a sense of conflicting experience on multiple levels, from unlikely characters to the subversion of accepted historical narratives with the introduction of the marginal. Revising a historical moment through a polyphonic plot brings a variety of conflicting identities and interpretations of history together—male/female, German/French/American—within restricted spatial boundaries, such as those of the movie theatre. Tarantino further subverts the WWII genre expectations (spaghetti western, historical epic, holocaust film) with an abundance of intertextual references (musical, verbal, etc.) and often through blatant irony and reversals. The conflicting experiences that emerge from the very pronounced linguistic, ethnic, and ideological divides introduced in the film are further complicated for a non-Anglophone audience through the presence of subtitles, which not only bear a defamiliarizing effect, highlighting the cinematic medium itself, but also have the capacity to serve as platforms of confrontation between the foreign of the film and the domestic of the subtitling language. Furthermore, Tarantino’s palimpsestuous construction of history is embodied by formal linguistic characteristics—linguistic register, code-switching, accent—which is integral to the filmic experience yet challenged by the medium of the subtitles. The aim of this presentation is to examine how the subtitles might produce insight into these conflicts or how they might camouflage them from the perspectives of film versus cinematic discourse, and whether the semiotic load of the subtitles undermines or reinforces the hierarchies present in the world of the film.

3. **Name:** Damla Pehlivan

Title: “Red Pill or Blue Pill?”: The Postmodern Condition as Conflict and Negotiation in *The Matrix* Trilogy

Abstract: It can be argued that the most characteristic aspect of postmodernism is its upheaval against metanarratives with bold strategies of narration, aiming at decentralization on every aspect of human life. However, this aspect is also the focus of the criticism against the postmodern condition, especially in the “Information Age” or “Computer Age.” Both concepts of conflict and negotiation seem to be embedded in the criticism and motive of postmodernism. In this context, to approach *The Matrix* trilogy either as a conflict with the metanarratives or as a negotiation with the new conditions of postmodern life is a matter of choice. Accordingly, this performative presentation has two separate paths, “The Red Pill” and “The Blue Pill,” and at the beginning of the presentation I will be giving the audience the right to choose and present the path of their choice. “The Red Pill,” the one that Neo chooses, will be analyzing the conflict which the narration of the trilogy constructs. In the Matrix, the “agonistic” language, to draw from Lyotard, is already at the core of this “new language of computers,” which enables humans to live in “prosperity.” Thus, Neo’s fight is a postmodern one: he tries to prevent those metanarratives from being the sole owner of the diversity of human life. On the other hand, “The Blue Pill” will be focusing on the negotiation the trilogy offers. In this perspective, Matrix demonstrates McLuhan’s ideas about our age of technology and what it means to live in a “global village.” *The Matrix*, dystopian as it might seem, is, according to McLuhan’s ideas about the “medium,” the product of the way human beings perceive the world. Regardless of the chosen path, this presentation will be examining the significance of negotiation and/or conflict concepts on postmodern culture as these become apparent at the core of the trilogy.

4. **Name:** George Vasilikaris

Title: Analyzing Conflict in *Spec Ops: The Line*: Towards a Deconstruction of American Ideology

Abstract: American history, and specifically American conflict, has been a recurring theme in various forms of art, such as paintings, literature, music, and, more recently, video games. Despite the fact that they are considered to be an inferior storytelling and artistic medium, video games have given birth to unique stories and have engaged players in the theme of war. This presentation will provide an analysis of *Spec Ops: The Line*, a third-person shooter game that acts as a satire towards both the U.S. foreign policy and the overly popular first-person shooter genre. Heavily inspired by real wars, such as the war in Iraq, and the “bloodlust” of gamers, *Spec Ops: The Line* draws parallels between fiction and reality by providing a realistic view of the battlefield and extending the moral dilemmas and the atrocities of war to the players themselves. My talk will provide insight into the topic of the heart of darkness, while also analyzing the game’s depiction of conflict through its iconography, music score, and game mechanics. The presentation will explore conflict in three dimensions—the game against war, the game against the player, and the players against themselves—and provide concrete examples of all the aforementioned categories. The questions that will be addressed revolve around the ways in which a war video game can act as a satire against war as well as the ways in which games can cause an internal conflict about topics the players have never experienced, and finally, what it takes to make you feel like a hero.

5. **Name:** Freideriki Tziogkidou

Title: The “OK, Boomer” Effect

Abstract: Generational conflict is not something new. There have always been differences in opinions between generations regarding beliefs, politics, and values. Generational conflict involves younger generations reacting against and expressing their dissatisfaction towards older generations through music, art, culture, and youth movements. How do today’s younger generations in America express their dissatisfaction? What are their concerns? It is a matter of fact that today’s younger generations are offered a greater deal of opportunities to express their dissatisfaction than older generations with new technologies contributing largely to this phenomenon. This presentation supports the idea that the catchphrase “Ok, Boomer” is an expression of generational conflict in American society and examines the phrase as part of the emerging meme culture of the 21st century. Initially, the characteristics of this conflict and the factors that contributed to its creation are analyzed, along with how it relates to other types of conflicts, such as environment- and economy-related conflicts. Then, we will examine the context in which the phrase was first coined and how it is perceived by younger and older Americans, with examples taken from articles in online media. Finally, another issue that this presentation will attempt to explore is the extent to which this conflict is in fact an American one, and whether it can be considered an international conflict. On account of America’s pivotal role in today’s increasingly globalized world, it stands to reason that a part of the presentation is dedicated to examining the spread and perception of the phrase outside America, which was in fact quite rapid, and, more specifically, to the phrase’s perception and appeal in the Greek younger and older audiences.

6. **Name:** Melenia Arouh

Title: Not Just Entertainment: Hollywood and the Culture War

Abstract: The culture wars that have dominated contemporary discourse in the United States seem to have reached a peak, especially since the election of Donald Trump. It was inevitable then that the intense polarization of debates, regarding both core social institutions and moral values, would eventually reach Hollywood. The Hollywood industry plays a key role here as the prominent domestic cultural institution and the main exporter of American culture around the world. Currently both conservative and liberal commentators seem to take issue with the industry either in terms of textual critique or in terms of industry standards and practices. This presentation will establish a theoretical and historical framework of the way in which Hollywood participates in these culture wars and will highlight certain pertinent issues. Firstly, I will review certain historical incidents that place Hollywood at the center of such polarization, starting from earlier decades. Specifically, I will review examples not only relevant to textual critique but also to industry practices, such as the introduction of the Hays code that was principally an effort to appease public outrage against the industry. Secondly, in looking at the present state of the culture war, I will delineate the way in which identity politics frame the major debates that affect the industry and explore the conceptual underpinnings that link current expressions of the culture war with this type of politics. Last but not least, I will revisit certain contemporary examples relevant to identity politics and explain how these have affected the Hollywood industry, such as the *#metoo movement*, cancel culture and audience backlash, regarding specific titles deemed problematic in the current polarized climate.

7. **Name:** Sophia Zuanich

Title: Preaching to the Choir: The Christian Film Genre in Culture Wars

Abstract: Despite low exposure and limited marketing in the mainstream media, independently produced Christian films have experienced massive monetary success and wide distribution in recent years. The term “Christian film” refers to films that deal extensively with explicitly Christian characters, conflicts or texts. They are based on Christian narratives or traditions for their plots, and they may employ Christianity for character definition. Notable titles include *God’s Not Dead* (2014), *I Can Only Imagine* (2018), and *Overcomer* (2019). Although Christian films are not a genre that is frequently discussed within film studies, the numbers of ticket sales indicate that Christian films have a much larger audience than mainstream viewers may assume. Despite employing mostly grassroots promotions, engaging with both independent and low production values and often receiving mocking reviews, these films have proven to be financially successful. Simultaneously, the current working assumption within film studies as well as the accusation from conservative audiences is that the majority of mainstream films in Hollywood is moving towards more neutral, valueless content in order to appeal to the broadest market possible. It could be argued, however, that Christian films persevere and thrive because, in the context of culture war and polarization, they establish and reaffirm conservative values to a conservative audience in a time when the rest of Hollywood is seemingly straying away from them. Under this premise, I will briefly define these films by noting their recurring ideological and iconographical elements, while also presenting data that indicates their success in the market. I will also examine the way these elements are guided and designed by certain production practices. Finally, I will discuss examples of Christian films from the past few years and indicate how they propagate conservative Christian values through these elements, which in turn draws in an audience seeking to affirm their position in America’s culture wars.

8. **Name:** Zafiris Nikitas

Title: Karolos Koun and American Dramaturgy: An Overview

Abstract: Karolos Koun (1908–1987) is widely recognized as one of the most innovative directors of the Modern Greek Theatre of the 20th century. Shortly after the Second World War, during the period 1946–1950, he introduced the Greek audience to American Realism and staged plays such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams, *The Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller, and *Desire Under the Elms* by Eugene O' Neill. These works built upon the reception of American playwrights in Greece, which started rising during the interwar period and gained popularity during the years of the American Cold War. Yet, Koun's lifelong connection to American culture extends beyond dramaturgy. The director started his career at the American College in Athens in the early 1930s, and during the period 1968–1974, when Greece was under the Military Dictatorship, Koun turned to the Ford Foundation in order to receive grants for his theatre endeavors. The presentation examines the conflicts and negotiations between American dramaturgy and the Modern Greek Theatre during the mid-20th century, focusing on the ambivalent modernity of stage director Karolos Koun. At the same time, the presentation addresses aspects such as the correlation between American Realism and Greek dramaturgy, the incorporation of American cultural politics through theatre, and the tension between cosmopolitanism and national identity during the period of the “anticommunist state” in Greece (1950–1974).

9. **Name:** Jimmy Noriega

Title: Intercultural Performance and Theatre for Social Change: Teatro Travieso Stages *Women of Ciudad Juárez*

Abstract: This presentation provides an overview of the work of Teatro Travieso (Troublemaker Theatre), a U.S.-based theatre company founded in 2012. It operates on the premise that theatre can create positive change in the world. At its core, the group seeks to cause the best kind of trouble—the type that tells untold stories, creates witnesses, and fights for those who seek justice in our society. To date the company has produced five original plays, which have been seen by more than 20,000 people in eight countries. This talk focuses on the group's most successful performance to date: *Women of Ciudad Juárez*, which uses the theatre as a space to examine, reflect on, and speak about the femicides taking place in Juárez, Mexico. The production was designed to tour as a form of transnational artistic activism and in performance gives primacy to feminist stories and pain. As such, the company seeks to keep female and minoritarian memory alive, honor those lost, and offer a voice to those silenced and erased through a dominant culture of oppression and exclusion.

10. Name: Aikaterini Delikonstantinidou

Title: From Thesis to Published Book: (It does not have to be) An Odyssey

Abstract: This seminar addresses –o mainly young scholars who aspire to— at some point in the near future—see their thesis published as a monograph. Today’s publishing industry when it comes to academic works of Arts and Humanities disciplines can function in rather tricky ways. Publishing house ratings, the act of drafting the book proposal, editing and proofreading services, funding options, subsidies payable by the author absent a Research Institute as sponsor, and copyright issues, among others, can seem to the newbie as intimidating as the mythical monsters Odysseus had to deal with on the way to his homeland. Thus, a process that should be fun and, well, raise one’s self-confidence often turns out to be overwhelming for the young scholar, sometimes even discouraging aspiring authors from going through with it. This seminar responds to the need to navigate the intriguing landscape of academic publishing by providing practical guidelines and tips aimed at assisting potential authors tackle the issues mentioned above. Particular emphasis is placed on the book proposal, its format and content, and on how to best market it.

11. Name: Anastasia Miskaki and Efrosyni Pappa

Title: Control over Women's Bodies in the On-Screen Adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* and the Contemporary Abortion Conflict

Abstract: This presentation will discuss the on-screen adaptation of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* in relation to abortion discourses and the conflict they have generated in modern-day America, using the work of theorists such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Elizabeth Grosz. In particular, we wish to explore how control over female bodies is manifested in the adaptation of the novel and to what extent women have the right of free choice over their own bodies. In the totalitarian and fundamentalist regime of Gilead, fertile women (Handmaids) are exploited for their reproductive power, being constantly raped by figures of authority, the Commanders. Complicit in these acts are the Commanders' Wives, whose agony over reproduction leads them to exercise undue control over other female bodies. This rape culture is continually sustained by the male Commanders' perverted sexual desire as well as the desire to make themselves feel powerful over women's subjugated, sexed bodies. Thus, the attack on female bodies becomes systemic and the political actions of the Commanders mingle with the personal lives of the Handmaids. Similarly, American society is currently characterized by the clash between those against abortion and those supporting a woman's right to choose. Ultimately, this is a matter of who can and/or should exert control over women's bodies since conservative ideas regarding abortion deprive women of their freedom over their bodies and reproduction. Despite pro-natalists' attempts to limit women's power, liberal women themselves attempt to thwart their efforts through marches, like the protagonist of the adaptation who joins an organised Resistance against the Commanders. Therefore, this presentation will attempt to establish that patriarchy's control over women's bodies in *The Handmaid's Tale* echoes the current conflict on abortion in the United States of America, as in both cases societal norms regarding reproduction rights restrain women's freedom over their own bodies.

12. Name: Maria Pinakoulia

Title: Female Struggle and Negotiation of Agency in Christina Dalcher's *Vox*

Abstract: Set in contemporary America, Dalcher's powerful novel presents a story of conflicts, struggles, and negotiations for agency and freedom. In this dystopian totalitarian setting, women's rights and voice are completely subjugated by the patriarchal and gender ideologies of the government. Electrical metal bracelets fitted in all the women and girls around the country allow only 100 words a day for women. The novel examines how the violent conflicts do not just remain in the public sphere of the society but also invade and completely disrupt the private space (familial and personal relationships). This invasion of privacy mainly involves the control of the female body that is deprived of language. Dalcher explicitly shows how language is inextricably connected to matters of control and power ideology. But the function of language in the novel is subversive. While it is used as a tool of enforcing control on women, it is also the means to create resistance. The novel tells the story of Dr. Jean McClellan, whose fight for control over language and her own body leads her to regain her own agency, thus determining the lives of her daughter and the rest of the women in the story. Employing gender and feminist theory, I will argue that the protagonist's negotiation of her own language and agency acts as a site of resistance against the violent practices and hegemonic ideology of the patriarchal government. The struggle for female subjectivity is also prevalent in the narrative structure of the novel as the narrative voice of Jean is in a constant state of conflict and negotiation. This presentation will thus discuss current controversial issues and conflicts in terms of gender, sexuality, and body politics. It will also address questions about the conflict between the individual and society and public versus private space.

13. Name: Maria (Mariza) Tzouni

Title: Conflict-ing/-ed Neo-burlesque Bodies: From Nostalgia to Objectification and Back

Abstract: From the first Girl Shows to the Neo-burlesque spectacle, representations of the female body adopted migratory politics in terms of format (e.g. tableaux vivants, cooch and shimmy dancers, go go dancers or strippers), genre transformations (e.g. vaudeville, minstrel, circus, carnival, variety shows, burlesque, or cabaret), and actual spaces to endure sociopolitical distresses and “titillate” spectatorship. Through mimicry, parody, and travesty, burlesque performers often satirized the content of traditional high-class plays to entertain the working-class audiences who had difficulty in understanding the elite’s preferences and tastes. Based on their predecessors’ principles, neo-burlesque performers have acquired equivalent migratory politics of corporeality to feed their spectators’ lustful appetites. Inspired by inter/national fairy tales, fictional characters, and objects, these performers often cross physical as well as symbolic borders and challenge stereotypical representations through their acts. They artistically transform fairytales and toy memories into adult entertainment extravaganzas in order to reshuffle past stories, present glittery political her/stories, and engage their audiences in their current re-narrations and negotiations. In this light, Michelle L’amour’s *Snow White*, Roxi D’Lite’s *Cinderella*, and Coco Framboise’s *Mr. Potato Head* demonstrate how nostalgia and the revisiting of traditional tales as well as the play on physical and sexual objectification of the female body re-create the map of spectatorship through neo-burlesque performance. They ultimately move toward fictitious characters and symbolic bodies to negotiate the representation of the female body on stage as an object/subject. This presentation will seek to explore the reasons why and the processes through which neo-burlesque pieces stage the said revisiting and recontextualization of fables, fairy tales, stories, and popular culture symbols, thus generating dialogues through neo-burlesque productions.

14. Name: Eleni Sylivani

Title: Shades of Masculinity in Steven Sherrill's *The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break*

Abstract: This presentation analyzes the re-interpretation of the Minotaur myth in Steven Sherrill's novel *The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break* (2000). Sherrill's Minotaur, with his bull head and human body, currently lives and works in North Carolina. Constantly migrating, suffering from speech and vision impairment and having the queerest appearance possible, Sherrill's version of the Minotaur in *The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break* could be representing several kinds of minorities. Based on gender and queer theory, especially drawing on Judith Halberstam's and Raewyn W. Connell's works, we will examine Sherrill's text in regard to expressions of masculinity throughout the novel. While exploring connections between the Minotaur of ancient mythology and its revisited version, we will focus on the marginalization of Sherrill's protagonist, deriving from the conflictual interactions and the frequent aggressive behaviors he faces. Apart from a few colleagues with whom he feels solidary and comfortable, the Minotaur often finds himself verbally or physically victimized, while always consciously resolved not to use his privilege in terms of monstrous physical strength in order to defend himself. Our exploration of Minotaur's alternative masculinity traits will support the argument that, within this contrast of hegemonic or toxic masculinity expressions, on the one hand, and an alternative masculinity, on the other, the author aims at supporting the latter, therefore providing the reader with a minority empowering version of the Minotaur myth.

15. Name: Stavroula Vergopoulou

Title: Conflicts Related to Sexist US Advertisements and to Their Translation

Abstract: This study pertains to multiple conflicts within the context of advertising, gender, and translation. To begin, emphasis is placed on gender in advertising. Thus, the presentation addresses the conflict between advertising as a rather sexist industry and “subvertising,” which includes the reconstruction of advertisements in order to criticize the original advertising messages. Subvertising can be seen as a potential feminist technique, as illustrated by online parodies of current advertisements or the enlightening example of the 2018 photography project entitled *In a Parallel Universe* by visual artist Eli Rezkallah, based on U.S. magazine advertisements of the 1940s, ‘50s, and ‘60s. Another similar conflict analyzed is that which arises between stereotypical representations of women in contemporary U.S. advertising and its audience’s increasing general urge to break these rigid gender stereotypes, as shown by critical comments on social media in reaction to sexist advertising. Furthermore, the presentation focuses on translation in advertising—in relation to gender. More specifically, it discusses the conflict between sexism in advertising language and the dynamics of the translation of advertisements when seen as a process which can be oriented to gender equality. In other words, it is interesting to explore the conflict between the advertiser’s focus on financial gain, which can also promote sexist elements in advertising, and the feminist translator’s interest in language use, which promotes gender equality. Of course, the translator’s inner conflict should be taken into consideration as well: Should they create a profit-oriented translation or an equality-oriented translation? Is the combination of both possible or are these goals rather incompatible? Is the translation of sexist advertisements inevitably a negotiation process? Negotiation is all about compromises, but the question is who compromises, and who needs to compromise: the advertiser, the consumer, and/or the translator?

16. Name: Caterina Stamou

Title: “Words are a war to me”: Female Writing, Conflict and Intersectional Coalitions in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*

Abstract: This presentation centers on the notion of “female writing” as an essential practice to initiate conflict and intersectional coalition in the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (first published in 1981 and followed by three more editions in 1983, 2008, and 2015). The anthology is a collection of poems, personal essays, and interviews by African-American, Asian-American, Indigenous, and Latinx female writers who explore issues of race, class, sexuality, and gender, as well as the way these identities intersect in experience under the multiple systemic oppressions that exist in contemporary American society. Through the testimonial and polyphonic character of its poetry and prose, the collection contrives perceptive aspects of intersectional feminism by deploying the importance of heterogeneity in language, content, and political visions; by giving prominence to activist coalitions; and by highlighting the conflicted relationship between socially constructed identity and intricate individual and communal experience. The aim of the presentation is to show how “female writing,” as analyzed by theorist Hélène Cixous in her emblematic essay “The Laugh of Medusa,” is employed in the poems of the anthology’s first chapter, “Children Passing in the Streets: The Roots of Radicalism,” to denote various experiential aspects of conflicted identities within American society and to impart the concept of intersectional feminism. Gloria Anzaldua’s seminal essay “Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers” will be employed as our main theoretical reference, since it illustrates a profound testimonial contemplation of the practice of “female writing” as a radical act that reveals conflict with one’s socially constructed identity and community but also empowers the subject towards intersectional feminist coalition-building.

17.Name: Panteleimon Tsiokos

Title: Racial Manifestations of Selfhood: Black Self as Burden in Yusef Komunyakaa's *Apologize for the Eyes in my Head*

Abstract: The question of the essence of black experience has run through African American literary and cultural criticism ever since the beginning of the 20th century. This has resulted from the fact that white American culture has always created images where the black existence is only defined in relation to white existence. In this light, African Americans have most frequently been approached in terms of what white Americans are *not*. This perception of black people has been embedded in American culture's definitional dualities and has affected the national as well as the personal understanding of blackness. This presentation will attempt to explore Komunyakaa's subversion of racialized images by revealing the impact they have had on the formation of black selfhood. My talk will mainly focus on an analysis of the poem "The Beast & Burden: Seven Improvisations" (*I Apologize for the Eyes in my Head*, 1986), which explicitly reveals the mutual inter-connections among poetic form, content, and the concept of black self as "burden." In more detail, my presentation will try to unearth the ways in which the African American poet employs raw material from his racial tradition, namely jazz patterns, and elevates it into an eloquent but concise narrative about the changing African American experience in the U.S. Ultimately, my argumentation will showcase how Komunyakaa transgresses personal perceptual boundaries and extends his observations onto the national level by challenging racial stereotypes and by unveiling how deeply white perceptions of blackness contradict reality.

18. Name: Kalliopi Fragkouli

Title: Imprisoned or Reformed: Exploring Racial Conflict and Brutality by Correctional Officers in Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys*

Abstract: Set in 1960s Florida, Colson Whitehead's novel, *The Nickel Boys* (2019), explores the story of Elwood Curtis, a boy that is wrongly accused of car theft and is sent to the Nickel Academy, a nightmarish version of juvenile prison. Apart from the justice system failing to protect both white and black boys who come from destroyed families, the administration and correctional officers make the boys' lives a living hell. Whitehead masterfully juxtaposes violent incidents of law enforcement brutality towards African American boys and the Civil Rights movement, by placing his protagonist in the center of action. From being a promising and intelligent adolescent, who is mesmerized by Martin Luther King's speeches and is swept away by the revolutionary spirit and socio-political turmoil of his time, Elwood finds himself imprisoned for life and unable to ever prove his innocence. This presentation examines how Elwood not only witnesses conflict between black boys and the guards as well as white and black boys in the form of racism, verbal, sexual, and physical abuse, but also experiences an inner battle as he is advised to abide by the rules, contain his rebelliousness and outspokenness, and muffle his sense of justice. Based on facts that showcase the existence of a segregated reform school known as the Florida School for Boys, which operated from 1900 to 2011, Whitehead exposes the issues of racial discrimination, hatred, and extreme violence as a means of repentance and reformation. Additionally, the author sheds light on the gruesome tortures, beatings, whipping sessions, rapes, and unexplained deaths since former detainees broke their silence, state authorities closed the school permanently, and hundreds of unmarked graves were linked to the reform school.

19. Name: Dimitra Nikolaidou

Title: Transformations of the Fantastic: Racial Conflict, Negotiation, and Transformation in Tabletop Role-Playing Games

Abstract: In recent years, the sub-culture centered on the genre of the fantastic has undergone a massive shift. To begin with, the success of speculative works such as *The Lord of The Rings* and *Game of Thrones*, as well as the proliferation of digital gaming, has catapulted the genre into the mainstream. Additionally, and in part as a result of its increased visibility, the problematic relationship of the genre with the issue of race has come under acute criticism, prompting intense debate and transforming the landscape of the fantastic across mediums. This process of conflict, negotiation, and eventual transformation, which mirrors wider societal and cultural shifts in the U.S., has been directly reflected in the creation and evolution of the highly influential genre of Tabletop Role-Playing Games (TRPGs). The first TRPG, *Dungeons & Dragons*, was published in 1975 in Wisconsin U.S.A., inspired by an amalgamation of classic and pulp fantasy narratives of that era; as such it reflected the genre's problematic attitude towards race. However, various inherent qualities of the genre, including the direct participation of the audience in the creation process and the opportunity TRPGs afforded to consumers to become creators themselves, prompted decades-long cultural negotiations which resulted in the eventual evolution of the genre towards more diverse and inclusive narratives. The proposed presentation aims to examine, through the intersection of narrative, historical, and cultural studies, the evolution of TRPGs in terms of visibility and representation of race, as well as the ways in which said evolution mirrors wider cultural shifts currently taking place in the U.S. The content of the two most popular TRPGs, namely *Dungeons & Dragons* and *World of Darkness*, will provide appropriate case studies. The conclusions are expected to chart the processes of conflict, negotiation, and cultural transformation taking place currently in the U.S.

20. Name: Maria Virginia Tsikopoulou

Title: Back to the... When? Rearranging and Negotiating Urban Space and Narrative in Ben Lerner's *10:04*

Abstract: Ben Lerner's *10:04*, published in 2014, is a novel full of personal, spatial, and time negotiations. Ben, the narrator, is an author living in New York City who negotiates with a good friend the possibility of bearing a child together. In this universe, stories and facts stemming from the past and intertwined with the characters' innate uneasiness about the future's instability weave a tale that poses various inquiries regarding the present. In *10:04*'s present, New York City (and the whole world) seems to be a place that constantly "rearranges itself," as the narrator estimates. However, what does this almost perpetual change entail and how is it expressed within the confines of the novel? This project sets out to explore *10:04*'s endless "rearrangement" on a double level: first, in relation to the city's urban environment and, then, in terms of narrative. Threatened by upcoming storms, New York is negotiated and often portrayed as a "metaphor city," in Ben Highmore's sense of the term, conceptualized as a functioning organism/body full of rhythms that is experienced by its inhabitants. The narrator, a *flâneur* who roams around its streets, realizing his personal detours and, at the same time, collecting the stories of others, develops a psychosomatic relationship with the city that is in a neverending state of change. Along with the urban environment, the narrative also "rearranges" itself on an ontological level; that is, *10:04* creates flickering McHalean Chinese-box worlds that project multiple narratives within the central narrative while, simultaneously, blurring the boundaries between fiction and fact. Finally, further enhanced with a plethora of photographs and its intertextual *Back to the Future* references, the novel both establishes and challenges the existence of conflicting temporalities as a testimony of the city's and the narrative's fragmented natures.

21. Name: Paschalia Mitskidou

Title: Sanitizing American History: The Absence of Historical Conflicts in Fictional Representations of American Theme Parks

Abstract: This presentation will be concerned with fictional portrayals of American theme parks in Lincoln Child's novel *Utopia* (2002) and Cory Doctorow's novel *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* (2003). In these futuristic theme parks, various reconstructed past eras coexist and the use of virtual technologies enables a more intimate and amusing experience of American history. Theme parks are popular staples in American culture and have been consistently critiqued for promoting a selective, sanitized version of American history, clear of conflicts and contradictions. As Marie-Laure Ryan, Kenneth Foote, and Maoz Azaryahu propose in their study *Narrating Space / Spatializing Narrative: Where Narrative Theory and Geography Meet* (2016), spaces, both real and virtual, are created through narrative, and cannot be examined only in purely spatial terms. Their arguments will inform this discussion, which will explore the potential of virtual reality as a "frame for storytelling" that allows for a new kind of experience of both space and narrative. Through an examination of the qualities of the portrayed parks and their various elements, the analysis will seek to identify how virtual technologies reconstruct American history and enhance the experience of an idealized American past, often obscuring or distorting the realities of historical conflicts and preventing us from making sense of their effects. Special attention will be paid to the choices involved in telling stories spatially, especially regarding the ideological values conveyed and the dynamics of power at work in shaping narrative within the fictional theme parks. Finally, the analysis will offer a broader reflection on the impact that the use of virtual technologies can have in terms of how the American past is recreated, perceived, and experienced today.

22. Name: Constantine Chatzipapatheodoridis and Penny Koutsi

Title: Syllabus Design Workshop

Abstract: This workshop aims at familiarizing participants with the process of course syllabus designing. Being well aware of the requirements of contemporary academic institutions regarding vacancy-filling application processes, we will attempt to introduce participants to course construction with a 30-min session. Through topic-specific activities and creative tasks, the participants will have the opportunity to acquire some basic skills on building a syllabus for academic purposes. This is a chance for those involved to practically engage themselves in the creation of targeted syllabi concerning either semester-long or short-term academic courses. This workshop will consist of two parts, an instructive one that will provide basic guidelines and tools, and a task-based one that will effectively put theory into practice. Depending on the number of participants, the latter will work in small groups or individually to develop their own course syllabus based on a given topic that will be more specifically decided after taking into consideration the participants' academic background as well as field of research interest.

Biographical Notes

1. **Ioanna Gympaki** is a graduate student at the Department of Philosophy in the University of Athens. After completing her undergraduate studies in the Department of English Literature and Culture of the same university, she decided to embrace new fields of study, extending from Cultural Studies and Philosophy to Psychology and Social Sciences. She has presented research papers in conferences in Greece and abroad, some of which have been published in Greek and foreign journals, while she has received awards and scholarship funds for her academic performances.
2. **Katerina Marazi** holds a B.A. in English Language and Literature, an M.A. in American Literature and Culture, a Ph.D. in Intercultural Studies and American Pop Culture, and a Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. Her research interests include Adaptation, Brand Identity Theory, Transmedia Storytelling, and Media Franchise Culture within the entertainment industry. Dr. Marazi is a member of EAAS/HELAAS, the Multimodal Group, a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and the Hellenic Semiotic Society. She has presented her research work at conferences both in Greece and abroad, she has published papers in peer-reviewed journals, and she regularly contributes book reviews to the *European Journal of American Studies (EJAS)*.
3. **Kelly Pasmatzis** earned her B.A. in English Language and Literature from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in 2006. She pursued postgraduate studies in Translation and Intercultural Studies at the University of Manchester, where she completed her M.A. (2008) and her Ph.D. (2014). She is the Research Director at the English Studies Department of The International Faculty of the University of Sheffield, CITY College, and teaches modules on Translation Theories and Literary Translation, among others. She is also a member of the editorial board for the journal *New Voices in Translation Studies*. Her research interests lie in literary translation, cultural transfer, and sociological approaches to translation.
4. **Damla Pehlivan** is a student in the M.A. programme of Comparative Literature in Dokuz Eylül University. She earned her B.A. from Ege University,

American Culture and Literature Department, in 2018. She participated at the International Undergraduate Symposium in Ege University in 2017 and 2018. Her bachelor's project with her colleague Serhan Bulanik is entitled "WESTWORLD: Science Fiction as a Retrospection of the Future." Her research on *Altered Carbon* (2018–) will be published in 2020 as a part of the collection of essays entitled *Sex, Death and Resurrection in Altered Carbon: Essays on the Netflix Series*. Her research interest includes psychoanalysis, postmodernism, cultural theory, and, in particular, the work of theorists such as Žižek, McLuhan, and Baudrillard.

5. **George Vasilikaris** has graduated from the School of English Language and Literature, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, where he currently continues his postgraduate studies in Translation and Conference Interpreting. Fascinated by intricate storytelling, he wanted to find a way to apply his passion for video games in his studies and research the endless possibilities they provide, as well as their immense impact on pop-culture. A literature enthusiast, video game critic and avid gamer, George would like to find a way to combine all his interests and bring games to the forefront of academic studies.
6. **Freideriki Tziogkidou** holds a B.A. in English Language and Literature from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She currently finds herself in the last semester of a postgraduate programme on Translation and Conference Interpreting in the same university. During her undergraduate years, she started getting fascinated about American culture. She always considered translators as cultural mediators and has always believed that words do not just carry meaning but also culture. She aspires to combine American Studies with Translation Studies in an attempt to illustrate the importance of contextual and cultural knowledge for the translation process.
7. **Melenia Arouh** holds a Ph.D. from the University of Southampton in film aesthetics. Dr. Arouh is Assistant Professor at the Communication and Philosophy Departments of the American College of Greece, Deree College. She is also the Assistant Head of the Communication Department. Her current teaching includes such courses as Introduction to Film, Film Analysis, Aesthetics, and Philosophy and Cinema. Her publication and research

interests are in the areas of film-philosophy, film aesthetics, and media studies.

8. **Sophia Zuanich** is a senior undergraduate Honors student studying Communication with a focus on journalism and film studies at the American College of Greece, Deree College. She has been President of the Communication Society at Deree since 2018, and she is involved in a wide range of extracurricular activities. Her research focuses mainly on media studies and framing.
9. **Zafiris Nikitas** is a Ph.D. Candidate in History of Theatre at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. His academic interests focus on the cultural identity of Modern Greek, European, and American Drama during the 19th and the 20th century. He has received an Excellence Scholarship by the Greek Institution of Research and Innovation for his ongoing doctoral project. He has collaborated with prestigious Research Centers, such as FORTH, and he has published papers in peer-reviewed journals. The most recent presentation of his research work took place at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, within the frame of an academic symposium.
10. **Jimmy A. Noriega** has directed over 30 productions in English and Spanish at theatres and festivals in Mexico, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Israel, Romania, Canada, Belgium, Ireland, India, and New York City. He received the 2013 Elliott Hayes Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dramaturgy from the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas and co-edited the book *Theatre and Cartographies of Power: Repositioning the Latina/o Americas* (Southern Illinois Press, 2018). He has published in *Theatre Topics*, *Latin American Theatre Review*, *Theatre Journal*, *Modern Drama*, *Review: The Journal of Dramaturgy*, and *Lateral: The Journal of the Cultural Studies Association*. He has a Ph.D. from Cornell University and is Chair of the Department of Theatre and Dance at the College of Wooster. He is also the Vice President for Conferences for the American Society for Theatre Research. In 2012, he founded Teatro Travieso/Troublemaker Theatre, which operates on the premise that theatre can create positive change in the world.
11. **Aikaterini Delikonstantinidou** holds a Ph.D. in Theatre Studies from the School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She is currently working as a post-doctoral researcher at the Department of Theatre Studies,

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, focusing on applications of Digital Theatre on Adult Education. She is also the Young Scholar Representative of the Hellenic Association for American Studies (HELAAS) and member of the editorial team of *Critical Stages/Scènes critiques*, the journal of the International Association of Theatre Critics (IATC). Her articles have been published in numerous volumes and journals, her research work has been presented at national and international conferences, and she is the recipient of several awards, grants, and scholarships. Her research areas include Theatre and Performing Arts, Greek Tragedy, Ethnic Studies, Digital Literacies and Education.

- 12. Anastasia Miskaki** is a graduate of the School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and, at the moment, she is a postgraduate student at the School's M.A. programme titled "English and American Studies." Her interests involve Romanticism, Comparative Literature, Poetics, and Gender Studies.
- 13. Effrosyni Pappa** is a graduate of the School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She is currently enrolled in the School's M.A. programme on English and American Studies. Her interests include Romanticism, the Gothic, Renaissance Literature, and Feminism.
- 14. Maria Pinakoulia** holds a B.A. degree in English Language and Literature (2016) and an M.A. degree in English and American Studies from the School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (2018). Her research focuses on 19th- and 20th-century British and American women's writing and cultural theory. She is interested in postcolonialism, questions of race, gender, cultural identities, and war narratives. Her diploma thesis researched British women's writing during the period of decolonization, examining the intersection of colonial whiteness and gender. She is currently working as an English language teacher in private and state schools and at the Military School of Non-Commissioned Officers in Trikala, Greece.
- 15. Maria (Mariza) Tzouni** is a Ph.D. Candidate at the Department of American Literature and Culture in the School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece. She has presented her research work in both national and international conferences while her poems have been published in anthologies and online blogs. Her fields of interest include Neo-

burlesque performance, Performance Art, Theater, Gender Studies, Ethnic Studies, and Popular Culture Studies.

- 16. Eleni Sylivani** graduated from the Department of Foreign Languages, Translation and Interpreting of the Ionian University in 2011. While working as a translator, she became a certified teacher in Adult Learning and taught English at Second Chance Schools for several years. She has been involved in many interdisciplinary projects and has attended international training courses on diversity and inclusion. She is currently a postgraduate student at the Department of English Language and Literature of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, attending the M.A. programme “The Greek Element in Anglophone Literature.” Her short stories have been published in short story collections for adults and children.
- 17. Stavroula Vergopoulou** is a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Translation and Intercultural Studies of the School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. For her doctoral research, which addresses gender, translation, and advertising, she is funded by the Greek State Scholarships Foundation. She holds a B.A. in English Language and Literature from Aristotle University and an M.A. in Translation from Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz (Faculty of Translation Studies, Linguistics and Cultural Studies in Gernersheim, Germany). For her postgraduate studies, she was funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).
- 18. Caterina Stamou** holds a B.A. degree in Communication, Media and Culture (direction: Cultural Management) from Panteion University in Athens and a European Joint Master’s Degree in English and American Studies from University Paris Diderot – Paris VII and Ca Foscari University in Venice. She wrote her Master’s thesis on the multiplicity of the female self in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s experimental novel *Dictée*. In 2014–2015, she was an intern at the American Library in Paris, conducting research and offering curatorial assistance for the library’s exhibitions, including “Black Man Abroad: The Poetic Life of James Emanuel.” She presented her thesis at the 3rd conference organized by AISNA Graduates (Italian Association for North American Studies), while her review on *Dictée* was published on the first issue of *JAM IT!* (Journal of American Studies in Italy) in 2019. She has collaborated with the Feminist Autonomous Centre for Research in Athens

and contributed to the creation and public presentation of the eBook *First Act*, which developed out of the first community course on intersectionality that the Centre facilitated.

19. Panteleimon Tsiokos holds a B.A. and an M.A. in English from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. He has attended several summer schools, conferences, symposiums, seminars, and workshops. He is a member of several Associations for American Studies and his research interests include American folk, ethnic, and minority literature, issues of identity in the twentieth-century contemporary American fiction and poetry as well as the urban space.

20. Kalliopi Fragkouli holds a B.A. degree from the School of English Language and Literature, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (2015). She completed her M.A. in English and American Studies at the same institution (2018). She has done research on African American fiction, particularly on Toni Morrison's works, placing emphasis on black feminism and beauty standards. She has also researched African American poetry, focusing on the works of Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, and Paul Laurence Dunbar, and addressing the issue of slavery, torture, lack of freedom, and sense of belonging. Her research interests include Contemporary American Literature, American Ethnic and Minority Literature, African American Novelists, Feminist Theory, as well as Race and Gender Studies.

21. Dimitra Nikolaidou is a Ph.D. Candidate at the School of English Language and Literature, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She is a member of HELAAS and the international War/Game project. Her work has been presented in Greek and international conferences. Her papers have been published in the *WyrdCon Companion*, the *Ex-centric Narratives* journal, and *Wargames: Memory, Militarism and the Subject of Play* (Bloomsbury 2019).

22. Maria Virginia Tsikopoulou is a Ph.D. Candidate at the Department of American Literature and Culture of the School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. She holds an M.A. (2018) in English and American Studies and a B.A. (2015) in English Language and Literature from the same institution. During her M.A. studies, she was awarded a scholarship of excellence as a class valedictorian. Her research interests include

Contemporary Fiction, Postmodern Literature, Drama, and Artistic Practices, with a special focus on Urban Space, Spatiality, and Psychogeography.

- 23. Paschalia Mitskidou** is a freelance writer and editor based in Athens. She holds a B.A. in History (Ionian University) and an M.A. in Creative Writing (University of Western Macedonia). She is a Ph.D. student at the Department of American Literature and Culture, School of English Language and Literature, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Her research interests focus mainly on contemporary American literature, digital narratives, and the representation of history in immersive media. Her Ph.D. research explores virtual reality in contemporary American culture and the ways in which the past is reconstructed, revised, or recontextualized through virtual reality narrative practices.
- 24. Constantine Chatzipapatheodoridis**, Fulbright alumnus, holds a doctorate degree from the School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. He has a B.A. in English Language and Literature and a M.A. in American Literature and Culture. His fields of research activity include LGBT+ Studies, Performance Studies, and Popular Culture Studies. His Ph.D. dissertation focuses on the politics of global gay culture and the praxis of camp in contemporary pop music spectacles. Parts of this research as well as other projects have appeared in international conferences and journals.
- 25. Penny Koutsi** is a Ph.D. student at the Department of American Literature and Culture, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. She is currently working on her dissertation which examines the death penalty in contemporary Anglophone plays. Her academic interests include Theater Studies, Political Theory, as well as the themes of conflict and violence. She has taken part in various national and international conferences and contributed articles to the e-magazine *ECHOES* and to MIT's online magazine, among others.