

**Twentieth Annual York Centre for International and Security Studies
Conference Program**

305 York Lanes
York University, Toronto
20-21 March 2013

Wednesday, March 20, 2013

10:30 – 10:40 **Opening Remarks**

10:40 – 12:20 **Panel I: Popular Culture and World Politics**

Moderator: David Mutimer

A Song of Rings and Hobbits: The Political Dialectic of Lord of the Rings and Game of Thrones
John Gallagher, York University

Imagining Insecurity: A Critique of the Images and Discourses of Superheroes and Security
Lori Crowe, York University

Popular culture and power: reading imperialism in Avatar and media discourses on Idle No More
Laura Pin, York University

Critical (Dis)engagement: War Videogames and the MIME-NET
Abhinav Kumar, York University

The More Things Change: 24, Homeland and Representational Practices in the Bush/Obama 'War on Terror'
Julian Manyoni, York University

12:30-1:15

Lunch – 7th Floor Lounge York Research Tower

1:30 – 3:00

Panel II: Narrative as Politics: Reflections on the Place of Voice in International Relations

Moderator: Elizabeth Dauphinee

On Nurturing Slow Learning through Alternative Narrative and Dialogue: Using Embodied Hybridity, Lack of Predictability, Love, Patience, and Humor to Transform the Ethics of Privileged Students and Scholars
Melissa Finn, Wilfrid Laurier University

Levinas, Narrative, and Healthcare
Nelly Jebran, York University

Through a Glass, Darkly: The Opacity of the Authentic in Autoethnography and Fiction
Kate M. Daley, York University

Silence Shouts: Writing and Forgiveness
Aytak Akbari-Dibavar, York University

3:10-4:50

Panel III: International Politics in Likely and Unlikely Places

Moderator: Sandra Whitworth

The Politics of Natural Knowing: Contraceptive Plant Properties in the Americas

Rachel O'Donnell, York University

"No idle sightseers": The Ulster Women's Unionist Council and the Ulster Crisis (1912-1914)

Pamela McKane, York University

A Kodak Moment in Toronto: The Residual Political Economy of Communication

Patricia Mazepa and Paula John, York/Ryerson University

Graffiti as Mass Media in Post-Dictatorial Uruguay

Ximena Gristci, York/Ryerson University

Canada's Shifting Approaches to International Cultural Relations after the Cold War

Amanda Coles, McMaster University

Thursday, March 21, 2013

10:45 – 12:15 Panel IV: Post-Communist Reconsiderations

Moderator: Sergei Plekhanov

Competing Visions of Democracy in the Post-Soviet Space
Seva Gunitsky, University of Toronto

When An Unstoppable Force Meets An Immovable Object: Russia as a US Foreign Policy Problem

Jon Lawrence, York University

Yugonostalgia Revisited: Political Protest and Resistance in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Goja Sevo, York University

12:15 – 1:10

Lunch -7th Floor Lounge York Research Tower

1:15 – 2:45

Panel V: Border Logics, Border Politics

Moderator: Elizabeth Lunstrum

*Exploring the Biosecurity Implications of
Transfrontier Conservation*
Francis Massé, York University

*'Seeing like a border city': The politics of refuge and
resistance in Detroit-Windsor*
Julie Young, York University

*Not a Border to Be Seen: Living Through the Vanishing
Palestinian Landscape*
Nayrouz Abu-Hatoum, York University

*Postponing Control: The Logics of Facilitating the Entry
of Irregular Migrants in Spain*
David Moffette, York University

2:55 - 4:25

Panel VI: Spaces of Mobility and the Border

Moderator: Robert Latham

*The State of Exception and the Making of Citizens:
Biopolitics and the
Neoliberal Ordering of Society*
Lina Nasr, York University

*Navigating Precarious Subjectivities: An Examination of
Agency in the Case of Victims of Trafficking via Human
Security*
James FitzGerald, York University

*The Durand Line: Afghanistan and Pakistan's Disputed
Border*
Mejda Joya, York University

Abstracts

Through a Glass, Darkly: The Opacity of the Authentic in Autoethnography and Fiction

Kate M. Daley,
Department of Political Science, York University

“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face” – 1 Cor. 13:12, KJV

“As a reader, as soon as I see the word I used (or avoided, for even avoidance is a way of using it), I know I have a fictional character in front of me.” – Sven Lindqvist

Perhaps autoethnography is, in part, our attempt to see face to face: to engage, with authentic knowledge of each other, as human beings. More importantly, part of the validity we attribute to autoethnography is based on the premise that it reflects authentic experience in a way that other methods do not. But Lindqvist may be right. The narrative “I” may always be fictional. The first-person subject is necessarily opaque. We still see through a glass, darkly. Should the presumed value of autoethnography rest on authenticity? I highlight some reasons I am inclined to answer this question in the negative, and I begin to tease out some of the implications of doing so. I suggest autoethnography may not need to insulate itself from comparisons with and metaphors of fiction in order to be a crucial tool for social scientists.

Silence Shouts: Writing and Forgiveness

Aytak Akbari-Dibavar
Department of Political Science, York University

How can personal experiences of loneliness and displacement be challenged without depoliticization? While feelings of loneliness are often isolating, narrative writing allows us to maintain the political nature of those experiences. Through a discussion of my student activism in Iran with

political prisoners, I try to explore the voices of those who have been imprisoned and sentenced to death, and to make sense of those voices within my own experiences of forced separation from my loved ones. I explore the place of guilt and forgiveness in narrative writing, how my own feelings of guilt inform my memory of those who were executed, and how narrative can allow those wounds to talk and cry. I try to show how narrative respects and values the voices of the wounded, marginalized, and condemned without depoliticizing their points of view. I try to show how narrative can highlight and amplify the pain that is otherwise silenced in IR and in social science – in other words, how silence shouts.

A Song of Rings and Hobbits: The Political Dialectic of Lord of the Rings and Game of Thrones

John Gallagher
York University

In the early 21st century, we have witnessed the triumphant return of the high-fantasy genre in popular fiction, and the domination of popular culture by fantasy tropes. Peter Jackson’s film adaptations of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* novels became the highest-grossing film trilogy of all time; in television, the HBO series *Game of Thrones*, adapted from George R.R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, debuted to record viewership in 2011. The fantasy genre has never enjoyed such a sweeping cultural appeal. Far from being an ephemeral pop culture fad, I argue that the immense popularity of high fantasy at this time is a decisive cultural indicator, with deep roots in our post-9/11 discursive world. The purpose of myth is to construct meaning. Yet fantasy is not monolithic; I analyze how two recent and popular examples of high fantasy, Jackson’s *Lord of the Rings* and HBO’s *Game of Thrones*, support wildly different understandings of the current political and cultural moment. Specifically, I argue that the foundational difference between each text is the role of the supernatural, which produces differences in each moral universe: one the one hand, the formation of a rationalist deontological ethic and on the other, an ‘immoral ethic’ of radical individualism. This distinction, I argue, breeds political difference, both within the text and without; each represents a discursive

'coping strategy,' which viewers may appropriate for purposes of political critique, self-justification, organization, and resistance. Thus, the popularity of fantasy is in some ways representative of and in some ways constitutive of a complex moral and political dialectic at work in Western culture.

On Nurturing Slow Learning through Alternative Narrative and Dialogue: Using Embodied Hybridity, Lack of Predictability, Love, Patience, and Humor to Transform the Ethics of Privileged Students and Scholars”

Melissa Finn
Department of Political Science, Wilfrid Laurier University

Like the slow eating movement which seeks to re-invest importance in local growing cooperatives and transform the kinds of ingredients people grow, combine, and consume, slow learning is about having patience with privilege, re-orienting ethics away from centers to neglected peripheries, and about transforming learning (for students and scholars) from the fast and furious consumption of taken-for-granted ideas and premises of thought to learning that fosters healthy community engagement, respect for self and other, awareness of the violence of knowledge production, and, that reduces dependence on fear as a mechanism for guiding political designs, interactions, and processes. I argue that slow learning is cultivated through the use of alternative narrative, uncomfortable dialogue, and bold, fearless risk-taking, and by maximizing the effect of embodied hybridity, lack of predictability, love, patience, and humor on the skeptic.

Levinas, Narrative, and Healthcare

Nelly Jebran
Department of Political Science, York University,

Through a Levinasian ethics, my research critiques the experience of healthcare, focusing on the encounters of families of children with cognitive impairments. Some of these families have felt disillusionment regarding the care of their children in a healthcare system that, I argue, may overlook ethics (the ethical relation between the Same and the Other emphasised by Levinas) for the sake of calculative politics and the goals of distributive justice. It is my hope that narrative, in the spirit of Levinas, will welcome the “speech” of the Other and allow for an embrace of these families’ experiences in a way that avoids their thematisation. It is my fear, nonetheless, that narrative may itself become a “method” in my research and, as such, risk eclipsing the core ethical relation and diminishing my responsibility to those whose experiences I will communicate.

Critical (Dis)engagement: War Videogames and the MIME-NET

Abhinava Kumar
Graduate Fellow, YCISS

Approaches to popculture in International Relations (IR) have tended to focus on the narrative dimensions of particular cultural texts to show how they reflect and constitute the terrain upon which IR unfolds. Such approaches present a number of limitations to the study of popular culture, most significant of which is a difficulty in assessing both the non-narrative aspects of media, and the processes of meaning-making which take place in any subjective encounter with a given media artifact. Using recent war videogames as examples, I consider how form, content and the acts of game play engender a type of critically (dis)engaged subject, which may form the basis of a new regime of perception/distraction. I then explore the ways in which this critically (dis)engaged subject plugs in to what James Der Derian has called the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network (MIME-NET).

The More Things Change: 24, *Homeland* and Representational Practices in the Bush/Obama ‘War on Terror’

Julian Manyoni
PhD Candidate (ABD)
Graduate Fellow, YCISS
Department of English, York University

This paper examines the relationship between representations of terrorism and counterterrorism in contemporary North American popular cultural and political discourse, focusing on two works; the Bush-era series *24* (FX) and the Obama-era drama *Homeland* (Showtime). Both of these narratives have come to stand as iconic cultural representations of the ‘war on terror’ during their respective periods; they are also significant in terms of the narratives and tropes they share with their respective historical official discourses; narratives through which policy is both shaped and articulated. Such cultural texts bear examination in particular because of the ways in which these structural homologues not only reproduce and disseminate particular hegemonic forms of knowledge about terrorism itself, but also as how these ways of knowing consequently concretely affect the relations of power in North American civil society. Using these two programmes as cultural representations of the ‘war on terror’ that are anchored in ostensibly distinct historical moments, the paper addresses the shifts in representational practices associated with the transition from the Bush to the Obama counterterrorism policies. It looks at the ways in which such highly visible shifts in both rhetorical strategies and the representation of counterterrorism practices have elided both the cyclical nature and historical continuity of the discourse associated with the ongoing ‘war on terror,’ and further naturalized its fundamental structural imperatives: social purification, the militarization, and increasing centralization of power.

A Kodak Moment in Toronto: The Residual Political Economy of Communication

Patricia Mazepa
Associate Professor
Department of Communications, York University

and

Paula John
York/Ryerson Joint Graduate Program in Communication and Culture

The phrase ‘a Kodak moment’ is an advertising slogan that occupies popular lexicon to mean an instance where one has, or wishes one had, a camera to capture an image. According to the urbandictionary.com, it is also used sarcastically to mean a “horribly twisted event”. This paper will critically engage with these meanings through a combination of a political economic history of Kodak international, and a series of photographic moments of the physical site of the former plant and headquarters of Kodak Canada in the city of Toronto. Abandoned on a street called ‘Photography Drive,’ the (in)security of the site (chain-linked boundaries, warning signs, and unknown environmental hazards), and visual resistance (smashed glass, graffiti, and nature’s own reclaim), asks us to view these abandoned places as sites of politics, and consider what remains for potential activism.

Popular culture and power: reading imperialism in *Avatar* and media discourses on *Idle No More*

Laura Pin
York University

The 2010 film *Avatar*, directed by James Cameron, has drawn accolades from the left, and criticism from the right, for its perceived anti-imperial, anti-American message. A close reading of the discursive and narrative structure of *Avatar*, however, suggests that while superficially *Avatar* may appear to critique military imperialism, the film legitimizes cultural imperialism whereby the indigenous “Na’vi” must become socially and

militarily Americanized to survive in a changing world. The narrative of cultural imperialism in *Avatar* mirrors popular criticisms of the Idle No More movement that situate indigenous “underdevelopment” in a refusal to westernize, rather than settler-state oppression. These twinned narratives of cultural imperialism suggest that popular culture plays a key political role in constructing social relations and legitimating discourses that naturalize distributions of power.