UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Postgraduate Research Experience

Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures

9 June 2026
University of Leeds

PGRE '26

welcome

Welcome to the first ever Faculty of Arts Postgraduate Research Experience.

Since 2011 we have been running the Undergraduate Research Experience to celebrate the excellence of our students in the Faculty of Arts Arts, Humanities and Cultures.

At the December 2024 **AHC Student Advisory Board** meeting a student mentioned that they loved the idea of the UGRE and asked why isn't there one for our Postgraduate students. So here we are...

On Tuesday 9 June 2026 we are running our inaugural Postgraduate Research Experience (PGRE) on campus, featuring presentations by Taught Postgraduate, MA by Research and PGRs.

The PGRE will be an informal event, so not like a “normal” academic conference. You can stay for a session (one-hour long), or for the whole day - it's up to you! It will be a great opportunity to see what's going on across the Faculty. You might find someone in a completely discipline researching a similar topic to you, or you might find an interest in a completely new area!

If you haven’t done so, please **register** your interest to attend.

code of conduct

Please note that the PGRE's aim is to provide a non-judgemental and supportive environment in which to celebrate Postgraduate research (MA, MAR, PGR) in AHC. We hope you, as our audience, will contribute to this atmosphere by engaging with our presenters enthusiastically and, most of all, respectfully.

Please join in the conversation on Social Media using **#AHCPGRE2026**

All opinions expressed in today's presentations are the presenter's own. The PGRE is proud to provide a space for their expression within the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures at the University of Leeds!

overview

Please check the **PGRE SharePoint** to ensure that you have the most up-to-date programme*.

09:30-10:00 Registration - Michael Sadler LG10

10:00-10.15 Welcome and Opening Remarks - Michael Sadler LG15
Professor Luke Windsor, Dean of the Leeds Doctoral College

10:15-11:30 - Session One - Michael Sadler LG15

11:30-11:45 - BREAK - Michael Sadler LG10

11:45-13:00 - Session Two - Michael Sadler LG15

13:00-14:00 - LUNCH (pizza!) - Michael Sadler LG10
Jasmin Surm (PhD, Media and Communication), from the AHC Wellbeing Project, will be running a relaxed drop-in crafting activity during lunch.

14:00-15:15 - Session Three - Michael Sadler LG15

15:15-15:30- BREAK - Michael Sadler LG10

15:30-16:45 - Session Four - Michael Sadler LG15

16:45-17:00 - Closing Remarks - Michael Sadler LG15
Professor Jamie Stark, Head of the Graduate School and Deputy Pro-Dean for Research & Innovation

*if you are external to the University of Leeds, please check this **page**.

abstracts

Adam Dockray, Media & Communication

In the Grim Darkness of the Far Future There is Only Woke: The Reactionary Politics of Warhammer 40k Fandom

Digital platforms like YouTube have significantly boosted the visibility of niche fandoms in mainstream culture. Warhammer 40k, once a quintessential “nerd” fandom, has experienced a rapid rise in popularity. The 40k fandom is complex, encompassing a tabletop wargame involving miniature construction and painting, alongside a transmedia presence in novels, video games, comics, and TV shows. This multifaceted engagement allows fans to connect with the IP through primary or overlapping means, blurring the lines between fandom and the “serious leisure” of miniature hobbyists. In addition to its existing complexity, its recent rise in popularity has led to a fandom, previously dominated by middle-aged, white, male fans, embracing a broader range of identities not typically associated with the IP. Given 40k’s narrative setting, initially intended as a satire of xenophobic authoritarianism, the already close relationship between reactionary discourses in formal politics and fan cultures finds an ideal cultural terrain to latch onto in 40k fandom, and recent demographic changes.

This study conducted a multimodal discourse analysis of 30 YouTube channels and videos to explore fan engagement with the IP. While many channels exploit Warhammer 40k’s setting for reactionary purposes, some within the fandom actively resist these narratives. Furthermore, there’s a strong correlation between the political rhetoric expressed and the mode of engagement with the IP. Hobbyists are notably less likely to adopt reactionary political rhetoric than casual media consumers. The findings illustrate the difficulties of mapping transmedia properties and propose a new typology of fan engagement, based on the concept of “layered Fandoms,” to fully understand the scope of the fandom and the variety of political rhetoric within it. Additionally, it provides a useful starting point for further research mapping modes of engagement to political rhetoric in contemporary fandoms



Content Notes

My presentation covers reactionary political discourses and as such touches of themes of racism, misogyny, transphobia and homophobia, in relation to these themes there is little explicit language used in my presentation, these topics are articulated via a highly specific vocabulary relevant to the Warhammer 40k fandom.

Udita Nag, English

The Politics of Marriage in Restoration Comedy: A Comparative Digital Study

Shakespeare said, 'All's Well That Ends Well', but is it so? This presentation explores how marriage in Restoration comedy is not merely about love but also about power, negotiation, and social expectations. Taking into focus, William Congreve's The Way of the World and Aphra Behn's The Rover, it compares two different visions of marriage. In Congreve's play, marriage often comes across as something carefully negotiated, shaped by social rules and money. In Behn's play, there is more focus on desire, freedom of movement, and moments where characters push back against patriarchal control.

I have combined close reading with digital methods to understand the ways in which emotional language and recurring themes shape these representations. Through the use of tools that track patterns of words and tone across the plays, the influence of strategy, control, and competing interests on relationships can be comprehended. These patterns are then interpreted alongside feminist and historical perspectives to understand how gender roles and expectations are constructed and challenged.

Literary analysis and digital approaches have been brought together in this presentation to show how new methods can offer fresh insights into familiar texts. It demonstrates that marriage in Restoration comedy is a dynamic and contested space, where questions of power, gender, and desire are constantly negotiated rather than resolved.



Content Notes
This presentation discusses themes of gender, sexuality, and social power, and will touch upon issues such as patriarchy and misogyny as represented in Restoration drama.

Helena MacCormack, PCI

All Eyes On Me:
A Reflection on the Experience of Online Virality as a Performing Artist

In 2022, I posted a video to TikTok. As a comedian in the 21st century, sharing work on social media has become part of the job - but this time, my video achieved unprecedented success. It reached 3.4 million views in a matter of days and a slew of accompanying comments.

This presentation is a reflection upon my experience encountering online virality, adapted from an assignment completed during my MA. The process began with an exploration of the complex emotions I faced during this event, the lasting record of which can be observed in messages to my loved ones and posts shared on Instagram. Connecting the experience to academic literature on affordances - the possibilities allowed or encouraged by a digital platform - I examined the enhanced factors of scale and speed facilitated by worldwide connectivity and TikTok's unique algorithm.

In this presentation I will discuss the lasting impact this event had upon my relationship with social media, having largely withdrawn from digital culture since. The reflection helped me finally address a formidable challenge: how performing artists can balance feelings of autonomy and security with the artistic dependency on public visibility. Moreover, my research led me to draw comparisons between modern social media virality and the tumultuous history of the reality television industry. I conclude by calling for further study of the intersections between digital media and our rapidly evolving system of fame and celebrity, as well as the potentially dangerous psychological effects of hyper-visibility.



Erin Clark, PRHS

In Zion “we all are rich – there is no real poverty” - reclaiming narratives of early working-class LDS converts in England (pre-recorded)

It is recognised that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints holds missionary activity as paramount in their evangelical operation. Although the first instance of LDS missionary activity in England is regarded as “the greatest missionary journey of all time,” (see Evans 1984) narratives of early LDS converts in the British Isles have been reduced to footnotes in the history of the movement. Arriving in 1837, the pioneering LDS missionary party divinely bestowed with the task of spreading the Mormon message into the British Isles was greeted by a fractious England typified by rapid industrialisation, a burgeoning population, and widespread poverty – all of which made way for an expansive ‘crisis of faith’. Despite this environment being a perceived antithesis to a spiritual environment, the LDS Church managed to capitalise by specifically targeting “the urban poor.” (see Watt 2009) The English working classes, perceived to have “strong faith [yet] lacking in speculative intelligence” (see Young et.al 1840) seem to have been targeted due to their ease of belief and lack of resistance in conversion. Whether indicative of underlying classism, or representing a forethinking response to navigating an uncertain religious context, the omittance of the narratives of these early working-class LDS converts in England from the continued LDS canon presents some interesting moral quandaries.



This paper seeks to detail the socio-religious experiences of early English LDS converts against the backdrop of the Victorian crisis of faith, in order to explain the earliest capitalised successes of missionary activity in the LDS Church. The overall aim of this paper is to consider aspects of canonisation, to question which communities are afforded the luxury of narrative preservation through formal community records, and to afford some academic attention to these communities which played an imperative role in the establishment of this global new religious movement.

Michelle Duxbury, Media & Communication

My Ghost Will Haunt You: towards a radical reimagining of the rural idyll (featuring a soundscape)

The starting point of my research comes from personal experience of chronic illness, neurodivergence and disability, leading to isolation and lack of connection to the outside world. In my doctoral research, I position this liminality not only as a state of exclusion but also as a transformative disruption to normative order.

Drawing on a textual analysis of the ghost in contemporary anglophone horror films through a synthesis of videographic criticism and practice-based audiovisual work, I employ looping as a mechanism to destabilise and resist dominant narratives and hierarchies of knowledge, alongside practices of embodied speculation to imagine alternatives to physical landscape.
In this presentation I will give a brief introduction to my research project and share one of my soundscape works, inviting the attendees to immerse themselves in the work and consider ways we can imagine and feel and connect with landscape that we can't be physically present in.

Content Notes
This presentation includes themes of disability and horror



Danielle Tseng, PRHS

Constructing autism: A historical trajectory of "theory of mind"

Having a “theory of mind” (ToM) is defined as having the ability to “impute” mental states on oneself or on another individual. It was first conceived in a lab by primatologists working with chimpanzees and later adopted by developmental psychologists studying autistic children.

My research focuses on determining where ToM came from, its historical trajectory as it bounced from one discipline to another, and how it situates within psychology today. I am also particularly interested in evaluating criticisms of ToM and broader criticisms of how psychology has handled autism.

Through my work, I aim to provide an account of what it means for a condition (such as autism) to be made and re-made. Within the context of autism, I also consider: who should get a say in the construction of scientific knowledge?



Melanie Kidd, PCI

The Grief Forum: using theatre as a tool for dialogue about grief support

The Grief Forum is a practice-as-research project exploring how theatre can act as a springboard for discussion around grief literacy. Viewing grief support through a lens of a shared social responsibility, the research explores the skills, knowledge, and values needed in communities to identify and support grief.

Bringing together professionals working in areas of creative practice, academia, community support, and health care, the project uses performance as a tool for increasing and supporting dialogue. The Grief Forum is a facilitated space where participants are guided through a process to consider how the fictional translates into real life. The direction of the conversation is led by them. Ultimately, participants are asked to consider: what could we do to better to support grief in our communities?

I will share the process of the research, how theatre inspired the conversations, and the actions participants are willing to take to share the responsibility of increasing grief literacy in their communities.

Content Notes
Please be aware, this presentation discusses the themes of grief, death, and bereavement.



Joseph Macaulay, English

'Indolent and Supremely Careless': John Keats's Letters of Idleness

In his brief career, John Keats produced some of the greatest poetry ever written in the English language. Remarkably, his prodigious output was realised all before he died at the age of just twenty five, but this work ethic does not come as a surprise. A doctor by trade, and nurse to his tubercular brother Tom, at who's side it has been conjectured that he caught the disease that killed him, Keats was surrounded by reminders of mortality. He was deeply anxious to write while he had time to do so, and the results are manifest in his sizeable oeuvre.

It might come as a surprise, therefore, that this industrious writer also relished moments of idleness. This presentation shall shed some light on Keats's periods of lethargy described in his letters, which paint a rather amusingly cliché picture of the languidly reclining romantic poet and reveal the poet's penchant for 'delicious diligent Indolence!'



Joud Asil, Design

Artificial Skin Technology for Real-Time Respiratory Health Monitoring

Current diagnostic approaches for many health conditions often rely on invasive procedures that may not be suitable or comfortable for all patient groups. This highlights the growing need for alternative diagnostic solutions that combine clinical effectiveness with improved patient comfort and accessibility.

Cystic Fibrosis (CF), a genetic disorder that primarily affects the lungs and the body's mucus-producing cells. Individuals with CF require regular medical monitoring. One of the key biomarkers associated with CF is the elevated chloride concentration found in sweat, making sweat analysis the current gold-standard method for diagnosis.

The project aims to develop and evaluate wearable sensing technologies as a non-invasive and user-centred alternative for respiratory health monitoring.



Jamila Falak, Music

REMEDI: Reggae as Medicine - A Practice-Based Musical Exploration of Self-Embodiment and Wellbeing (followed by a performance)

REMEDI, the project, explores how reggae music can support emotional wellbeing, healing, and self-understanding through creative musical practice. Rooted in my experiences as a Jamaican artist, songwriter, and postgraduate researcher, this project combines music creation, reflective practice, and personal storytelling to examine how music can become a form of medicine for both the creator and the listener.

Through the development of original songs, the project investigates how songwriting, vocal expression, and interwoven with reggae-inspired sound can help process identity, grief, stress, displacement, and personal growth. The research also considers how reggae's long-standing connections to community, resistance, spirituality, and emotional expression contribute to feelings of comfort, grounding, and wellbeing.

Using a practice-based and autoethnographic approach, the project reflects on my lived experiences as an international student and creative practitioner navigating change , loss, and self-discovery while studying in the UK. Alongside the creative work, the research engages with perspectives from listeners and music practitioners to explore how reggae music may create spaces for reflection, connection, healing, and empowerment.



Rather than presenting music only as entertainment, REMEDI positions reggae as a meaningful cultural and emotional resource that can support wellbeing and encourage deeper conversations around identity, care, and human experience.

Melanie Delaney, Media & Communication

Capturing a Movement: Problematising Ethics in the Photographic Representation of Children Protesting Climate Change

My presentation will focus on environmental photography documenting climate change protest, specifically featuring images of children. Through analysis of three photographs of the climate change movement, I will argue that photography evidences a chronological shift from children being depicted as passive victims of climate change to active participants in global environmental campaign movements.

I will also briefly discuss the inherent contradictions which emerge in using photography to evoke ethical and moral responses in viewers through a medium that is arguably morally contentious, environmentally damaging and which has been criticised for distancing viewers. Climate activists must balance advocacy for climate justice whilst avoiding the movement becoming fetishised or commodified.

Content Notes:
This presentation will discuss themes of race and social justice with regards to environmentalism, and touches on issues of racism and racial injustice.



Ayushi Madan, FAHACS

What Indian Dance Pedagogies Tell us About Power Hierarchies

My research is about the emotional experience of being guru-disciple dance training. This form of pedagogy indigenous to India, is utilised not only in dance training but also in other forms including music; in yoga, wrestling, as well as in mystical and spiritual practices. Upholding intimate apprenticeship based relationships with individual disciples, gurus hold immense power over their disciples training, career and largely over their lives.

In this presentation, I will describe the historical evolution of the dance form that I have trained in for over two decades —Odissi. I will also discuss its 'classical' status and its training methods.

The research presentation will then rely on psychoanalytic frameworks to understand why hierarchical forms of relationships are sought and sustained over long periods of time. Why is education an emotional scene in the first place? What does psychoanalysis lend to education (if it should), towards creating more egalitarian practices In pedagogy? Finally, we will seek to understand what constitutes care in pedagogical relationships, and why that is problematic.



Morinta Rosandini, Design

Tracing the Evolution of Batik: Cultural Transformation and Material Practice

How does a traditional craft change over time while still keeping its cultural meaning? This research explores the evolution of batik in Indonesia through a series of stages, showing how it has developed from early resist-dye techniques into a contemporary design practice.

The study outlines six key stages, from early material practices and the emergence of batik as a cultural tradition, to periods of growth shaped by industrial production and market pressures. It also examines how batik became part of national identity, and how it continues to evolve today through digital and sustainable approaches.

Rather than focusing only on patterns, this research looks at how batik is made. It considers materials, tools, and processes, showing how design develops through practice. By comparing traditional and modern techniques, the study highlights how innovation and tradition exist together.

This presentation shows that culture is not fixed but always evolving. Batik demonstrates how cultural practices adapt and change over time, responding to social, technological, and economic influences.



María Alvarado, FAHACS

Affective Encounters in Textile Art Practices

What happens if we think about art not as a finished object, but as something that takes time to unfold?

Drawing on a chapter from my doctoral research, this presentation explores textile artworks by Chilean women artists through practices such as sewing, basting, and knotting. Rather than focusing on what these works represent, I ask how making with fabric involves care, endurance, and time. Paying attention to touch, material resistance, and bodily labour, I reframe artistic practice as a process that unfolds gradually—an ongoing, relational activity shaped through making rather than a finished object.



Tanmay Kulshrestha, History

Seen and Unseen: The Ayah and the Intimate Life of British Colonial India

This paper examines the figure of the ayah and her relationships with colonial men in India between 1850 and 1947, a period during which the ayah occupied a paradoxical position within the imperial imagination: at once indispensable and suspect, intimate and alien, hypervisible yet historically underexamined.

While existing scholarship has largely situated ayahs within the gendered frame of their interactions with memsahibs, this study repositions them as agents navigating a patriarchal colonial order in their encounters with colonial men within the domestic household.

Drawing on a range of archival sources, this paper argues that the ayah came to crystallise the broader anxieties that shaped British engagement with the native Indian subject. She was not merely a domestic worker, but a figure onto whom colonial fears about racial contamination, sexual vulnerability, economic dependency, and cultural proximity were persistently projected. The home, far from being a private refuge insulated from the political, emerges here as a microcosm of empire itself, a site where the hierarchies, desires, and contradictions of colonial rule were enacted on an everyday, embodied scale. In this sense, the relationship between the ayah and the colonial man becomes a lens through which to examine the broader relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, one defined not by distance but by an enforced and deeply unequal intimacy.



The research thus contributes to histories of colonial domesticity, subaltern agency, and the intimate politics of empire, offering a fresh perspective on how the colonial home functioned as a site of both domination and negotiation.

Teba Naqash, English

Arabic-English Translation Issues in Legal and Peacebuilding Iraqi Contexts: Power, Negotiation and Reconciliation

This study investigates how legal and peacebuilding language is translated from Arabic into English in post-2003 Iraq, a context marked by political transition, post-conflict reconstruction, and evolving legal institutions. In such contexts, language functions not only as a legal tool but also as an instrument of power, negotiation, and reconciliation. The paper examines how key legal and peace-related terms such as السلام (peace), المصالحة (reconciliation), and العدالة (justice) are translated and framed in bilingual legislative texts and NGO peacebuilding documents, and how these translation choices influence meaning, legal clarity, and perceptions of justice.

A self-compiled Parallel Corpus of Iraqi Legislative and Peacebuilding Texts (PCILPT) was developed containing 40 Iraqi laws and bilingual NGO reports. The dataset comprises approximately 98,109 Arabic tokens and 132,834 English tokens, segmented, aligned manually, and analysed using Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al, 2014). Employing a mixed-method corpus linguistic and translation studies approach, the study identifies translation strategies (Baker, 1992), examines lexcial, semantic and syntactic shifts, and evaluates how institutional and socio-legal concepts are mediated across languages.

Preliminary findings reveal systematic additions, paraphrasing, and lexical expansion in English translations, often used to clarify culturally embedded or legally dense concepts (Bostanji, 2010:189). However, some translation choices introduce ideological shifts or conceptual ambiguity, potentially affecting the interpretation of legal rights, peace narratives, and public trust. (El-Farahaty, 2023:103). The paper highlights challenges related to legal equivalence, multilingual legal reform, and the representation of peace discourse in translation.



By combining linguistics, translation studies, and peace research, this study contributes both to academic knowledge and to the practical improvement of legal translation practices in post-conflict contexts.

Ffion Evans, English

The disenfranchised Bodies of George Orwell

My presentation focuses on the varying manifestations of the bodies in both Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Down and Out in Paris and London*. From the working-class men and women in *Down and Out*, I critique the capitalist system that upholds the impossible, dangerous and glorified exploitation of the entrapped blue-collar body. I also expand on the scope of the systemic female suffering in this autoethnographic work.

I also examine Julia from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and I argue that she is the most disadvantaged body across all of Orwell's works. I also briefly touch upon a nuanced, feminist lens from *Julia*, a novel by Sandra Newman, and how this expands the scope of her character both psychologically, emotionally and sexually within *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

My overall discussion will focus on the portrayal of the undermined, sovereign, working-class, displaced and tortured body. How and why, they're undermined and what Orwell's works present about social and economic labour. Overall, I examine the works and expand upon the novels polemical issues that surround the socio-political structures external to the fiction.

Content Notes
My presentation touches on these themes: sexuality, misogyny, sex/ sex work, sexual assault/rape.
Other Brief Topics: totalitarianism, torture.



Ye Daxon Ye, LCS

Queer culture in ancient Egyptian civilisation or The queer unconscious intentional narrative of contemporary European art films

Abstract to follow

Daniel Padgett, Music

Reapproaching String Instrument Performance with New Bow Hair Objects

In my current post-graduate composition research at Leeds, I explore new approaches to playing string instruments that engage the body in unique ways through various bow hair objects (from large bow hair loops, to worn bow hair garments). Though still made from one of the bow's core materials (horse hair), I am interested in using these bow hair objects in different ways from traditional bowing techniques. It is my hope to use these new bow hair objects to disrupt the hierarchies that have historically existed in music—hierarchies that often place the composer's genius before the performers' more first-hand experience. Positioning these objects as co-performers, and even co-composers, I also prioritise cross-discipline collaboration and work with costume designers, visual artists, and string instrument experts to bring these collaborative works to performance environments.



Morty Zhang, English

From Christophere Okigbo's Heavengate to Labyrinths

I am doing a poetry analysis on Christopher Okigbo, specifically, I want to explore how David Richards' theory of cultural representation in Masks of Difference helps us understand the poetry of Nigerian modernist Christopher Okigbo.

Richards' core argument is clear. He suggests that colonial and anthropological discourses construct "the other" through a logic of the mask. This mask simultaneously reveals and conceals. It serves power, but it is also full of internal contradictions and expresses what Richards calls "perpetual dissent.

My argument is that Okigbo's poetry – particularly Lament of the Flutes and the wider Labyrinths sequence – performs a literary instantiation of Richards' theoretical concerns. For example, Okigbo's work features two closely related water-deity figures: the Watermaid and Idoto.

Idoto refers to a specific Igbo river goddess, intimately tied to the poet's ancestral lineage – his grandfather was a priest of Idoto. The Watermaid, by contrast, is a more syncretic figure. She blends Igbo "mammy water" traditions with Western associations, serving as Okigbo's personal muse and his medium for cross-cultural dialogue. In his poem, Okigbo does not naively abandon the mask to return to an authentic, pure tradition by shifting from Watermaid to Idoto. He does something more sophisticated. He let the Watermaid become the path to Idoto – the hybrid, cross-cultural mask that points toward the ritual core that demands sacrifice. This, I believe, is exactly what Richards means by seeking "different masks" rather than merely wearing "masks of difference."



Georgie Hook, PCI

Exploring assemblages of home through participatory collage-making

Homes are sites where the interdependent relations between objects, materials, bodies, atmospheres and multi-sensory phenomena are continually (re)assembled in an everyday context. Yet, the sheer ubiquity of these quotidian environments means their affectivity can often be overlooked, receiving 'daily inattention' (Highmore 2011). Informed by my background as a performance designer in theatre, this project draws on the spatial and material sensibilities of scenography to explore the intimacies that shape experiences of domestic environments, and the possibilities that emerge from attending to them.

As part of an evolving methodology, I have visited research participants in their own homes and engaged them in a series of creative activities, designed to encourage attunement to the space. These activities include collage - a method that involves a tactile assembling of disparate materials. In this presentation, I'll be reflecting on the role collage-making can play in revealing embodied experiences and foregrounding the idea of home as a ‘collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces’ (Bennett 2010, p21).



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Thank you

Thank you to all of our fantastic presenters, the PGRE wouldn't have happened without you! Also a big thanks to our chairs who have kept the sessions running.

To you, our audience, thank you so much for attending the first ever PGRE. We really appreciate your support.

In order to find out what worked, what we could improve and whether you want there to be a second PGRE, please could you complete our short feedback form: **https://tinyurl.com/pgre26feedback**

AHC Enhancement

PGRE '26