

RSAA JOURNAL

Special Guest:

Noemi Marin



Dr. Noemi Marin and Dalai Lama

Dr. **Noemi Marin**, Professor, School of Communication and Multimedia Studies, held positions also as Director of the School (2011-2014), Director of the Peace Studies Program (2007-2012), and the Editor of the *Journal of Literacy and Technology*, since 2005.

Sole contributor to the *International Encyclopedia of Communication* (Blackwell, 2008) on Eastern and Central European rhetoric, Dr. Marin presented over 120 international and national conference papers, focusing on communist and post-communist discourse and societies in transition. She received the prestigious Presidential Leadership Award, 2010, and Researcher/Creative Scholar of the Year Award (2009), Florida Atlantic University.

In April 2014, **Dr. Marin** was invited to present a lecture at the well-renowned Davis Center at Harvard

University, lecture that is now part of the events recorded on the university site. Currently, Dr. Marin is completing a book project “Rhetorics of 1989” to be published by Routledge in 2015. In addition, Dr. Marin is working on a new book project related to political communication in societies in transition.

Dr. Marin authored the book *After the Fall: Rhetoric in the Aftermath of Dissent in Post-Communist Times* (2007), and contributed to several books *Negotiating Democracy: Media Transformation in Emerging Democracies* (2007); *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* (2007; 2006); *Realms of Exile: Nomadism, Diaspora and Eastern European Voices* (2005); *Intercultural Communication and Creative Practices* (2005); *Culture and Technology in the New Europe: Civic Discourse in Transformation in Post-Communist Nations* (2000). Scholarly articles have been published in *East European Politics and Societies*; *Migration: A European Journal of International Migration and Ethnic Relations*; *Forum Artis Rhetoricae*; *Romanian Journal of Journalism and Communication*; *Global Media Journal*; *Controversia: An International Journal of Debate and Democratic Renewal*. Dr. Marin edits the international academic journal *Journal of Literacy and Technology*, since 2005.

Dr. Noemi Marin publishes for the first time in the present issue the English version of “**Universities as Discursive Geographies.**”



Romanian Studies Association of America



Universities as Discursive Geographies Dr. Noemi Marin (Florida Atlantic University)

Looking at American universities and at internationalized contexts of their functioning, the discursive spaces under and within which they operate are always fragmentary, converging multiple loci of interactions. Discussions cross subject matters, linguistic and semantic articulations, personal data and geographical and historical locations. Fascinating topic, complex, fluid, interactive. Hence, in viewing American universities as a topic in international conferences and congresses or fora, what strikes as an important perspective is how the discursive spaces are always created in fragmentary yet complex formats. Discussions cross subjects, topics, linguistic or semantic concepts and articulations, personal or spatial information, group identities, and cultural positions, to name a few. The relations construed among academics, information, knowledge, and human communication become a fascinating locus where cultures and communication collapse to emphasize specific targeted conversations on education and research, on polis and politics, on clustered fragments of discourse that would be continued throughout the world, in times to come. Complexity falls into place all over, sharing words, structures, multiplicities of meaning, while at the same time, specific clusters of cultural discourse shares mainly spaces of linguistic experiences, without semantics following in support. Idioms, academic jargon, and interstices of scholarly formations of meanings flow in Foucaultian discursive formations together with spaces, geographical and physical spaces concurring within cultural and critical relationships of multiplying and multiplied reconstructions of knowledge, all within the space of a university.

Hence, how can the relationship between university and discourse be viewed from a cultural and critical perspective, when reflecting on human communication? What I claim in this essay is that the

relationship university-discourse construes a complexity of spaces, discursive spaces where location and loci interact and interrelate creating convergent and divergent dynamics for human communication. In order to explain how complex exchanges of discourse take form within cultural and critical perspectives of academic life, three such discursive mappings will be featured in particular, namely: [a] physical locations of discourse; [b] intellectual spatial constructions [architectures of power structures]; and [c] discursive geographies.

[a] Challenging to reflect on is the cultural lens through which such mappings can be seen, for American universities reflect and deflect in a sense, the European versions of higher education centers, creating specific geographical entities for specific continuation of discursive practices on necessary knowledge and information. Such cultural lens assists in contextualizing campus and college towns as physical loci for American academic discourse, inventing places similar in the world, yet divergent and different due to the cultural boundaries and perspectives. The diversity of American universities and their geographical position, history, and culture is overwhelmingly complex, adding to the dynamic mentioned state histories, federal policies, local ambitions or global contexts. Thus, by drawing from interactions between locality of discourse, i.e. specific to specific university location; and contextual general format of discourse, such loci to perpetuate histories of higher education standards and hierarchies invite the participants to abide by the general rules of academic life while at the same time, add architectural bodies and proxemics, or negotiations of space within the cultural and critical clusters posted within the physical locations of universities.

Campus and college town represent two



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conceptual and territorial notions that define in particular large university centers in the US, collecting in a sense entire cultural and educational cores of discourse. Fascinating to follow in this critical journey is the fluid notion that language as a metaphor of discursive practices and physical territories as academic units, campuses, college towns, people participants co-create in continuum motion. Unlike European universities, American ones continue semesters with summer school, with next semesters, without silences that breaks into the discourse might bring to the relationship. Hence, the continuum on which this relationship develops remains important physically, as both participants and spaces coexist in spaces without specific temporal frameworks of human communication.

The way the notion of campuses is used here refers mainly to academic discourse designed to locate centers of education, divided into colleges of arts, science, medicine, law, and the list goes on and on. From a communicative perspective, academic culture reflects specifically the translation of physicality of universities into cultural words, symbols for geographic entities that cover the campuses all over the US. Campus translates as a collective university, a collective space where, depending on the type of higher education school, (private, state, comprehensive, research, etc.) several colleges coexist as intrinsic physical and geographical entities. Cultural translations of words and their location within the discursive spaces of universities while at the same time identifying physical buildings representing specific clusters of academic knowledge concur to reiterate a pertinent and permanent relationship culture-discourse-space to be experienced as life in a university.

The play between physical spaces and language when discussing American universities through a

cultural lens such as Romanian language becomes a “*playing with mirrors*” endeavor. In cultural translation, “*campus*,” “*college*” and other examples to follow, all represent different discursive meanings and words while shared by cultural interests. In Romanian language “*campus*” signifies a “*university*” and “*college*” might mean divergent spatial bodies, such as “*liceu*” or “*facultate*.” All over American space, campuses and college towns attach to their meanings additional cultural words, fluid and transparent, differently read in diverse cultural contexts. Commonalities remain in American-shared physical spaces of academic life: “*faculty*” means the body of professors for a specific department (*corpul profesoral*); “*department*” means a “*facultate*” (*Rom*), “*college*” means “*a university*” or “*an institute*,” “*a school of medicine*” means “*an institute*” or “*university*” (in Romanian, *institut* or *universitate de..*), “*law school*” is yet another “*faculty*,” “*research*” is collapsed most of the time as part of the college, “*students*” are different from “*graduate students*,” “*assistant*” means a “*secretary*,” “*provost*” is a “*prorector*,” “*a degree*” is actually a “*license*” and “*commencement*” is a “*graduation ceremony*.” All students “*graduate*” no matter which level of schooling; but not all students are in “*graduate programs*.” As one can see, the cultural discourse labeling the places and the results of existing in those places called universities or higher education institutions attest to cultural constructions of symbolic geographies for the academic endeavors taking place. Symbols and signifiers share both linguistic and cultural meanings that concur in occupying physical and cultural spaces to partake to American academic life. (1) This is not to say that



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other cultural readings universities from countries like Romania, for instance, would not be similar. However, the essay emphasizes mainly the intracultural and intercultural relationships of discourse created within the space of American universities as *campus* represents a limited and liminal physical locus for such interactions.

Similarly, and as fluid, *college town* is yet another spatial notion that corresponds in language to an entity of buildings, structures as well as to cultural clusters functioning to assist any university in its endeavors by bringing together the students, faculty, and administrators. College towns bring with them additional words, places for fun and entertainment, accommodations, solid businesses to cater towards a normal life while in college, or while in graduate school. There is a transitive quality to college towns shared closely with the university life, for each year the newcomers arrive and the oldtimers leave, creating a vibrant flux of communication, new and old patterns of discourse, diverse venues for national and international interactions.

Additionally, while both campus and college towns constitute physical mappings of higher education, they also carry an insular dimension, specific mainly to American universities, rather than European ones, even if using this dimension as a cultural yet simplifying generalization. Universities as discursive campuses represent, on one hand, a physical entity unlike the rest of the corporate or private worlds of a city or region, articulating academic discourse in separate yet continuous relationships with specifically-delineated loci of knowledge creation and engagement within a

larger cultural community. On the other hand, the insular feature that discourse and space engage in by coexisting into a dynamic conversation constitutes an isolation of discursive practices, offering conversations of specific topics, specific patterns and particular vocabularies not shared by larger communities where such universities are located. This double insular feature of the relationship language space in American universities claims cultural ethos and appropriate civic and civil engagements which involve both insular and global dynamics while at the same time construing specificities of such discursive practices into the spaces mentioned.

Most likely, one of its most pervasive features for such linguistic and physical mapping of academic life lies in the convergent and concurrent realms of identity as cultural practices of discourse. Residing within the physical buildings are discursive practices that identify and ritualize constructions of specific identities based on specific names, words, and meanings shared by faculty, students, administrators and alumni (to name only the obvious users of discourse), in cultural clusters where individuals, collectives, knowledge and information coexist under identifiers and identities of choice. For the continuously reinvented relationship between physical and cultural delineations of discourse as identity representations carves important discursive spaces for human communication concurring in search of intellectual answers in the name of knowledge.

[b] Another cultural read on American higher education institutions as discursive geographies highlights the relationships created between space and



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power as cultural architectures of discursive structures. In a sense, like all educational institutions throughout the world, no university or college of higher education remains free of territories of power, in metonymic and contextual usages of the term. After all, higher education in itself involves architectures of power, whether cultural and/or political power, religious power, or even scientific or artistic credibility as academic power.

Interesting for the purpose of this essay is to explore how the multiple interactive spaces of discourse concur in both horizontal and vertical power structures, as levels and layers of discursive interrogations on power and knowledge, constitutive dimensions of university life. All academic institutions in all cultures carry with them power-embedded architectures, from physical buildings to spatial hierarchies conducive to decision making processes connected and in continuous relation to economic, political, social and cultural power.

As mentioned, universities and their discourse occur in hierarchical spaces, from presidential structures as highest spatial and power-related loci down to a larger spread of schools, colleges, departments, faculty, graduate students, undergraduate students, potential participants and former ones, called alumni, all share discursive structures embedded as architectures of power.

The vertical axis mentioned is always already (to use postmodern terms) altered by academic discourse working in horizontal axes, addressing questions of power, pursuing political, economic, cultural and social interests in relation to countries, cultures,

individual drives and collective concerns. (2) American academic pursuits are legitimized by critical endeavors in questioning power on a continuum, as part of the democratic process as engaged civic participation. Most campuses offer courses in public speaking, in communication in intercultural contexts, in debate and argumentation, adding to linguistic vocabularies accrued within disciplinary realms, civic and public articulations on social, political, and public matters salient to the culture represented.

In addition, academic faculty, most professors and researchers cohabiting within the power hierarchies of the vertical realms such cultures call for, articulate and revisit articulations of discourse for the benefit of a demos, contributing to a critical ethos of knowledge within and resisting structures of power. Socratic questions pertaining to inquisitive argumentation on linear or vertical powers of discourse concur and collapse into linear and synthetic synergies of academic pursuits in collective and individual attempts to diffuse solid architectures of power in order to reconstruct civic engagement for citizenry in a global world.

Critical thinking, individual development of civic voice and resistance to conformity provide participants with discursive vocabularies to engage continuously in the dual axes of power structures, creating at the same time complex modern and postmodern cultural experiences of knowledge and power.

[c] Looking at American universities as cultural entities of discourse where physical, spatial, and meta-structural discursive mappings coincide, what stands



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to mind is the intricate articulation of discourse as cultural fragmentation inherent to multiplicity of vocabularies and voices partaking within shared spaces geographies and symbolicities of academia.

Creating texts in contexts, scientific, literary, critical, engaging, political, social and economic texts, all vocabularies of universities present challenges for a meta-discourse unless viewed in cultural fragmentation as coherent functions of such discursive geographies proposed.

Discursively, cultural fragmentation challenges the inherent function of the text-context relationship in contemporary rhetoric. (3) Using the same framework to continue the argument of the essay, all critical discourse, pertinent to academic pursuits and used here in its totality as part of the academic rhetoric, are formative and transformative texts. Understood to be larger than apparently finished discourse, different cultural fragments that form discursive maps of shared meaning. While McGee takes “rhetoric as a master term,” explicating that “rhetors *make* discourses from scraps and pieces of evidence,” creating meaning by moving between different cultural fragments that are both textual and contextual, this essay features academic discourse as textual-contextual spaces in *cultural* interconnectedness, as “structures of fragments, finished texts “ and contexts as a collapsed text and context relationship in culture. (4)

Important for the purpose of this essay is McGee’s argument (5) that by modifying the relationship between text and context, critics and rhetors operate with “*discursive fragments of context*,” with an invisible

text “never quite finished but constantly in front of us.”(6) Similarly, universities as discursive fragments and geographies can celebrate mapping of incomplete structures where text and context influence and confluence into each other, disappearing into discursive constructions of cultural fragmentation. The claim of universities as discursive geographies focuses most on the relationship among cultural fragmentation, national and international interjections of topical and spatial loci, as concurring confluences of interactive discourse.

Responding to multiple, convergent and divergent cultural contexts and discursive fragmentary exchanges performed within the palimpsestic loci forming, re-forming and reconstituting the geo-entity of a university, can such spaces negotiate unilateral relationships between places of knowledge and locations of discourse? Most likely, in a global world, where locating and dis-locating universities on the internet, from the national into international, within cultures and outside a main culture, intervening on language by using international languages in construing academic discourse, all coexist within discursive geographies incurring multiple cultures, deterring multitudes of cultural boundaries, and negotiating influences and confluences of meanings and knowledge that form and per-form as an entity called a university of the 21st century. It is in the multiple interconnective cultural and intercultural discourses that coexist within languages pertinent to academic fields, architectural structures, and cultural expectations that such entities continue to formulate spaces of human[e] interaction.



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Notes:

(1) See Marin's study on intercultural differences between Eastern European expectations and American ones in relation specifically to higher education. Marin, Noemi, "Turning American: Cultural Challenges for Foreign Students in American Universities" in *Czas Kultury*, 3(102) (2001) 17-21. University of Poznan, Poland.

(2) An interesting study referring to the experience of both vertical and horizontal axes of discourse as performative interactions see Blair, Carole, Marsha S. Jeppeson, and Enrico Pucci, Jr. "Public Memorializing in Postmodernity: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial as Prototype." 1991. *Critical Questions: Invention, Creativity, and The Criticism of Discourse and the Media*. Eds. William L. Nothstine, Carole Blair, and Gary A. Copeland. New York: St Martin's Press, 1994. 344-383.

(3) Michael McGee, "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture" in *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 54 (1990): 274-90.

(4) McGee, "Text," 279.

(5) Calling attention to the "fundamental interconnectedness of all discourse," McGee challenges the traditional notion that text is a finite rhetorical product and separate from its historical (and cultural) context. Consequently, McGee collapses the two, in order to visit cultural fragmentation (McGee, "Text" 281). Suggesting that "conceptual separation" creates confusion about "the root nature of discourse" he contends that rhetoric needs to see discourse within a collapsed text-and-context relationship in culture. Positing himself in contrast with the close textual analysis of rhetorical texts, McGee writes that: "[B]y contrast, with rhetoric as a master term, we begin by noticing that rhetors make discourses from scraps and pieces of evidence. Critical rhetoric does not begin with a finished text in need of interpretation; rather, texts are understood to be larger than the apparently finished

discourse that presents itself as transparent. The apparently finished discourse is in fact a dense reconstruction of all the bits of other discourses from which it was made" (279). Later on, describing how fragments reshape the relationship between text and context in contemporary rhetoric, McGee adds that: "My way of stating the case (using the concept "fragments" to collapse "context" into "text") emphasizes an important truth about discourse: *Discourse ceases to be what it is whenever parts of it are taken "out of context."* (McGee, "Text" 283)

(6) McGee, "Text" 287-88.

This article translated in Romanian by Justina Ieremia appeared in the *Romanian Journal of Journalism and Communication*, 1(1) (2006): 85-90. University of Bucharest, Romania.

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SUNDAY, JULY 5
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Awakening Compassion: His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Public Talk and Dialogue with Artists on the Transformative Power of Creativity and Art

MONDAY, JULY 6
 BREN EVENTS CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE
MORNING SESSION, 9:30 AM - 11:30 AM
Compassionate Planet Panel: His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the Effects of Climate Change and Taking Action to Resolve this Global Issue

AFTERNOON SESSION, 1:30 PM - 3:30 PM
His Holiness the Dalai Lama on: Wisdom, Vision and Experience Panel — A Dialogue with Nobel Laureates, World Leaders, Professional Experts and Artists

TUESDAY, JULY 7
 BREN EVENTS CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE
MORNING SESSION, 9:30 AM - 11:30 AM
His Holiness Dalai Lama on: Youth, Leadership Panel — The Significance of Education in Advancing Universal Human Values

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 — HIS HOLINESS THE 14TH DALAI LAMA

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Dr. Noemi Marin has been invited to participate at the 14th Dalai Lama's 80th birthday celebration.