



Croatian Association for American Studies 11th Annual Conference

**Media, American Culture, and Global Perspective
Images, Ideas, and Illusion**

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Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Rijeka

Book of Abstracts

Media, American Culture, and Global Perspective Images, Ideas, and Illusion

Croatian Association for American Studies
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Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Rijeka

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KEYNOTE TALK

Patterns of Perception in Media Culture: The Paradoxical Effect of Digital Images

Denise Pilato

Denise E. Pilato holds a PhD in American Studies from Michigan State University. She is a Professor Emerita of Technology Studies, Eastern Michigan University. Her publications and scholarly research agenda focus on nineteenth- and twentieth-century American women inventors, gender and technology, and technology, culture, and progress. The scope of her interdisciplinary teaching focuses on the social impact of technology, history of technology, and technology and ethics.

Abstract

Many digital images appear globally ubiquitous regardless of the audience or delivery medium. Although the images may be visually the same, they often suggest vastly different meanings across geographic boundaries as well as within cultural borders. The sheer number of images that saturate our daily lives offers insight and understanding about their effects on our digitally connected world. The consequences of this saturation have reshaped our models of perception, revealing patterns that connect diverse peoples, divide populations who share a national identity, and/or splinter cultures in a myriad of ways and shapes. An examination of this paradox begs the question: does the improved technology of digitally consumed images mean progress? Historian Leo Marx suggests that it could but only if we are willing and able to answer the next question—“progress toward what?” (41).

The assumption that innovation represents progress, particularly in our digital age, raises fundamental questions about human values, social justice, and the importance of cultural diversity. Deconstructing and reading ideas behind an image is a strategy for building common ground, understanding diverse global values, and identifying challenging issues. One challenge that emerges very quickly is that the meaning of any image is fundamentally as complex as the human viewing the image. In the 1960s, noted philosopher and scholar Marshall McLuhan argued that technologies are extensions of human faculties. As humans, we appreciate things that are easy, fast, cheap, accessible, and offer the illusion of control, like digital images and the invaluable communication power it provides. The global saturation of ubiquitous digital images

allows us to “see” beyond the flat screen to better understand social structures and dynamic human relationships with technology and with each other.

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PRESENTATIONS

Someone Forgot about Us: A Third-World Critique of American Construction of Lesbianism in Popular Culture

Ekshita Arora

Ekshita Arora is currently pursuing her Masters in Media and Communications from Lund University, Sweden. In 2021, she graduated from Kamala Nehru College, University of Delhi with a Bachelor's degree in Journalism (Hons.) with the thesis "Pink-washing, Brand Image and Hierarchisation of LGBTQI+ Community: A Study of Bumble and Tinder." Post-graduation, she has worked as a content strategist in advertising for almost two years, aided high school students to consolidate their research through academic mentorship, and invested some time in personal research projects centered around media and politics in India. For her potential Master's thesis, she plans on deciphering the gap that exists in queer scholarship regarding third-world transnational audiences of pop culture and advertisements. Whilst there exist a multitude of theories with diasporic or transnational audiences at the center, there seems to be a lack of those representing people who are fat, queer, and brown/black. To address this gap, Ekshita Arora would like to formulate a thesis that represents the often ignored by employing in-depth qualitative and discourse analysis of popular culture. In the past six months, as a student at Lund University, she has managed to polish her qualitative research skills by delving into theories of diaspora, media audiences, pop culture, identity performance, intersectionality, and transnationalism. Her main area of research is branded media, identity performance, and diasporic queer discourse.

Abstract

In her ethnographic research, Jones found that "certain themes are repeatedly found in studies of self-identified lesbian women, but [that] these themes reflect the impact of a largely white, middle-class, Western cultural context" (1). The term "lesbianism" has been used to describe a sexual identity in popular culture for decades. This identity is often seen as a "Western" phenomenon, but an entire world outside the Western sphere is also struggling to make sense of its lesbian identities. Likewise, a significant gap exists in queer scholarship pertaining to transnational lesbian audiences. This gap can be translated through the famous, inclusive, and American products of popular culture on TV, devoid of lesbians from the Global South. To further decipher this gap, I will employ the analysis of two American products—Mike Flanagan's *The Haunting*

franchise and Mindy Kaling's series *Sex Life of College Girls*. This in-depth analysis will help decode how the lack of ethnic and bodily intersectionality in inclusive products impacts audience identity performance in the Global South, why it is integral to decipher this gap, and how the Americanization of queer pop culture adds another stratum of marginalization. These arguments will be explored by building upon ideas of identity, engagement, and transnationalism as established by Hall, Athique, Hill, and Dahlgreen.

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Mass Media and Movies: Opportunities and Pitfalls

David Grčki

David Grčki is a postdoctoral researcher on the project *Aesthetic Education through Narrative Art and Its Relevance for the Humanities*, financed by the Croatian Science Foundation. He received his PhD in Philosophy (field: logic and decision-making) with the thesis titled “Planning, Reasons and Rationality over Time” (2020). His research interests are in the areas of aesthetic cognitivism (the relationship between art and knowledge) and the nature of the engagement with fictional characters. His recent publications include “Learning Through Stories: Epistemic Understanding as a Cognitive Value of Narrative Arts,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* (forthcoming 2023) and *An Epistemology of Criminological Cinema* (with Rafe McGregor), *Routledge* (forthcoming 2023).

Abstract

Commercially successful movies are seen by hundreds of millions of people every year. The question is: can we learn anything useful or relevant from our favorite movies or are they here only for our pleasure and entertainment? We watch movies primarily because they are enjoyable (rarely anyone’s primary intention when going to see a movie is to be educated), but they can also serve as sources of knowledge and understanding about a wide variety of important and relevant topics—from history and natural sciences to complex topics like social justice and systemic racism. This paper argues that movies are powerful tools. As any tool, they can be used in a morally positive way—to advance desirable values and raise awareness about important topics—and in a morally negative way—to misinform, manipulate, and control (propaganda movies are historically notorious and exist even today in a variety of forms). The way that we learn from movies is twofold—via cognitive and emotional engagement with the story (Carroll 7) and the characters (Smith 21) as well as through reflection and contemplation (Mikkonen 89). Good movies make us think. We ponder about ideas and themes of movies, and sometimes, we even reexamine our beliefs and values. This will be exemplified through the analysis of the movie *Us* (2019), which teaches us about racism and social justice.

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The Mark of the Digital in Contemporary Print Textuality

Lovorka Gruić Grmuša

Lovorka Gruić Grmuša is an Associate Professor at the Department on English, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka, Croatia. She teaches literature courses, American culture, and media culture. She has been awarded several grants (among which a Fulbright scholarship at UCLA and a Duke University Literature grant), has contributed to English and Croatian literary journals, co-edited a collection of papers: *Space and Time in Language and Literature* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), and published two books: *The Novelistic Vision of Kurt Vonnegut* (FFRI, 2015) and *Memory and Identity in Modern and Postmodern American Literature* (co-authored; Springer, 2022). Her research interests focus on interdisciplinary approach to temporality and space-time (literature, history, science, and technology), contemporary US literature, and media studies.

Abstract

This paper addresses the question of how contemporary print textuality has adapted to our computationally intensive environments, drawing attention to the mark of the digital—the move toward network aesthetics. Since the circumstances in which reading and writing take place have changed dramatically due to technological advances, and our reliance on networked and programmable devices has altered us at the core, so did the print novel evolve, engaged in conversations with electronic textuality. This study is informed by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s account on how modern mass media modify and animate earlier media forms, proving that all media interpenetrate mutually in *remediation*, and by Samuel Weber’s and N. Katherine Hayles’s concepts of media as transformative processes that are always mutating and intermediating among themselves, taking various shapes.

Many contemporary novelists, including Jonathan Safran Foer, Steven Hall, Salvador Plascencia, Mark Danielewski, and others, experiment with printed texts by incorporating the textual, the visual, the graphic, and even the kinetic (the latter being the hallmark of the digital medium in terms of interaction), which combine and reverberate, emphasizing intermedial reflexivity from the digital to the print/paper surface. Various techniques, such as layered text, multimodality, irregular spacing, bricolage, blanks, graphic images, handwritten text, photographs, drawings, and unconventional typesetting, appear as fully integrated visual elements that are part of the writing, featuring “the book as a multimedia format, one informed by and connected to digital

technologies” (Pressman 465). The resilience of print culture is unquestionable; books will not disappear, but neither will they escape the effects of the digital technologies that interpenetrate them.

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**“You Don’t Have the Right to Have Rights”:
Employing ICTs to Dismantle Government Myths around
Offshore Detention Centers on Guantánamo and Manus**

Tihana Klepač

Tihana Klepač is Associate Professor at the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb, where she teaches nineteenth-century Australian literature. She has published papers on Australian white settler literature and women’s writing. She is the author of *Dancing in Red Shoes: Barbara Baynton and the Australian Myth* (2022). She has co-edited *Irish Mirror for Croatian Literature: Theoretical Assumptions, Literary Comparisons, Reception* (2007) with Ljiljana Ina Gjurgjan and *English Studies from Archives to Prospects: Volume 1 – Literature and Cultural Studies* (2016) with Stipe Grgas and Martina Domines Veliki. Her research interests include nineteenth-century white settler literature of Australia and women’s life writing.

Abstract

“A life without speech and without action . . . is literally dead to the world” (Arendt 176). In acting and speaking we show who we are; we make our appearance in the world, and education is crucial in the process of acquisition of knowledge and skills required for this expression. It is a point where we decide not to strike from our children’s hands “their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world” (Arendt 196). Thus, we can understand education as a shielded site of experimentation to learn what citizenship practices are in informal settings. One such site are modern, interrelated forms of digital ICTs as they hold the possibility of becoming transformative of citizenship. Diamond and Plattner refer to them as “liberation technology” as they enable “citizens to report news, expose wrongdoing, express opinions, mobilize protest, monitor elections, scrutinize government, deepen participation, and expand the horizons of freedom” (4). *Poems from Guantánamo* (2007) edited by Marc Falkoff and *Don’t Forget Us Here: Lost and Found at Guantánamo* (2021) by Mansoor Adayfi provide a US equivalent to Australian Behrouz Boochani’s *No Friend but the Mountains* (2018) and *Freedom, Only Freedom* (2022) by giving a voice to detainees and making the inhumane and unlawful practices of detention centers visible by employing digital ICTs. These writings are not just acts of resistance and ways to reclaim identity but, by making them accessible to a wide audience, Falkoff and Adayfi have also made governments somewhat more accountable for their actions.

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Shifting the C(o)urse to Coursera: Using Digital Media as a Tool for Teaching English as a Foreign Language in High School

Matea Lacmanović

After having finished her MA studies in English and Croatian language and literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Rijeka, Matea Lacmanović moved to Graz and enrolled at a doctoral program in American studies at Karl Franzens University, where she is still working on her dissertation. Her field of interest soon narrowed down to media and cultural studies, women's rights, and feminism but has broadened to more pedagogy-oriented topics since she started working at a high school in Pazin, Croatia, in 2020. Her research has taken her to several international conferences in Europe as well as the US, where she completed a short research stay at the Northeastern University in Boston. She has also spent a year abroad in Maribor, Slovenia and attended the Graz International Summer School. She currently teaches several courses at the Faculty of Education, Juraj Dobrila University of Pula.

Abstract

During the COVID-19 pandemic, educators relied on digital technologies to assist them in providing lectures on every educational level. However, as soon as the situation regarding the pandemic-related restrictions started to normalize, some of the educators returned to their verified teaching methods and sources, thus ignoring the new media, which had been a crucial part of their teaching methods for the past two years. This paper is based on a short-term research I conducted at Juraj Dobrila Grammar and Vocational School in Pazin by including the online-learning platform Coursera in my English language teaching curriculum. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the advantages of utilizing online tools in teaching English as a foreign language and to conduct a comparative assessment of the language skills of grammar school students and students enrolled in a vocational curriculum.

Media Language as a Political Instrument in
The Hunger Games and *Red Queen*

Valentina Markasović

Valentina Markasović (1997) received her BA and MA degrees in History and English Language and Literature from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Croatia, where she currently works as a Teaching Assistant and is a doctoral student in the “Literature and Cultural Identity” program. She also works as an English teacher and a freelance translator. Her primary fields of interest are popular literature, fantastic literature, and children’s and young adult literature, with a focus on the representation and construction of women’s identities.

Abstract

In real life, as in fiction, political leaders use media to disseminate their messages to the public—in other words, their speeches and statements are televised so as to reach the widest possible audience. In his famous essay on political discourse “Politics and the English Language” (1946), George Orwell distinguishes two main modes of linguistic manipulation—persuasive speech and vagueness of language. This paper uses Orwell’s findings to examine the political language in two works of dystopian young adult fiction—*The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008–2010) by Suzanne Collins and the *Red Queen* series (2015–2018) by Victoria Aveyard. The paper first elaborates on Orwell’s claims and then delineates how the villains of these book series employ the same strategies and actively find ways to keep their subjects docile, confused, fearful, and divided. The analysis also shows that the protagonists of the series do not fall for lies; instead, they recognize them for what they are, question the regime’s inner workings, and ultimately rebel against the system.

**A Badge of Courage:
Globalizing the (Lost) Illusion(s) of the American Dream
in F.S. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby***

Aleksandar Mijatović

Aleksandar Mijatović is a Full Professor of Literary Theory and Literary History at the Department of Croatian Language and Literature, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Rijeka. He has authored chapters in edited collections published by Rodopi, Brill, and Routledge as well as articles in international academic journals, such as *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, *IKON: Journal of Iconographic Studies*, *Language Design: Journal of Theoretical and Experimental Linguistics*, etc. He is the author of a book entitled *Temporalities of Post-Yugoslav Literature: The Politics of Time* (Lexington Books, 2020) and co-editor of the recent volume *Reconsidering (Post-)Yugoslav Time: Towards the Temporal Turn in the Critical Study of (Post-)Yugoslav Literatures* (Brill, 2022).

Abstract

In Chapter 4 of *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Nick Carraway discovers that Montenegro awarded Jay Gatsby a war medal. Like most of Gatsby's fabrications, this one can neither be confirmed nor rejected. Gatsby spins this yarn as he recounts his life to Carraway in order to validate his success from the bottom up. This presentation will explore why Fitzgerald, a member of the group of American writers known as the Lost Generation, used this exotic motif. Prominent representatives of the Lost Generation, such as Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos, included in their fiction motifs stemming from the South Slavic world. However, in *The Great Gatsby*, this reference to a peripheral culture has a structural role in Gatsby's concoction of his life. Drawing upon this reference, this presentation will examine how the external provincializing of America relates to its internal provincializing.

ChatGPT and Teaching Literature

Evelina Miščin

Evelina Miščin is a Full Professor at the RIT Croatia and the School of Medicine in Zagreb. She teaches Writing, Critical Reading, courses in Literature, as well as medical English. She is the author of textbooks, dictionaries, and scholarly articles and has given numerous workshops in the field of teaching ESP both in Croatia and abroad. Her main interests include linguistics, particularly collocations, teaching ESP, as well as alternative ways of teaching literature. She holds an MA degree in literature (“David Storey – a Conflict between an Individual and the Environment”) from the University of Zagreb and a PhD in linguistics (“Verb Collocations in Medical English”) from the University of Osijek.

Abstract

This paper will deal with the danger and the use of ChatGPT in creative writing. The presentation will trace the history of AI generated literature, mentioning a French school of writers and mathematicians and their founder, Raymond Queneau. This group focused on poetry and used algorithms to change the nouns in poems, revealing structural elements of language. As an example, they used William Blake’s *Auguries of Innocence* (Du Sautoy 261). Similarly, software developers wanted to write a code that could generate a 50,000-word novel (Du Sautoy 260). For this purpose, they used various novels, like *Pride and Prejudice* and *Moby Dick*, to create an algorithm. After a brief literature review, the paper will present some examples of texts generated by ChatGPT. These texts will be compared to texts written by students. The last part of the paper questions whether the future of literature and any written assignments will be jeopardized by the artificial intelligence as the proliferation of tools such as ChatGPT could also lead to plagiarism in students’ work. It also examines the implications of ChatGPT in teaching literature and for academic work.

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**“Give Us Our Daily Dread”:
Dystopian Traces in the COVID-19 Media Discourse**

Jelena Pataki Šumiga

Jelena Pataki Šumiga holds a degree in English and Croatian Language and Literature as well as in Translation. A PhD candidate in Literature and Cultural Identity Studies at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Osijek, she is writing a doctoral dissertation titled “The (Ab)Use of the Body in Contemporary Anglophone Dystopian Novel.” As a TA at the same institution, she teaches the courses “Survey of English Literature I” and “Contemporary British Literature.” Her research interests include Anglophone literature and culture, with an emphasis on YA fiction, fantasy, and dystopian literature. She is also a member of the Croatian Literary Translators Association and has translated more than fifty novels from English to Croatian.

Abstract

Even before the war in Ukraine delivered the final blow to contemporary semblances of freedom, safety, and democracy in the Western civilized world, the COVID-19 pandemic has since the early 2020 reminded society at large that dystopias, despite being highly imaginative and often futuristic, are never a mere fancy. In fact, repressive social, political, linguistic, media, and other forms of discourse found in fictional dystopias are deeply grounded in reality. In the face of the pronounced “age of individualization,” one of the postulates of modern society, individual freedom, has been unmasked as an intensely fragile concept during the pandemic. The introduction of “the new normal”—the restriction of movement, the suddenly illegal physical contact, police hours, ostracization of the (potentially) infected, as well as peer pressure, underpinned by a constant and intimidating media rhetoric—has disclosed within an allegedly free society the notable inner workings of a repressive dystopia. Beyond the preventative and safety measures devised to curb the virus spreading, the typical dystopian inequality, political hypocrisy, and fear-mongering can be discerned, disseminated mainly through media. In tracing the social, political, and media discourses of Orwell’s classic dystopia *1984*, the aim of this paper is to exhibit the ways in which the COVID-19 media discourse connects the contemporary world with a typical dystopian society.

Tucson's Little Dalmatia: Transnational Migration from Southeastern Europe to the American Southwest, 1880–1920

Vjeran Pavlaković

Vjeran Pavlaković is a Full Professor at the Department of Cultural Studies at the University of Rijeka, Croatia. He received his PhD in History in 2005 from the University of Washington and has published articles on cultural memory, transitional justice in the former Yugoslavia, and Yugoslav volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. He is the co-editor of the volume *Framing the Nation and Collective Identity in Croatia* (Routledge, 2019), which was re-issued in Croatian in 2022. He was the lead researcher on the *Memoryscapes* project as part of Rijeka's European Capital of Culture in 2020, a co-founder of the Cres Summer School on Transitional Justice and Memory Politics, as well as a researcher for Rijeka/Fiume in Flux. His current research includes the transnational muralization of conflict and a history of Dalmatian immigrants in the American Southwest, which explores the trajectories of former Habsburg imperial subjects re-inventing themselves as a driving force in the Americanization of US borderlands.

Abstract

This presentation will examine the preliminary results of work on the book *Tucson's Little Dalmatia: Transnational Migration from Southeastern Europe to the American Southwest, 1880–1920*, the untold story of a group of European immigrants who settled in Tucson at the turn of the nineteenth century and whose fates were interwoven into the socio-economic history of both Arizona and their distant homeland on the Adriatic coast. Although the administrative records of the time considered them to be “Austrians,” new research has revealed that they originated from a small region located in the present-day Republic of Croatia, i.e., the historical region of Dalmatia, and, most notably, the city of Dubrovnik and its vicinity. Based on meticulous analysis of available written records, including city directories, voters' registers, family collections, newspaper articles, and newly discovered material in both Croatian and Arizona archives, this book uncovers the contributions of *Little Dalmatia*, a relatively small but influential immigrant community in Tucson between 1880 and 1920 that left its mark on the city at a time of its transition from a peripheral frontier outpost into a modern American metropolis. The transformations in Tucson as well as Southeastern Europe were particularly dramatic as the Great War interrupted migration patterns as well as communication and concepts of national belonging. Through the biographies of three of these “Dalmatians in the desert” (John Ivancovich, A.V. Grossetta, and Anton

Mazzanovich), the talk will explore issues of migration, white colonialism, national identities, borderland studies, and collective memory that intersects in the American Southwest.

What Is Sublime in the Iconography of the Media: Artistic and Verbal Images of the Corona Virus

Ivana Podnar

Ivana Podnar graduated in Art History and Comparative Literature in 2004 at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb. In 2013, she received her PhD in Urban Iconology from the Department of Art History at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana, with the topic “Urban Icons of Zagreb in the Period of the SFRY and Independent Croatia.” Her research interests are focused on urban iconography, the relationship between art and public space politics, the iconography of contemporary Christian architecture, and visual culture. Since 2014, she has been teaching Art History, Visual Culture, and Art Today at the School of Design at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Zagreb, and since 2022 Art History at the Academy of Dramatic Art, University of Zagreb.

Abstract

The paper investigates the role of media, artistic, and verbal images of the corona virus pandemic in creating feelings of fear that have a paralyzing effect on the individual, connecting them with Edmund Burke’s concept of the sublime. Through Burke’s distinction between the artistic and the political sublime, the revolutionary potential of the image, or rather its absence, is examined. Media images contain an iconographic pattern that incorporates Burke’s fundamental characteristics of the sublime: they are dark and obscure and embody the most powerful of all fears—the fear of death. The paper will present the results of the analysis carried out within the online project of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb *FB for Your Thoughts*, referring to the concepts of deprivation, infinity, uniformity, and silence as important aspects of the sublime. Artistic images dominantly communicate closure and acceptance of a state that leads to sensory deprivation—loss of contact with others. The emptiness of space, similarly to the isolation of man, contains meaning in what is not shown (the virus), which is the premise of creating such images. The paper will also analyze verbal images of the metaphorical language, which, in turn, create mental images of the virus as a subject that attacks, spreads, and threatens. A synergy of verbal, media, and artistic images affects the individual and society, activating the strongest possible experiences that are within the scope of human experience, which Burke calls the sublime.

War Blogs: Alternative Media in Narrating the War

Jasna Poljak Rehlicki

Jasna Poljak Rehlicki holds a position of an Assistant Professor at the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Osijek. She teaches undergraduate courses in twentieth-century American literature, American war literature, and contemporary American drama. Her research interests focus mainly on war literature, American myth, American drama, and American culture and society in general. She has spent a year in the United States as a Fulbright visiting researcher in Portland, Oregon. She is the co-editor of the books *Facing the Crises: Anglophone Literature in the Postmodern World* (2014) and *What's Past Is Prologue: Essays in Honour of Boris Berić's 65th Birthday* (2020) and the author of many articles on American literature and culture.

Abstract

In her study *Authoring War: The Literary Representation of War from the Iliad to Iraq*, Kate McLoughlin writes: “it now seems evident that the First World War’s natural form was the lyric poem, that the Second World War’s was the epic novel, that the Vietnam War’s was the movie,” and that the Iraq War’s natural form “may well turn out to be the blog” (10). Clearly, the nature of war itself has an impact on how it will be represented and remembered. Unlike in previous wars, the developments and the availability of technologies and media enable the twenty-first-century soldiers to “live virtually as the star of the ultimate war movie” (Peebles 3). Technology has allowed for a more immediate, first-hand experience of the war to reach the public gaze and, even more importantly, to challenge, disprove, or even subvert official military, political, and media reports. One such example is Colby Buzzell’s blog *CBFTW*, which he launched during his deployment to Iraq in 2003. Writing the blog in the midst of the war, in which he disputes many of the official reports, put him under the surveillance of the Pentagon itself. This talk will focus on how cynicism, sarcasm, and honesty of Buzzell’s blog entries contradicted the mainstream media and military reports of the Iraq War. Finally, this talk wishes to investigate the power of such alternative media to influence and steer public opinion and inspect which actions the military undertakes to regulate (censor) twenty-first-century war narratives.

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Between the Sacred and the Profane: Carnival and Spectacle in the Era of Social Media Cosmopolitanism

Petra Sapun Kurtin

Petra Sapun Kurtin is a doctoral candidate in English at the University of Zagreb (thesis: “Representation of New Orleans as a Port City in Recent American Fiction”) and currently teaches at the Department of English at the University of Rijeka, where she received a dual-degree in English and German. She was awarded the Fulbright scholarship for her interdisciplinary research on cities and literature, spending a research year at New York University, NYC, and Tulane University, New Orleans. She also spent a research year as a Doctoral Fellow at the University of Alberta in Canada (Wirth Doctoral Fellowship). She is the president of the Croatian Canadian Academic Society (HKAD) and a member of the Executive Board of Wirth Alumni Network. Her areas of scholarly interest include, more broadly, American, Canadian, and Mediterranean studies and, more closely, port cities from the humanities perspective, intersection of technology and culture, and theories of spatiality.

Abstract

This presentation explores the implication of experiencing the spectacle of locally rooted carnival traditions through the lens of globalized social media and what remains lost in translation. In recent years, a rising trend on social media featured calls for action regarding masking practices in carnivals in both US and Europe. Singled out and viewed out of context, carnival imagery on social media can simplify and obscure the complexity of local cultural customs. Simultaneously, the justification of tradition obscures the history and current role of heavily mediated city spectacles that are modern-day big-city carnivals. Which traditions and spatial practices deserve to remain sacred and which are considered profanity by the current standards of Western media landscape cosmopolitanism? By analyzing and comparing the backstories and impact of recent media-driven calls for action regarding carnival practices at New Orleans Mardi Gras and Rijeka Carnival, I will juxtapose the potency of both the “medium and the message” for their implications on spatial practices and dynamics in cities as well as discuss how the assumption of universalism in both contributes to a lack of nuance in the dialectics of public space. My analysis will rely on recent theories of critical cosmopolitanism (Christensen and Jansson, Kent and Tomsy) with regard to both the immediacy of social media and subversiveness of carnival practices as contemporary spaces of potential *communitas* (Turner).

“We Value Your Privacy”: The Social Media and Our Life Worlds

Jelena Šesnić

Jelena Šesnić, Full Professor, teaches in the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb. Her research interests encompass nineteenth-century US literature and culture, US ethnic literatures, methodologies of American Studies, transnational cultural processes (with special emphasis on the Anglophone Croatian diaspora), and memory studies. She is the author of two books and editor of two collections of essays. As a co-founder of the Croatian Association for American Studies, she co-organizes the society’s annual American Studies workshops. She edits, with Sven Cvek, *Working Papers in American Studies* (<https://openbooks.ffzg.unizg.hr/index.php/FFpress/catalog/series/WPAS>).

Abstract

My argument stems from a not particularly striking but ubiquitous observation on the implications of the widespread use of the social media and the internet, which increasingly impinge on the notions of privacy, data protection, human rights, and social dynamics. Drawing on some recent studies (by Ferguson, Putnam, and Zuboff, in particular), which, from their own varied points of view, consider different aspects of the pervasive use of social media in our lives, my presentation will address the particular ways in which the social media impact our life worlds and the potential consequences thereof.

Newspaper Headlines as a Worldbuilding Tool in Sanderson's *Wax & Wayne* Series

Petra Sršić

Petra Sršić (1997) is a doctoral student in the “Literature and Cultural Identity” program at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, where she also received her BA and MA degrees in English Language and Literature and History. She currently works as an English teacher. Her academic interests include various topics related primarily to fantasy literature, such as the representation of sexuality and the integrity of the female body. However, she is likewise interested in combining the study of history and literature with topics concerning medieval English literature and modern historical novels.

Abstract

Novels belonging to the genre of fantasy often feature imaginary worlds and societies, sometimes inspired by certain historical periods and processes. In Brandon Sanderson's *Wax and Wayne* series, the Elendel Basin and the Roughts exhibit certain elements of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. The growing importance of the media for the functioning and development of society is reflected in Sanderson's series, where the author includes a broadsheet headline in each of his novels. This presentation focuses on the impact of the newspapers on culture and the development of the literary world of the series. Their function is twofold; newspaper excerpts serve as additional material for the author to develop his world, and they allow readers to familiarize themselves with the functioning of society in the series. The presentation will analyze the excerpts based on the type of published content and its role in the narrative. It will demonstrate how elements of industrialization, consumer culture, and the frontier myth can easily be integrated into an imaginary world through the medium of the newspaper headline. Moreover, ideal cultural values and attitudes will be ascertained and the model of the ideal literary hero will be presented and compared to the myth of the frontier hero. Special attention will be given to the discourse on supernatural elements and the position of the wider population regarding the supernatural in the series.

**“A Stranger in a Strange Land”:
Reimagining Transatlantic Indigenous Modernity
through the Travel Writing of Gaagegigaabaw**

Michael P. Taylor

Michael P. Taylor is an Associate Professor of English and the Associate Director of American Indian Studies at Brigham Young University, Utah, USA. He currently holds the Butler Young Scholar appointment from the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies and is visiting the University of Graz as a US Fulbright Scholar of American Studies, where he is teaching Western American literatures and Indigenous North American Studies. He is the co-author of *Returning Home: Diné Creative Works from the Intermountain Indian School* (2021), published with University of Arizona Press. His scholarship has appeared in such venues as *Modernism/Modernity*, *American Quarterly*, *Native American Indigenous Studies*, and the *Routledge Handbook of North American Indigenous Modernisms*, with forthcoming pieces in *Western American Literature* and *PMLA*. His research focuses on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Indigenous literary activism and federal Indian boarding schools. He is currently working on a monograph, *The Indigenous Literary Collective*, which turns to Indigenous political collectives at the turn of the twentieth century to rehistoricize modernity as an era of trans-Indigenous solidarity. He is also co-editing a collection entitled *Boarding School Stories*, which brings together an interdisciplinary range of community-based approaches to reconciling and healing from the federal Indian boarding school system.

Abstract

In 1850, Anishinaabe writer and lecturer Gaagegigaabaw (George Copway) travelled throughout western Europe and subsequently published about his experiences on his way to attend the Third World Peace Congress in Frankfurt, Germany as the sole representative of the so-called Christian Indians of America. Throughout his travels, he was consistently confronted by the widespread popular images and imaginations of North American Indigeneity that had spread across nineteenth-century Europe. Rather than directly resist such reductive stereotypes, he often repurposed the image as he created a modern Indigenous identity that ultimately enabled him to discuss Indigenous realities and futures with some of the most important Western literary and political figures of the time. Much of the scholarship on Gaagegigaabaw, however, focuses on either his complicated life experiences and the performativity of his public persona, or on the lasting European fascination with all things Indigenous. Yet, his travel writings suggest a purposeful, if also experimental, adaptation of Europe’s Indigenous

imagery while presenting Indigenous peoples as remaining rooted in Indigenous homelands and the self-determination of sovereign Indigenous nations. Building upon recent scholarship in Indigenous modernism/modernity and transatlantic Indigenous histories, this paper turns to Gaagegigaabaw's writings about modern Europe and the Indigenous modernist aesthetic through which he briefly became a representative voice in the leading discourse on international peace. By returning to the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writings of such transatlantic Indigenous travelers as Gaagegigaabaw, this paper offers a necessary next step within an ever-growing literary map of transatlantic Indigenous modernity.

Alice Munro: The Best Moment to Snap a Photo

Nikola Tutek

Nikola Tutek was born in Croatia in 1978. In 2003, he received his MA degree with honors in English and Croatian Language and Literature from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Rijeka with a thesis on Quentin Tarantino's films. He received his PhD with honors in 2018 from the Karl-Franzens University of Graz, Austria with the thesis "Visual and Verbal Interrelations in Canadian Short Fiction." From 2007 to 2010, he worked as an independent scholar. From 2011 to 2012, he held a position as a Croatian Language Instructor at the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University in Kaliningrad, Russian Federation. Since 2012, he has been employed at the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Rijeka, as a Teaching Assistant till 2022, and as Assistant Professor since 2022. His main field of research interest is Canadian literature.

Abstract

This paper provides an analysis of Alice Munro's short story collection *Too Much Happiness* (2009). It focuses on Munro's writing style and pays special attention to her frequent usage of typically one-word verbless sentences at the end of paragraphs. The analysis aims to show how Munro's peculiar stylistic technique enhances her literary world creation, how it creates suspense and produces emotional effect on the readership, and, most importantly, how it complements Munro's literary technique of creating pen-photographs. Finally, the paper will provide a possible classification of the repetitive grammatical and thematic patterns in Munro's short and truncated sentences.

Media Stereotyping of Black Women: Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire

Tatjana Vukelić

Tatjana Vukelić received her BA and MA degrees in English Language and Literature and Russian Language and Literature from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Rijeka, respectively. She holds a PhD from the University of Rijeka with the thesis “Race, Gender, and Sex Discrimination of Black Women in the Literary Works of African American Women Writers.” She is the author of a recently published book titled *The Scars of Black America* (2022) and several scholarly articles, both in English and Russian, published in Croatia and abroad.

Abstract

Societal stereotypes about a wide range of social groups that persist in the United States are promoted, or reinforced, through mass media and can have numerous detrimental consequences. Stereotypes are sometimes based on some amount of real difference that distinguishes groups, and sometimes they are not. Even if stereotypes reflect some amount of reality, they can lead to inaccurate overgeneralization of all members of a group and to ignoring other important information about individuals, with a variety of adverse consequences. The representation of Black women in media is often flawed, as ideologies shaped by racism dominate the social construction of the representation of Black women in media. Stereotyping occurs when a negative and/or misleading generalization is made about a category of people and is then used to predict or explain behavior. The portrayals of Black women in media are often inaccurate, and these false representations can have devastating impacts on the perceptions of Black women worldwide. Black women’s negative and stereotypical portrayal in media has historically been dominated by three images: Jezebel, Sapphire, and Mammy, and each of the three stereotypical representations of Black women causes harm in that it inaccurately represents Black women. The Jezebel stereotype came out of slavery as a way for white men to justify their victimization of Black women owned as slaves, as the Jezebel was depicted as a Black woman with an insatiable appetite for sex. The most pervasive image of Black women is the Mammy. Originating in the South during the time of slavery, this image associates Black women with obesity, having dark skin, a wide nose, dressing in bandanna clothing, and always wearing an apron. As representations of Black women continue to shift and evolve, so do the labels associated with them. Negative stereotypes in media applied to African American women have been fundamental to Black women’s oppression.

Analysis of the News and Social-Media Coverage of the British Royal Family: Views May Vary

Jadranka Zlomislić

Jadranka Zlomislić is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Osijek, Croatia. She grew up in the United States, where she received her elementary and high school education. After returning to Croatia, she earned her BA in English and German Language and Literature at University of Osijek, her MA in English literature from the University of Zagreb, and her PhD in English literature from the University of Osijek. She teaches British and American Culture and Civilization. Her research interests include American and British cultural studies, American academic fiction, and cultural translation.

Abstract

The fascination with the British monarchy that spans the globe is particularly visible in the United States. Despite fighting a bloody war to separate themselves from Great Britain, Americans are still heavily obsessed with the British royal family. The interest endures in great part due to the air of mystery and celebrity depicted in media productions as well as real-life events that keep providing media fodder on both sides of the pond. Among the latest and most controversial royal family moments are those regarding Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, also known as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex. This study analyzes the treatment of the Sussexes in the mass media and on social networks by examining the Netflix productions *The Crown* and the Harry and Megan docuseries, Meghan Markle's Spotify podcast *Archetypes*, as well as the correlation between articles and interviews in both American and British media and Twitter and Facebook posts. Drawing upon the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) by Blumler and Katz, which attempts to explain what social and psychological needs motivate audiences to select particular media channels and content choices, it examines how varying reactions pertaining to cultural differences reinforce preexisting attitudes regarding the British royal family in order to reveal the gratifications and experiential factors accompanying the participation of individuals in news production and diffusion in large global virtual communities.