

Paper proposal

Beyond the hearing line: Utopian representations of Flournoy's Commonwealth

Throughout history, the framework under which structured languages were theorised overtly excluded signed languages. The peak of such rejection manifested in the so-called Milan Congress, a gathering of educators of the deaf in 1880. 25 years prior to this event, during a particularly auspicious period in Deaf history, Deaf activist John J. Flournoy and educator William W. Turner exchanged letters discussing the former's wish to create a Deaf Commonwealth. Samuel Porter, the American Annals of the Deaf editor at this time, decided to ask both gentlemen to publish such letters, for their topic was of relevance to the community. Several influential Deaf figures became inspired to contribute to this discussion, particularly Edmund Booth who brought in his perspectives on the possible consequences of a numerous hearing offspring on the success of the project. The desire for the creation of a Deaf Commonwealth is a recurrent utopian projection deriving from Sign Language Peoples. About 130 years after the exchanged letters, the same construct interestingly appears as the topic of Douglas Bullard's *Islay: a novel*, an item of Deaf Literature fitting the utopian genre. Longing for a place where Sign Language usage is widespread and Deaf people are granted full accessibility consistently guides narratives emerging from Deaf communities. The notion of a Deaf city, state or country appears in Deaf poems, prose, and films, having become the topic of an interdisciplinary doctoral research, drawing from Culture Studies, Utopian Studies and Deaf Studies, and aiming at defining the innovative concept of *Deaftopia*.

Applicant Information

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Brief Bio

Cristina Gil is a third year PhD student and FCT scholarship recipient in Culture Studies at the Lisbon Consortium - a doctoral program of Universidade Católica Portuguesa at the Faculty of Human Sciences. She joined the Research Centre for Communication and Culture under the research line of Cognition and Translatability. She holds an Advanced Studies Diploma (2014) on Languages Literatures and Cultures – specialization in Cultural Studies, a Master of Science on Deaf Communities, Education and Signed Languages from the University of Barcelona (2010) and holds a licentiate degree in Translation and Interpretation of Portuguese Sign Language from the School of Higher Education of Setúbal (2007). Her work intersects Deaf Studies, Utopian Studies and Culture Studies in her research of the utopian concept present in Sign Language Peoples.