



## Teaching Philosophy

### Cultural Studies as a Space of Dialogue

Humanities courses should teach students to think critically, engage with differences and consider unfamiliar viewpoints. In my classes I strive to foster a democratic learning environment and to stimulate my students to question discourses of authority. I encourage them to use references and scholarly theories wisely, but also learn to contest them or expand them, whenever they feel that something has been left unsaid or has not been explored. I seek to nurture their awareness that every scholar approaches the humanities from his or her own perspective, that their research, thoughts and findings are shaped by one's partial point of view and that cultural studies are (or at least should be) preeminently a space of dialogue and negotiation.

### Inclusivity and flexible Syllabi

An important component of my inclusive approach is a complete transparency in my teaching methods and goals. Explaining why a given exercise is useful or a given text is meaningful to the syllabus is fundamental in building collaboration and engagement. For this reason, whenever possible, I keep my syllabi flexible so as to follow and encourage the students' interest. Last spring during the pandemic, I co-taught a class on Gothic novels with Margaret Cohen. In the middle of the quarter, we discovered that there was going to be a live performance of *Frankenstein* at the London National Theatre directed by Danny Boyle, starring Benedict Cumberbatch and Johnny Lee Miller and that it would have been on YouTube for a week only. The students' excitement to the news led us, the instructors, to propose the option of adding both the play and the novel by Shelley to the syllabus for the upcoming week. The students were not dismayed by this double charge of work, but were actually more enthused, since the play added a sense of urgency and excitement to the otherwise dull experience of lockdown and general estrangement. In the end, that week, we had two of the richest discussions of the quarter, in part because the play had added a racial element by casting Elizabeth and her family with Black actors. We were thus able to discuss and compare the creature's situation and destiny with that of the people surrounding it in a richer way than we would have had by simply reading the novel or by maintaining the initial syllabus.



## Relation of the humanities with the so-called “real world”

By focusing on anthropological questions within fictional works, I try to show the students how the humanities as a field and fiction as a mode of representation relate to their own experience of reality and everyday life. The underlying idea is to teach students to discern how narrative characters are constructed. The strategy is to use a micro- and macro-approach at the same time: close readings of specific parts of text are as important as considering the larger picture that the work at hand is presenting. The first step in this direction, which is in turn dependent on my research focus, is to encourage the students' awareness towards the fact that the ways in which individuals (real or fictional) are described, presented and characterized are never neutral, but depend on specific constructions and are motivated by precise goals. This awareness is not, on the other hand, granted by my voice, but is achieved by the students themselves. The assigned readings in my classes are usually accompanied by questions that the students should consider in advance of class. In class students work on the questions first in smaller groups and then together as a class. In this way, they have the chance to ponder the matter at first alone, and then refine their thinking through a dialogue with their peers. My voice arrives only at the last stage, as part of the dialogue and not as the authority. My authority is there to build connections and relations to elements or issues they may have missed and are worth considering.