

Project Description – Malaika Sutter

Crafting the Needle: Text/ile-Image Constellations in Contemporary North American Fiction and Art

1. Current State of Research

Research on needlework has gained momentum in recent years (Jefferies et al. 2016; Hemmings 2012; Goggin/Tobin 2009) but it has never been discussed in a study that focuses on its intermedial appearance in contemporary North American prose and art. Within the context of North American literature, the most recent study is Suzanne V. Shepard's *The Patchwork Quilt: Ideas of Community in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Fiction* (2001). It lays the foundation for my project in its exploration of the metaphorical use of quilts in nineteenth-century American women's fiction. However, Shepard's study does not focus on the quilts' intermedial appearances. While there are studies on needlework and intermediality, in particular ekphrasis,¹ they mainly focus on poetry (Loizeaux 2008) or on ancient, medieval, and early modern prose (Hyer et al. 2016, Olson 2013, Heffernan 1993). The overlap of intermedial studies and textiles in contemporary North American art and fiction remains neglected and it is the aim of this project to make a substantial contribution to this research gap.

This project's deployment of a close reading of text/ile-image constellations in contemporary North American fiction and art will make use of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concept of a "positionality of beside" (Sedgwick 2003: 8). Sedgwick argues that the preposition 'beside' offers a less dualistic, less hierarchical, and more 'disordered' approach, which will prove especially useful when discussing gender. This intervention is also important to the fields of African American literature and textile art because research of the intersection of these fields will provide new perspectives to canonical works such as those of Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Faith Ringgold.

2. Objectives, Corpus, and Method

The objectives of this PhD project are:

(1) to analyze the rhetorical potential of needlework in contemporary North American prose texts and art pieces and to understand the tradition of using needlework in women's and LGBTQIA writing and art. These aims will be achieved through a combination of close readings, historical and art historical contextualization (Goggin/Tobin 2009, Grudin 1990, Parker 1984), and gender and media theory (Engel 2018, Loizeaux 2008, Mulvey 1975).

(2) to analyze the needlework's intermedial appearances. The analysis of the 'appearance' is important in order to point to the problematics of typologies (Louvel 2018, 2011, Rippl 2015a, 2005), particularly within this unprecedented research field.

(3) to analyze the text/ile-image constellations' (socio-political) functions (Brosch 2018a, 2018b; Louvel 2018, Rippl 2018, 2015b, 2015c). The functions are discerned with the help of the historical

¹ Ekphrasis is an intermedial sub-category and is defined as "the verbal representation of visual representation" (Heffernan 1993: 3).

contextualization (objective 1) and the theoretical framework and methodology of intermediality (Bruhn 2016; Rippl 2015a; Hallet 2015; Rajewsky 2005; Wolf 2005; Mitchell 1995).

(4) to analyze the close relationship of word and image within needlework and what the implications are for the disciplines of art history and literary studies (Rippl 2015a; Louvel 2011; Loizeaux 2008; Heffernan 1993; Mitchell 1995).

(5) to establish a reading practice for the analysis of female connoted crafts in prose texts and visual art (Louvel 2018, 2011; Rippl 2015a; Mitchell 1995). This reading practice will be developed within the North American context but it is the aim to make it applicable to other contexts that focus on needlework and textiles in prose texts and visual art.

The texts I will consider are Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996) and *The Testaments* (2019), Whitney Otto's *How to Make an American Quilt* (1991), Tracy Chevalier's *The Last Runaway* (2013), Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1983) and her short story "Everyday Use" (1973), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Siri Hustvedt's *The Summer Without Men* (2011), Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* (1988), and Jennifer Chiaverini's *Elm Creek Quilts Series* (1999–2012). The art pieces I will analyze and bring into a conversation with the prose texts are: *The Aids Memorial Quilt* (1987–; cf. Ruskin 1988), selected story quilts from the exhibition "And Still We Rise: Race, Culture and Visual Conversations" (2015–; cf. Mazloomi 2015), selected embroidery pieces by Elaine Reicheck (1996–1999; cf. Reicheck 2000), selected story quilts by Faith Ringgold (1989–; cf. Cameron et al. 1998), selected embroidery fabric collage pieces by Esther Nisenthal Krinitz (1977–1998; cf. Krinitz/ Steinhardt 2010), Allyson Mitchell's installation *Creep Lez* (2012; cf. Mitchell 2012), selected story quilts from the exhibition "Stitching Memories: African-American Story Quilts" (1989–1991; cf. Grudin 1990), selected embroidery pieces from Diana Weymar's *Tiny Pricks Project* (2018–; cf. Weymar 2020). My analysis of these primary sources will consist of the parallel close reading of visual and textual components.

3. Bibliography

Atwood, Margaret. *Alias Grace*. 1996. London: Virago Press, 2009.

———. *The Testaments*. New York: Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, 2019.

Brosch, Renate. "Ekphrasis in Recent Popular Novels: Reaffirming the Power of Art Images." *Poetics Today* 39.2 (2018a): 403–423.

———. "Ekphrasis in the Digital Age: Responses to Image." *Poetics Today* 39.2 (2018b): 225–243.

Bruhn, Jørgen. *The Intermediality of Narrative Literature*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Cameron, Dan, Richard J. Powell, Michelle Wallace, Patrick Hill, Thalia Gouma-Pterson, Moira Roth, and Ann Gibson, eds. *Dancing at the Louvre: Faith Ringgold's French Collection and Other Story Quilts*. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998.

Chevalier, Tracy. *The Last Runaway*. New York: Dutton, 2013.

Chiaverini, Jennifer. *Elm Creek Quilts Series*. New York: Dutton, et al. 1999–2019.

Engel, Antke. "Queer Reading as Power Play: Methodological Considerations for Discourse Analysis of Visual Material." *Qualitative Inquiry* 25.4 (2019): 338–349.

- Goggin, Maureen Daly. "Introduction: Threading Women." *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750–1950*. Eds. Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009a. 1–10.
- . "Stitching a Life in 'Pen of Steele and Silken Inke': Elizabeth Parker's *circa* 1830 Sampler." *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750–1950*. Eds. Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009b. 31–49.
- Goggin, Maureen Daly, and Beth Fowkes Tobin, eds. *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750–1950*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009.
- Greber, Erika. *Textile Texte: Poetologische Metaphorik und Literaturtheorie*. Cologne: Boehlau, 2002.
- Grudin, Eva Ungar, ed. *Stitching Memories: African-American Story Quilts*. Williamstown, MA: Williams College Museum of Art, 1990.
- Hall, Carrie A., and Rose C. Kretsinger. *The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt in America*. Caldwell: The Caxton Printers, 1947.
- Hallet, Wolfgang. "A Methodology of Intermediality in Literary Studies." *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature – Image – Sound – Music*. Ed. Gabriele Rippl. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015. 605–618.
- Hedges, Elaine. "The Needle or the Pen: The Literary Rediscovery of Women's Textile Work." *Tradition and the Talents of Women*. Ed. Florence Howe. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991. 338–364.
- Hedley, Jane. "Introduction: The Subject of Ekphrasis." *In the Frame: Women's Ekphrastic Poetry from Marianne Moore to Susan Wheeler*. Eds. Jane Hedley, Nick Halpern and Willard Spiegelman. Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 2009. 15–40.
- Heffernan, James A.W. *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- Hemmings, Jessica, ed. *The Textile Reader*. Oxford: Berg, 2012.
- Hustvedt, Siri. *The Summer Without Men*. New York: Picador, 2011.
- Hyer, Maren Clegg, Jill Frederick, and Gale R. Owen-Crocker. *Textiles, Text, Intertext: Essays in Honour of Gale R. Owen-Crocker*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2016.
- Jefferies, Janis, Diana Wood Conroy, and Hazel Clark, eds. *The Handbook of Textile Culture*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.
- Krinitz, Esther Nisenthal, and Bernice Steinhardt. *Memories of Survival*. Washington, D.C: Art and Remembrance, 2010.
- Loizeaux, Elizabeth Bergmann. *Twentieth-Century Poetry and the Visual Arts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Louvel, Liliane. *Poetics of the Iconotext*. Ed. Karen Jacobs. Trans. Laurence Petit. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011.
- . "Types of Ekphrasis: An Attempt at Classification." *Poetics Today* 39.2 (2018): 245–263.
- Mazloomi, Carolyn L. *And Still We Rise: Race, Culture, and Visual Conversations*. Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2015.

- Mitchell, Allyson. "Creep Lez." 2012. *allysonmitchell*. Accessed: 02 February 2020.
<http://www.allysonmitchell.com/project.html?project=creep-lez>.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. *Picture Theory*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. 1987. London: Picador, 1988.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16.3 (1975): 6–18.
- Naylor, Gloria. *Mama Day*. 1988. New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1993.
- Neumann, Birgit. "Intermedial Negotiations: Postcolonial Literatures." *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature – Image – Sound – Music*. Ed. Gabriele Rippl. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015. 512–529.
- Olson, Rebecca. *Arras Hanging: The Textile that Determined Early Modern Literature and Drama*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2013.
- Oster-Stierle, Patricia. *Der Schleier im Text: Funktionsgeschichte eines Bildes für die neuzeitliche Erfahrung des Imaginären*. Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2002.
- Otto, Whitney. *How to Make an American Quilt*. 1991. New York: Ballantine Books, 2001.
- Parker, Rozsika. *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*. London: The Women's Press, 1984.
- Pristash, Heather, Inez Schaechterle, and Sue Carter Wood. "The Needle as the Pen: Intentionality, Needlework, and the Production of Alternate Discourses of Power." *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750–1950*. Eds. Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009. 13–29.
- Rajewsky, Irina O. "Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermedialität." *Intermedialités* 6 (2005): 43–64.
- Reicheck, Elaine. *When This You See....* New York: George Braziller, 2000.
- Rippl, Gabriele. *Beschreibungs-Kunst: Zur Intermedialen Poetik angloamerikanischer Ikontexte (1880–2000)*. Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2005.
- , ed. *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature – Image – Sound – Music*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015a.
- . "Introduction." *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature – Image – Sound – Music*. Ed. Gabriele Rippl. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015b. 1–31.
- . "Postcolonial Ekphrasis in the Contemporary Anglophone Indian Novel." *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature – Image – Sound – Music*. Ed. Gabriele Rippl. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015c. 128–155.
- . "The Cultural Work of Ekphrasis in Contemporary Anglophone Transcultural Novels." *Poetics Today* 39.2 (2018): 265–285.
- Ruskin, Cindy. *The Quilt: Stories from the NAMES Project*. New York: Pocket Books, 1988.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Shepard, Suzanne V. *The Patchwork Quilt: Ideas of Community in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Fiction*. New York: Peter Lang, 2001.

- Showalter, Elaine. "Piecing and Writing." *The Poetics of Gender*. Ed. Nancy K. Miller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. 222–247.
- Thomas, Diana Mary Eva. *Texts and Textiles: Affect, Synaesthesia and Metaphor in Fiction*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016.
- Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*. 1982. London: the Women's Press, 1993.
- . "Everyday Use." 1973. "Everyday Use." *Alice Walker*. Ed. Barbara T. Christian. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994. 23–35.
- Weymar, Diana. "Tiny Pricks Project: Created and Curated by Diana Weymar." *tinypricksproject*. 2019. Accessed 30 November 2019. <https://www.tinypricksproject.com>.
- Wolf, Werner. "Intermediality." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. Eds. David Herman et al. London: Routledge, 2005. 252–256.