

**Centre for Narrative Research in the Social Sciences
University of East London**

To THink is To eXperiment
CELEBRATING A DECADE OF CNR DOCTORAL RESEARCH

**Wednesday, 18th May, 2011, Docklands Campus,
Room: BS 3.22, Library Building, Business School Block, Third Floor**

10.00-10.10	Introduction
10.10 -10.40	Memorial Lecture for Siyanda Ndlovu <i>“Both sides of the story”: narrative identity and the curatorial imagination.</i> Dr Linda Sandino
10.40-11.05	<i>Negotiating Sexual Modesty: Analysing Narrative Moments within the Microphysics of Education</i> Dr Cigdem Esin
11.05-11.30	<i>How do I look at M.E? The advantages of using a pilot study</i> Sharon Gallagher
11.30-11.45	Coffee Break
11.45-12.10	<i>Dancing a neighbourly two-step: insider/outsider complexities of interviewing in one’s own backyard</i> Nicola Samson
12.10-12.35	<i>Translation Dilemmas in Narrative Research</i> Mastoureh Fathi
12.35-13.00	<i>Intra-group negotiation of a collective identity through storytelling: how intersecting stories work to transform the Dutch Moroccan identity.</i> Jacomijne Prins
13.00-13.45	Lunch Break
13.45- 14.10	<i>Sex Sells? Polytheist Eroticism on Early 19th-Century American Paper Money</i> Dr Gudrun Loehrer
14.10-14.35	<i>La-bas: the suspended image and the politics of anti-messianism.</i> Dr Chrysanthi Nigianni
14.35-14.50	Coffee Break

14.50-15.15	<i>Mothers living with HIV tell their stories</i> Denise Proudfoot
15.15-15.40	<i>Mirabilia Domestica - a guided tour through a cabinet of textile wonders</i> Dr Solveigh Goett
15.40-16.00	<i>Discussion</i>
16.00-18.00	Picnic at the University Square

Abstracts:

Dr Linda Sandino

“Both sides of the story”: narrative identity and the curatorial imagination.

In this paper to honour Siyanda’s memory and research on identity, I’d like to explore a current life history interview with a curator of fashion at the Victoria & Albert Museum whose work encompasses “radical” forms of curating (radical) fashion within the context of an established, historic museum and collection. “Both sides of the story”, a quotation from the interview, refers to the curator’s pragmatism and yet intense desire for innovation and change. The etymology of the term ‘radical’ originally designated ‘the humour or moisture once thought to be present in all living organisms as a necessary condition of their vitality,’ and it continues to denote a fundamental quality ‘advocating thorough or far-reaching change’ (OED, 2008). However, given museums and curators’ responsibilities are as custodians of an archive/collection, what is the function of ‘radical’ in this narrative? How does ‘fashion’ as a concept provide a temporal and agentic dimension to the possibility of change? Is a radical disposition, a commitment to change, a fundamental characteristic of Ricoeur’s *ipse-identity*? Or, does the curator’s narrative express Brockmeier’s ‘reaching for meaning’ as a space for imaginative creative freedom and its possibilities?

References:

- J. Brockmeier (2009) ‘Reaching for Meaning: Human Agency and the Narrative Imagination’. *Theory and Psychology*, vo. 19 (2), pp.213-233.
P. Ricoeur (1992) *Onself As Another*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Dr Cigdem Esin

Negotiating Sexual Modesty: Analysing Narrative Moments within the Microphysics of Education

Drawing on Foucault, I analysed sexual narratives of educated young women within a wider network of disciplinary practices on women’s sexuality within the context of Turkish modernity for my doctoral research. Education of women has been a long-standing element of the Turkish modernisation. Particularly women’s participation in higher education reflects the socio economic status of women as well as their engagement with the secular and westernised ideals of the modernisation project. Educational institutions have been designed to construct women as well-educated so that they will internalise and carry on the secular, progressive, westernised processes in modern Turkey while simultaneously being shaped by traditional gender discourses. Therefore, these institutions became the sites of

disciplinary practices surrounding young women's sexuality. However, education in modern Turkey has not only functioned as it was originally designed. It has also created spaces for young women to move beyond the dominant discourses of Turkish modernisation while deconstructing their gendered configuration and re-constructing their relationship with these dominant discourses.

In this paper, I am re-visiting the data so as to trace narrative moments, to expose the multiplicity of strategic positions young women inhabit in their negotiations within the microphysics of education.

Mastoureh Fathi

Translation Dilemmas in Narrative Research

This paper looks at the dilemmas existing in the process of translation of interview data in a narrative research with educated Iranian women living in Britain. Translation is an 'act of dialogue' between data and the translator/researcher. It is an evolving process, which depends on mutual understanding, and interpretation of meanings between the speaker and the audience. Translation involves various and complicating layers of context, history and political decision-making of the translator/researcher. This makes translation not only linguistic but also a cultural performance of narration. Drawing on examples from semi-structured interviews, this paper discusses the difficulties and limitations of the translator's decision-making with regard to the contextual, historical and political complexities of the lives of the participants and the translator at historical moments and places.

Sharon Gallagher

How do I look at M.E? The advantages of using a pilot study

My main project investigates the topic of 'uncertainty' in relation to ME/CFS, a chronic illness, previously known as 'ME'. The overall project uses a Foucauldian genealogical perspective to examine the macro (big story) of categorisation, alongside, the micro (life stories) of those who have experienced severe symptoms associated with a diagnosis of ME/CFS.

A pilot study was carried out to validate the most appropriate narrative method for my main project. The process allowed me to test for feasibility and the logistical demands faced by both the participant and researcher. My pilot study was based on one male participant who had been formally diagnosed with moderate symptoms of ME/CFS. I carried out two separate interviews to evaluate both the illness narrative and life history approaches. I documented my observations and personal involvement during the interview process. Comparing the two narrative approaches, I conclude that the 'illness narrative' confines, and limits the participant's experiences to that of illness. In contrast, the 'life history' approach offered an opportunity for the participant to explore his life in its entirety, where the experiences of 'illness' emerged as part of his lifeworld. In addition, to the life history interview, I also supplied the participant with a camera to compile a photographic diary. I argue that the second interview on his photo-elicited diary gave the participant a further means by which to discuss and illustrate the difficult 'unspeakable' and 'forgotten' moments of his life history interview and a window in to how the world looks to him in the here and now. The inclusion of visual stimuli thereby enriched the narrative data and at the same time remained

sensitive to the ways in which it is often difficult to talk about the problems of living with ME/CFS. These preliminary findings also gave me the opportunity to test ideas which had emerged due to my genealogical perspective into the categorisation of ME/CFS. The pilot study has therefore improved the quality of my overall design for my main proj

Dr Solveigh Goett

Mirabilia Domestica - a guided tour through a cabinet of textile wonders

In 16th century Europe, scholars were striving to come to a better understanding of the diversity and complexity of the world by creating a microcosm of its wonders in their collections of *naturalia* and *artificialia*. These cabinets of curiosities were significant sites for material, scientific and artistic investigations; in present-day terminology they could be described as interdisciplinary practice-based research and resource centres. Acknowledged as the forerunner to universities, museums and galleries alike, the pre-disciplinary *Wunderkammer* has been rediscovered in recent years as an alternative model for knowledge derived through sensory correspondences rather than linguistic means, been linked to contemporary contexts of interdisciplinarity and likened to the visual networks of digital technologies.

Inspired by the model of the past, its enduring legacy and subversive potential, textile artist and researcher Solveigh Goett has created her cabinet of domestic wonders to be explored by curious hands and minds in search of missing links in the fabric of life. *Mirabilia Domestica* draws on tacit textile knowledge and pays homage to the small things whose significance is often overlooked; it is a space for meaning making, memory work, enchantment, evocation and flights of the imagination. In words and images, through fabrics and fabrications, this paper reflects on concepts of curiosity, meandering methods and sensory investigations that challenge the logo-centric bias of academia as well as the ocular-centricity of the visual arts.

Dr Gudrun Loehrer

Sex Sells? Polytheist Eroticism on Early 19th-Century American Paper Money

While the front of the U.S. banknotes of the 20th century have been illustrated predominantly with dead presidents, the visual imagery of dollar bills during the *free banking era* covered a much wider range of topics. Since national paper money politics were not regulated, the visual politics of the medium were equally unregulated. Recurring subjects on the notes were agricultural and industrial scenes, but also the depiction of 'happy' slaves, Native Americans and allegorical depictions of nude Greek and Roman goddesses. The predecessors of the current dollar (clearly committed to monotheism) thus seem to refer to a greater variety of religious commitments. However, this paper analyzes the religious, the erotic-aesthetic and the gendered dimension of carrying illustrations of nude women in the wallet. Banknotes need to be understood as circulating cultural products. Images of female nudity were not exactly considered to be appropriate in mainstream Victorian culture; on the contrary, many states had obscenity laws and regulated the degree of nudity that could be shown. This paper asks why the depiction of female nudity when it took the form of mythological figures was acceptable on the mass medium of bank notes. It draws a connection between erotic imagery and allegorical nudity

on 19th-century American paper money and scrutinizes the idea of the production of trust and value with regard to the imagery.

Dr Chrysanthi Nigianni

La-bas: the suspended image and the politics of anti-messianism.

“When everything has been said, when the main scene seems over, there is what comes afterwards...”

Antonioni, Cinema 58, Sept. 1958.

Departing from the concept of ‘suspension’, a rather ambiguous and polyvalent concept with a range of definitions such as, abrogation or cessation, temporary debarment, postponement and/or prolongation, this article wishes to argue for the cinematic image of suspension as a thinking-image that politicizes the notion of ‘time’ and ‘temporality’. By giving time an ontological priority, the suspended image breaks away from a valorisation of visuality which has historically enhanced the privileging of space over time (psychoanalytic concepts of ‘scopophilia’, ‘voyeurism’, ‘gaze’ are still dominant and key terms in order to think of the cinematic image), assuming instead a different ‘perception’ and ‘thinking’ that break away from the norms of representation. Hence, an image that does not serve (re)cognition and command/action, but persists and endures as the power to be affected. It will be suggested that the latter constitutes the essence of the suspended image.

This will be further explored through Deleuze’s and Guattari’s concept of passive vitalism, defined in their work *What is Philosophy?* as “a force that is but does not act – that is therefore a pure internal awareness”. The paper will argue for a new cinematic aesthetics of vitalism, in which we can find different possibilities for the conception of political bodies and their relation to images outside representation and recognition. This new aesthetics will be sought in Chantal Akerman’s film *Là-bas (Down There, 2006)*; a film that with its stillness and stubborn fixedness, constitutes a suspension-film: a film made as a refusal to the aboutness of the film (a film ‘should’ always be about something); a film that negates film as representation, film as command, film as action.

At the heart of one the most debatable political spaces (Tel Aviv) Akerman creates a film of the seer and not of the agent. By bringing out the inhuman powers of duration, as internal differentiating, change and transformation, the film runs still, expressing an undecidability between prolongation and cessation, postponement and debarment; an undecidability that in turn puts forward a politics of vitalism, not as representation and belonging but as negotiation of the multiple affections and attachments that compose the body-behind-the-camera and the image-as-body. A vital body precisely because of its radical passivity and of its distinction from the ‘I’ viewpoint’ that commands. *Là-bas* produces a true ‘foreign body’, a body that eschews self-recognition mainly because it does not possess its time or its space. On the contrary, the ‘I’ is always a second comer, one caught in suspension: not a messianic body-to-come as the self-righteous Subject, but always the ‘second’ coming of the ‘I’, as a radical counter-messianism and falsification. In *Là-bas* to come second, to be this highest point of evolution, progress and rational development is not to have an existential priority; it is to be belated.

Jacomijne Prins

Intra-group negotiation of a collective identity through storytelling: how intersecting stories work to transform the Dutch Moroccan identity.

Researchers taking a social constructionist perspective on identity agree that identities are constructed and negotiated in interaction. In ethnicity research, interaction mainly concerns in-group vs. out-group interaction. In this paper we use a narrative approach to study intra-group identity construction and negotiation among Dutch-Moroccan young adults. Narratives were elicited in focus groups of structurally varied (male/female, educational level) and mixed composition. Our analysis focused on thematic and structural similarities in short stories narrated in interaction. Central to our analysis were the narrators' evaluations of events. We found that Dutch Moroccan young adults in focus groups collectively narrativize experiences of exclusion and discrimination, constructing a collective 'ethnic minority' identity. However, we also found that this identity was not uncontested. Our respondents used their own everyday experiences to reconstruct or negotiate their personal identity and the identity of their group. These everyday experiences varied considerably per group. In the different groups we found traces of ethnic, religious, gender and regional identities which intersect with the construction and negotiation of a collective Dutch Moroccan identity.

Denise Proudfoot

Mothers living with HIV tell their stories.

This narrative doctorate study explores the challenges faced by mothers living with HIV (MLH). Few studies have considered their lives as they juggle HIV disease with the responsibilities of caring for their children. Recently Vallido et al (2010) found that mothers living with illness consider themselves as mothers first and patients second which does impact on their experiences. Since 1990, over a thousand babies have been born to HIV positive mothers living in Ireland (NSHPC, 2009). My presentation will focus on my research story so far as my interviews draw to a close. I have used a purposive sample of women from a HIV peer support centre in Dublin, Ireland. The proposed analysis of the collected stories will be presented. This narrative study specifically considers

- The mothering experiences of the research participants while living with the social impact of HIV.
- An account of how the lives of MLH be understood theoretically in relation to existing literature on living with HIV.

The collected narratives will allow for the women's experiences to be heard within their own context and documented.

References

- National Study of HIV in Pregnancy and Childhood (NSHPC) Summary (NSHPC) Data September (2009) accessed @<http://www.nshpc.ucl.ac.uk/>.
- Vallido T, Wilkes L, Carter B & Jackson D (2010) Mothering disrupted by illness: a narrative synthesis of qualitative research *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 66(7), 1435–1445.

Nicola Samson

Dancing a neighbourly two-step: insider/outsider complexities of interviewing in one's own backyard.

Getting to know your neighbours can potentially be the making of great friendships, degenerate into fraught enmity, or produce cool indifference. The highs and lows of living amongst others does not usually engender much more than a passing thought but living on the same street as your interviewees brings into question ethical and relationship concerns that are unlikely to arise in the usual research relationship. This paper will consider some of the issues that have arisen for me as I undertake narrative life story interviews with neighbours in my street for my PhD research on women's experience of belonging.