

Conference Report on "Fear and Fantasy in a Global World"

Hermes—European Consortium for Literary and Cultural Studies
(Centro de Estudos Comparatistas Faculdade de Letras - Universidade
de Lisboa) Casa de Santa Maria, Cascais, Portugal

June 12-18, 2011

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That fantasies trigger or lessen fear is as evident as that fear stimulates or inhibits fantasy. The interplay of the two has fascinated the scholarly mind for a long time. In our day and age fear and fantasy seem to have reached a new level, indeed a global level: the attacks of September 11, 2001 have been interpreted as American and Western traumas of a new magnitude; global warming and natural disasters are occupying imaginary constructions of the earth's future; and the threat of a pandemic—as the word itself suggests—carries with it a threat to the totality of the globe. As the organizers of the 2011 Hermes Seminar and Symposium, Susana Araújo, Marta Pacheco Pinto, Sónia Ribeiro, and Kristian Van Haesendonck, put it in the call for papers, "notions of crisis and catastrophe play an increasing role in our collective imagination and cultural memory". Many senior and doctoral researchers from the partner institutions of the Hermes network heeded their call and in their papers addressed the topic of Fear and Fantasy in a Global World.

Opening Session and International Symposium

The 2011 Hermes Seminar took place in picturesque Cascais, Portugal, near the capital Lisbon, at the Casa de Santa Maria and the Casa das Histórias of the Foundation Paula Rego. Organized by the Centre for Comparative Studies of the Faculty of Letters at the University of Lisbon, it was the fourteenth event of its kind; the European Consortium for Literary and Cultural Studies, Hermes, has been offering doctoral researchers from its partner institutions the chance to present and discuss their own works-in-progress since 1998 (Hermes Website). Since 2004, the seminar has been combined with a scientific symposium featuring senior keynote speakers. The Cascais Symposium on Fear and Fantasy in a Global World included four keynote lectures, and the Seminar offered four days with papers by 33 researchers, dealing with all things fearful and fantastical, from the war against fear in Dante (DANIELA DI PASQUALE) to secular apocalypse (JUHA RAIPOLA), the post-apocalyptic beyond (ANA FILIPA PRATA), and the question 'What would Tom Cruise do?' as an antidote to contemporary male anxiety (DANIEL HOLDER).

The seminar opened with an introduction by coordinating organizer SUSANA ARAÚJO (Lisbon) on "Fear and Fantasy: The Case of 9/11", in which she extended the discussion of the September 11 attacks beyond trauma discourse, using as a counter-point the form of the colonial captivity narrative. Araújo also argued for the utility of the Freudian distinction between fear and anxiety: in several texts, Freud distinguished between fear as being focused on a specific object and anxiety as a state that has no determinate object. Discussions throughout the conference brought out the philosophical forebear in Kierkegaard's notion of anxiety or angst, but also its similarity to Heidegger's conception of Angst as well as related psychoanalytical research. Araújo's introductory paper was followed by an initial discussion in which the notion of trauma was problematized in relation to memory, as it is not the case—in Christopher Bollas' phrase—that you remember trauma, but that trauma remembers you. It was suggested that we should deconstruct the post-9/11 binary opposition between the 'traumatized' on the one hand and the 'celebrators' on the other (perhaps the best example of this being the late Karlheinz Stockhausen's comment on the events as a work of art), since such an opposition leaves no room for political reactions other than these two. This led to agreement on the general importance of the reconstruction of the political implications of narratives, reconstructions of the relation between politics and cultural narratives that were attempted in many of the papers presented at the conference.

At the heart of the summer school was the International Symposium on Wednesday, June 15. Under the title "The Transmissive Self and Transmissive Objects in the Age of Globalization", CHRISTOPHER BOLLAS (British Psychoanalytical Society) spoke on the emerging changes to personality structure in the global era by transmissive objects such as smartphones and social networking sites on the Internet. Drawing on terminology by psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion, philosopher Martin Heidegger, and sociologists Anthony Elliott and John Urry, Bollas argued that social relations are moving in and out of virtuality all the time: sitting down together at a restaurant table does not mean that the people with whom one is dining, the 'actuals', are also the people one is most in contact with at that point in time, as smartphones and other media keep live a connection to 'virtuals' not bodily present. In the same way that children react to scary horror films, Bollas concluded, the transmissive self adapts to this demanding world of transmissive objects in that it makes all speakers and discourses interchangeable, with what was once food for thought becoming mere fast food for thought.

The critical impetus was taken up by BOAVENTURA DE SOUSA SANTOS (Coimbra) in his keynote on "The Epistemologies of the South", in which he delved into the ideological implications of Western epistemology and outlined a postcolonial theory of citizenship. Elaborating on the role of fantasy in the political, Sousa Santos explained that it is as difficult to imagine the end of capitalism and colonialism as it is to imagine that they have no end. For him, this also holds true for the very tools which are supposed to work against these oppressive systems, because a vocabulary of, for instance, 'exploitation', the 'subaltern' or 'cosmopolitanism' does not necessarily represent emancipatory language, but rather evinces its hegemonic origins in the global North. To use 'Northern' language for anti-hegemonic purposes one would have to supply it with insights from alternative critical theories and

practices, as they appear in the 'Global South'. Sousa Santos proposed the solution of a negative general theory that does not rule out geographically and socially specific practices, so as to eschew traditional Eurocentric universalisms in favour of a "negative universalism". Sousa Santos' delineation of a post-colonial theory of citizenship was based on the diagnosis that the Western tradition envisions citizenship based on a politics of administered fear, since thinking in terms of the social contract posits that it is the citizens' fear of each other which makes the state a necessity. In contrast, Sousa Santos developed a view of citizenship from the perspective of the non-citizen, i.e. from the perspective of non-humans, subhumans, and dysfunctional humans. It becomes clear, Sousa Santos concluded, that the fear at the heart of the problems to which the epistemologies of the South provide a solution is the fear of politics.

In his keynote on "Shaft Which Ran: Chinese Whispers with Auerbach, Buck, Woolf and De Quincey", ORTWIN DE GRAEF (Leuven) traced a complex and subtle textual history, the end of which is the last chapter of Erich Auerbach's classic *Mimesis*. De Graef contextualized Auerbach's allusion to Chinese peasants from a Pearl S. Buck novel, and compared the portrayal of the Chinese faces to the "troubled focus" on Mrs Ramsay's face in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* that also haunts the last chapter of Auerbach's book. Virginia Woolf herself, de Graef revealed, was considerably influenced by the English romantic Thomas De Quincey at the time of writing the novel, an influence that extended almost exclusively to this period. Fragments and shades of De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* in Woolf's novel point towards a "sinophobic fetishism", as de Graef phrased it, such as when De Quincey constructs the Chinese as subhuman and laments "the tyranny of the human face". De Graef revealed the problems underlying this 'tyranny of the face' as the challenge of the origin of human sympathy, a challenge that is both of particular importance in post-Christian societies, where the ideology of Christianity no longer guarantees sympathy among the members of society, and part of the human condition.

B. VENKAT MANI (Wisconsin-Madison) offered a transatlantic analysis of anti-immigration movements in his keynote address on "The Nation Undone? Globalization and the Anxiety of the Instead". An analysis of the medial controversy surrounding Thilo Sarrazin's infamous book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (2010) built the basis for Mani's genealogy of earlier expressions of anti-immigrant sentiments in recent German history, such as the notorious slogan "Kinder statt Inder" ('Children instead of Indians'). Taking these debates as indicators of a specific anxiety locatable in a "growing sense of global replaceability", Mani compared the German debates with a proliferation of anti-immigrant publications in the United States by authors such as Roy Beck, thereby arriving at a picture of anxieties in the age of (and as a result of) the global flow of capital, labour, and intellect. The ensuing lively discussion, which also marked the end of the International Symposium, centred on the origins of anti-immigration movements in economic crises and the possibilities and pitfalls of multiculturalism(s).

Seminar

The 33 papers by doctoral researchers on fear and fantasy in a global world stretched across time periods, from the early Italian renaissance to TV shows as recent as 2010. Papers were twenty minutes each, with a subsequent ten minutes for discussion. While the major part of the presentations followed the general topic closely and focused on the fear-inducing factors of fantasy, some contributions, especially on the first day, also foregrounded the capacity of fictional and non-fictional discourses to shape positive utopias. KATHLEEN CONNOLLY (Wisconsin-Madison), in her talk on the immigration debate in Spain, contrasted the literary and filmic appropriations of the topic, often rather negative portrayals, with a positive imagination of national identity that takes place in internet forums which offer help to people in multicultural relationships. A similar, but fictional counter-discourse can be found in works by Milan Kundera and Bernardo Atxaga, in which dream sequences work as an alternative form of resistance, facing political and social reality despite their fantastic character, as HARRIET HULME (London) argued. That these possibilities are often tenacious was shown by MAY HAWAS (Leuven), who analysed the attempt to make sense of an anxious world by means of the genre of the Bildungsroman in Kundera's *Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984) and the Egyptian Waguih Ghali's *Beer in the Snooker Club* (1964). Some groupings of papers were specifically focused on topics in the realm of literary studies, such as the Tuesday morning session, which dealt with fantasy and fear in poetry from Romanticism to Postmodernity. BRECHT DE GROOTE (Leuven) re-examined Coleridge's distinction between imagination and fancy and its inherent tensions through a reading of his poem "Constancy to an Ideal Object" (1828), and compared it with Thomas De Quincey's *Suspiria de Profundis* (1845) to illuminate a "rhetoric of fear" as the spectre that haunts the romantic conception of fantasy. Symbolist poetry and poetics were the focus of CAMILLE MURIS-PRIME's (London) talk on "Baudelaire's Spleen", which traced elements of fear and fantasy in Baudelaire's lyrical interactions with Paris within the tensions of emerging modernity. MARGARITA GARCIA CANDEIRA (Santiago de Compostela) combined the two interests in space and the spectral in her paper on "Habitability and Spectres in the House of Language", in which she discussed the Spanish author Luis García Montero's "Casa en ruinas" (*Las flores del frio*, 1991) as an example of postmodern experiential poetry.

During the last two days the collective scenario of fear of World War II and the horrors of the Holocaust as well as their literary and cultural repercussions were the centre of interest. JARKKO LAURI (Oulu) drew attention to Finnish author Mika Waltari's war novellas and foregrounded elements of fantasy and allegory often in contrast to the writer's better known historical novels such as *Sinuhe, the Egyptian* (1945). ALEXANDRA HILLS (London) emphasized the unsettling effects of the past as they affect the present, as she interpreted the nightmarish sequences in Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina* (1971) and the sadomasochistic relation between a former Nazi officer and a Holocaust survivor in Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* (1974). The possibilities of an ironic way of coping with Holocaust experiences were laid out by MARIJA SRUK (Gießen), who explained how film comedies of the late 1990s such as *La vita è bella* (1997) shield neither their protagonists nor the audience from the brutality of historical facticity, despite creating a fantastic parallel world. The question of how the post-memory

generation deals with cultural memories of earlier generations was addressed by DRAGO MOMCILOVIC (Wisconsin-Madison) in his analysis of Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* (1995). RAUL CARSTOCEA (London) dealt with the Romanian fascist movement, "Legion of the Archangel Michael", arguing that their anti-Semitic propaganda represented a strategy for glossing over the actual problems of a rapidly changing Romanian society between 1927 and the outbreak of World War II.

Beyond specific historical epochs and events, many of the presentations occupied themselves with cross-medial constellations of fear and fantasy. JOÃO PEDRO COSTA (Porto) devoted his talk to the question of how the visual composition of v(ideo)logs is adapted for the staging of fears in music videos, the dominant audio-visual medium on the Internet. GERO GUTTZEIT (Gießen) brought out the trans-generic features of the detective narrative as a fear-dispelling myth of knowledge, as it informs the Sophoclean drama, *Oedipus the King*, and Martin Scorsese's film *Shutter Island* (2010). A continuous science-fiction narrative that enacts the fearful contradictions between the local and the global in the novel *Road Side Picnic* (1971), the motion picture *Stalker* (1979), and the video game series *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* (2007-2010) was traced by JOEL KAIPAINEN (Wisconsin-Madison).

Inter-disciplinary contributions included the relation between literature and the sciences as well as literature and economics. The interplay between scientific discoveries in geology and archaeology and literary discourses was analysed by CHRISTIN GRUNERT (Gießen) in nineteenth-century German and English texts. JAMES DANIEL's (Wisconsin-Madison) paper on "Promise and Control in Free Market Fantasy" examined the repercussions of the global financial crisis in Iceland, adding to the tally of those contemporary events that seem to inspire fear as much as fantasy.

After Fear and Fantasy

The 2011 Hermes Seminar and Symposium have proven that the topic of fear and fantasy in a global world stimulates a wide array of broad-ranging and subtle responses. The papers at the conference, of which a selection is to be published, opened up perspectives on fear and fantasy not only in the contemporary, globalized world, but also in earlier periods and epochs. The conference provided an excellent forum for young researchers to receive feedback at different stages during and after the doctoral process. Joining junior and senior researchers in an open and friendly atmosphere, Hermes 2011 in Cascais helped to put individual projects into an international perspective, but above all it provided an encouragement to go on researching beyond fear and with a good dose of fantasy.