UAL Funded PhD Studentship Project Proposal Form

*(Please scroll to the bottom of the table to consult our indicative bibliography.)*

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| Title: "Decolonizing Arts : | **An Ethnographic Study with the Arab Image Foundation (AIF) at UAL** |
| College/Institute: | Creative Computing Institute |
| Centre if Applicable |  |
| Director of Studies | Dr Hunter Brueggemann, Course Leader and Senior Lecturer at CCI, UAL |
| Second Supervisor : | Dr Sarah Fdili Alaoui, Reader at CCI, UAL |
| External Partner | <https://stories.arabimagefoundation.org/> |
| Suitable for distance learning mode of study (International students only) | Yes |
| **Project description and significance (max 500 words)** | |
| This funding application addresses the predominance of Western paradigms in European art and design education within academic institutions. Despite efforts towards diversification, these institutions overwhelmingly endorse Western methodologies, sidelining indigenous and non-Western forms of knowledge. Such Eurocentricity places Western culture in a position of superiority, neglecting the rich diversity of global perspectives. The proposal scrutinises whose voices and knowledge are represented in artistic research, particularly in visual anthropological practices, and which knowledges are overlooked.  Our project, "Decolonising Arts: An Ethnographic Study with the Arab Image Foundation (AIF) at UAL," intends to revolutionise the creation of visual narratives about the Arab world. It is underpinned by decolonial and postcolonial theories, incorporating visual anthropological methods and embodied practices such as somatics, sensory ethnography, and multimodal anthropological engagements. The focus is on the Arab Image Foundation's archives and the generation of visual artefacts through fieldwork in the Arab world, ideally by candidates well-versed in visual culture and in sync with the cultural contexts of specific Arab countries.  The principal objective is to confront and re-envision the Eurocentric paradigms of visual production that dominate contemporary pedagogical practice. This entails re-evaluating the technologies, architectures, and performative elements of education to attain epistemological justice. The project advocates for a profound shift in art practice and research methodologies, not merely in content but in the foundational approach to the creation and comprehension of art.  The research will encompass the production of images, artworks, ephemeral art, embodied vignettes and other artefacts that are grounded in ethnographic bodily practices that are exploring the AIF's collections through methods such as dance, somatics, choreography or other embodied methods appropriate for this project.  The findings/artefacts will aid in developing new methodologies for art creation that resonate with decolonial principles, offering a more nuanced and inclusive experience. These activities aim to surface insights and perspectives frequently ignored in Western-centric art settings.  The significance of this project is substantial for UAL and CCI, particularly given our commitment to inclusivity and global perspectives, which are to produce justice in HE. By embracing our an anti-colonial and embodied approach, the project positions itself at the vanguard of practice-based research, critical theory, artistically and politically engaged praxis, and methodological innovation. It not only aligns with UAL's priority activities but also seeks to set a new benchmark for other educational institutions. Integrating non-Western perspectives and decolonial praxis can enrich and deepen the understanding of art and design, challenging conventional notions of knowledge origins and implications.  In essence, this project champions a pluriversal approach to innovation and relevance, advocating for a more inclusive, diverse, and globally conscious framework for conducting embodied visual anthropological work in the fields of arts, design, and critical innovation. Its influence extends beyond UAL, offering transformative insights and methodologies for the international art community. | |
| **Role, relevance to and proposed engagement with external partner and/or UAL archive (max 300 words)** | |
| The AIF's extensive collection, with over 150,000 images since 1860, underpins this study's deep dive into the Arab world's visual narratives and cultural heritage, aligning with its mission to safeguard and showcase the photographic legacy of the Middle East and North Africa.  For UAL and CCI, this partnership is transformative, positioning them as pioneers in applied embodied and sensory methodologies within cultural studies, and underscoring a dedication to innovative, interdisciplinary, and culturally grounded and ‘sound’ research. It also offers the students and faculty invaluable access to the AIF's resources and know-how, greatly enhancing their academic and professional trajectories.  This collaboration propels visual anthropology forward, blending embodied and sensory methodologies with the AIF's esteemed archival prowess, promising immersive encounters with its distinct, invaluable collections and a nuanced understanding of Arab visual culture.  Our envisaged methodological emphasis centring on embodied, affective and experiential knowledge and cultural expression, broaden the AIF's methodological range and enrich archival interpretation. Therein we see a substantial scope for mutually beneficial exchange of expertise and scholarship and resources.  The project gains from the AIF's unmatched archives and expertise, offering a wealth of resources and authoritative guidance. The study taps into the AIF's progressive archival methods, viewing photographs as vibrant cultural artefacts, thereby elevating its goal to reshape visual epistemology and counter Eurocentric views. This partnership also advances the AIF's aims, ensuring its rich visual narratives are explored and shared broadly.  Furthermore, the partnership's scoping for the remit of any implementation of current frontline digital technology and their suitability for the AIF is a domain where CCI has substantial scope to expand its expertise. Innovation that is guided by cultural soundness, mindfulness and stakeholder-led approaches is an emerging stance within the field of Creative Computing, Responsible Innovation and Critical HCI (Human Computer Interaction). This partnership will weigh-up the remit/value of pioneering technologies, grounded in social, ethical, and cultural considerations. | |
| **Expectations of the student (ie attendance on site, travel to undertake data collection, creative practice) (max 100 words)** | |
| We expect to recruit a candidate specializing in visual practices/methods with a focus on decolonial or feminist epistemologies. The PhD candidate will collaborate closely with the AIF. They will undertake specific fieldwork investigations in an Arab country corresponding to their cultural background. It is crucial that the cultural background of the candidate aligns with that of the country where they will be immersed. Preference would be given to candidates and fellows with previous embodied practices (e.g. somatics) and tacit experiences/knowledge of decolonial emancipation. This will ensure that they can also utilize their experiential expertise as a means of engaging in/with the field. | |
| **Please describe how the proposed studentship project will support the development of your own area of research and your career development (max 300 words)** | |
| Undertaking the supervision of this PhD project represents a pivotal advancement in Hunter’s academic career, magnifying their expertise in pioneering decolonizing methodologies within innovation. This proposal seamlessly aligns with their established research in embodied, multisensory methodologies, promising to substantially contribute to shortcomings within the discipline of HCI. The project will leverage the unique perspectives brought forth by the collaboration with Sarah, the AIF and the student. Furthermore, this project would be a milestone in our ongoing attempts to strengthen CCI’s critical scholarship to complement our extensive technological prowess.  The partnership with the AIF aligns perfectly with aim offering a fertile ground for cross-cultural academic fertilisation. Hunter’s research endeavours, particularly focused on mitigating epistemic violence in institutions, will significantly contribute to the knowledge exchange between Western and Arab academic realms. Furthermore, Sarah and Hunter both are fluent/native in French which will be a substantial advantage for the partnership.  The proposed supervision is not just an alignment but a strategic enhancement of Hunter’s EDI advocacy which is intricately woven-in with the fabric of emerging feminist research methodologies and the pursuit of decolonizing arts and design education. It presents a tangible opportunity to implement and evaluate innovative pedagogical strategies, especially pertinent  to Hunter’s own research and teaching practice concerning syllabi decolonisation and pedagogical innovation at UAL.  This project transcends traditional academic boundaries by amalgamating artistic practice with technological innovation, aligning perfectly with CCI's core research focus. Thereby, getting funding for this project would offer Hunter the opportunity to expand CCI’s realm of engagement into a new important and (to date) underdeveloped direction. It would enable him (together with Sarah) to invigorate our research by centring on voices from the field and attend to them with the duty and diligence they merit; a domain where expertise and scholarship are in high demand. | |
| **Indicative Bibliography** | |
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