

Mod Con schedule, Spring 2023

22.02

“Welcome to the Party: Introducing the Alegropolitics of Connection”

Ananya Kabir, King’s College London

Colonialism, enslavement, dispossession, and displacement: modernity's foundational traumas also catalysed unexpected new cultural forms, including globally popular social dances that combine the European-derived partner-hold with African-derived rhythmic elements. Unequal and violent encounters generated dances based on the shared exhilaration of partnership. My research has mobilised this paradox to articulate a relationship between trauma, resistance, and survival that I call 'alegropolitics', or the politics of collective joy. This year, I'm writing a book that draws on ten years of multilingual, multi-sited, archival and field research, to chart alegropolitics through the transnational spread of salsa, tango, lindy hop, zouk, bachata, and kizomba. Bringing together performance, dance, and memory studies, I bridge text and body to investigate the potential of African-heritage partner dances to transform cultural appropriation to inter-cultural reparation. From their racialised imbrication within capitalist leisure industries, I retrieve the dance floor as a site of intersubjective connection, to reroute standard narratives of global modernity through the persistent trace and memory of 'Africa'. In this talk, I'll present the introductory chapter of the book in progress, which is called, 'Alegropolitics: Connecting on the Afromodern Dance Floor.'

8.03

Present a Problem, Bring a Text

In this practical workshop, everyone is encouraged to bring a short text and/or a problem that they have encountered in their research, and has ten minutes to present it or share it with the group. The text/problem can be of any kind, literary, critical, methodological, theoretical, etc. The only requirements are that it/they be related to research and that it can profitably be shared with the group in about 10 minutes.

24.03 (10h-13h, PHIL203)

Reflections on Method

The two workshop leaders will reflect on the question of method in their work, and especially on their manoeuvres between nineteenth-century literature and cinema.

Alan Hollinghurst, Derek Jarman, and the Lessons of *Bajazet*
Denis Flannery (School of English, University of Leeds)

This paper explores how, in the early 1990s, Racine's *Bajazet* found itself translated and revived in the work of two English gay/queer artists: the novelist Alan Hollinghurst (1954 –) and the painter and film-maker Derek Jarman (1942-1994). The former's translation of Racine's play was performed in London in 1990 and the latter's 1991 film adaptation of Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* (1593) echoed many features of Racine's Oriental tragedy. Jarman's script trims the near 3000 lines of Marlowe's original to less than 1000, closer to the sleek scale of most of Racine's plays. *Bajazet* is set in a harem, a confined space towards which terrible forces converge. Jarman's film was shot in a walled world, one that is, like Racine's seraglio as described by Roland Barthes, a 'ceaselessly inverted structure, a site both smothered and smothering'. Allusively and explicitly, Hollinghurst's translation and Jarman's film explore pressing questions of the early 1990s: the ongoing HIV/AIDS crisis, the first Gulf war, and the eruption of queer politics.

This discussion is fuelled by the striking fact that both Jarman and Hollinghurst attended, albeit over ten years apart, the same school (Canford School, in Dorset) where, for at least one of them, Racine figured prominently in their studies. This paper will ask what is at stake when we consider Racine's play as a text which can be 'taught'. It will also explore the extent to which different relationships (between, say, Acomat and *Bajazet*, between Marlowe's King Edward and his brother Kent) in both Hollinghurst's translation and Jarman's film intertwine desire, attachment, and attempts at teaching.

The Rhythm of Doubt: Turner, Woolf, Early Cinema Andrew H. Miller (Johns Hopkins University)

In this paper I identify a pattern of thinking common both to Woolf's Victorian precursors, and to the cinema that fascinated her.

5.04

Getting Grants

Ananya Kabir, King's College London

Ananya will talk us through the stages of grant application and management around the project that she presented in our first workshop.

26.04

Works in Progress

Georgia Fulton (UNIGE): "Catholic Rites in Seamus Heaney's Poetry: Inverted Language"

Nora Zufferey (UNIGE): "Case study. 'Come Back Pharoah' and 'Reggae Sounds': Sound Scattering and Poetic Gathering"

15.05 (14.15h -18h, Uni Dufour U365)

Philosophy by Other Means

Robert Pippin, University of Chicago

Does literature do philosophy by other means? What is the relation between philosophical reflection and the literary text in its different generic forms? This question has haunted literary analysis since Socrates in the *Ion* noted that poets cannot explain what they declaim, and has shaped the theoretical formation of our discipline through deconstruction, the death of the author, speech-act theory and questions about literature and ethics. But the question of literature's philosophical significance is wider than that. In this half-day workshop, we will discuss the role of philosophy in our work, and address the ground-breaking work of Robert Pippin in thinking through the philosophical significance of modern literature. Pippin has written field-defining studies of Hegel, but also of Henry James, Marcel Proust and, most recently, J.M. Coetzee. His work offers an accessible account of how literature responds in its own ways to the problems of authenticity, metaphysics, performance, alienation and identity in the contexts of modern life, in ways that answer philosophical questions that philosophy itself cannot get to grips with. His work will appeal to a broad range of PhD students working in theory, aesthetics, performativity and morality.

The workshop will comprise a session of student presentations on the relation to philosophy in their own writing and an open discussion, followed by a talk by Pippin himself on the topic of "The Problem of Truth in Novels and Cinema".

The problem of truth in novels and cinema is whether there is any. Philosophers have been skeptical that there can be for two reasons. The first is that they think that only propositions asserted in judgments can be truth bearers. The second reason is consequent upon the first: literature and movies do not assert anything. They are made up narratives about fictional beings. In this talk I want to introduce the claim that there is a form of truth available in great literature and great cinema and thereby address the question: if literature and cinema can be said to convey something true, what could such a non-assertoric content be, and how could any such truth be distinguished from the mere appearance of truth? The examples to be discussed are drawn from the thirteen films made by Robert Bresson between 1943 and 1983.