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Imagination



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Abstracts

Imagination

Paradise Lost: Pastoral fantasy – Breastfeeding Peasant in Late Nineteenth Century French Art

This paper examines the imaginary representations of the peasant women feeding their children in French art at the end of the nineteenth century. It argues that this was a fantastical genre which reflected a longing for a dying epoch of fertility and peace. The paper then shows that during the second French Empire, visual representations of blissfully breastfeeding peasants set in nature have appeared in abundant works of art, intertwining the Rouseaunian ideal of nature with the peasant's working ethos. In these works the nursing mother is positioned in scenes of agrarian fields, reflecting family values as well as a strong affinity between the fertile land and humankind. These strong ideological ties brought the images of the nursing peasants great attention as they were exhibited in the Parisian Salon. And yet, the Franco-Prussian war, the industrial revolution and the import of raw materials compelled many peasants to search for new sources of livelihood and eventually to urbanize; thus this visual representation was not in tune with reality. Rather, it portrayed the nostalgic vision of idyllic nursing mothers.

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On the Love for a Perverse Object: The Artist of Evil and the Profaning of the Father's Photograph in Marcel Proust's Novel Remembrance of Things Past

Marcel Proust's novel Remembrance of Things Past (*À la recherche du temps perdu*) is a cultural document which entails a heterogeneous discourse of photography. This discourse in the novel enables the tracing of the changes in the political existence in connection with the changes in the concept of "the visual" during the

development of the age of reproduction and the appearance of photography. As such, it reflects the need to adjust to the new technology, as much as to the new conditions of political existence in the sphere of sexuality.

Recent researches focused on the construction of subjectivity through the discursive aspects of visibility in the novel. In contrast, this paper explores the manner in which discursive aspects of visibility bear on the construction of female sexuality and the female's ability to act political. It does so by examining the relations between photography, gender and sexuality in one of the famous parts of the novel – the Monjovan episode. It will argue that these discursive relations construct the conditions for the appearance of a political action carried out by the female subjects. Thus, during a ritual of profanation of her father's photograph Mlle Vinteuil and her girlfriend act to reorganize the field of vision in order to enable their own emergence as sexual subjects.

In focusing on this episode the paper wishes to challenge contemporary critical discourse regarding the politics of gender and sexuality in visual culture. Thus, it will eventually discuss the manner in which the acts in the Monjovan episode resist the effects of modern visual regimes, philosophical and clinical, which promote essentialist concepts of sexuality, and whose implications are the fixation of a hierarchy of gendered role divisions and power relations in the sphere of sexuality.

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Fantasy, Folklore, Fairytale Erotica: Tales of the "Golem" in German Literature of the first Decades of the Twentieth Century

This paper discusses the legend of the *Golem* and its role in German literature of the turn of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. The paper shows that the New-Romantic style of the late nineteenth century emphasized an admixture of mystical and rational attitudes regarding the non-rational and inhuman, either by tending towards neutral symbolic perception or towards the erotic element in the legend. During the twentieth century, however, authors and novelists such as *Meyrink*, *Nottebohm* and *Singer*, distanced themselves from the original legend materials. Finally, in some of the later writings, the Golem represents mainly a symbol detached from its original story. The *Golem* appears as a demon (*Wassermann*), as a machine or symbolic automaton (*Mynona, Kerr*), or as representing the human figure of Walter Rathenau (*Kessler*).

The importance of these stories lies in their wide influence on the European popular culture of their era. Their influence could be traced to well-known books such as "Frankenstein" by Mary Shelley, and the play "R.O. R" of the Jewish playwright Czech *Karel Čapek*. Written in 1920 in Prague, this play described a race of synthetic beings, called "robots", created in factories by scientists, eventually

destroying the human race and taking its place; it constituted a central image which is still present in the contemporary social, cultural and political imaginaries.

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Manifest for Political Imagination: Reflections on Feminism, Oppression and Care

This paper aims at presenting what could be termed as a spiritual feminist approach to questions of oppression and political activism. For this propose the paper challenges, from a theoretical perspective, the boundaries between the public-sphere and the inner, private, sphere, for which the individual is the object of change. To a large extent these boundaries starkly informed modern political thought, and the so called separation between religion and state. The paper's aim however is to argue that an integration, rather than separation, between the two may enable the creation of a viable, essential transformation in the current social and political arenas of feminist struggle.

In order to discuss such a possible integration the paper returns to the writings of eastern as well as western philosophers. The ancient Hindu philosopher Patanjaly and the contemporary writings of the western philosophers Luce Irigaray and Emmanuel Levinas will serve as cases in point. The objective in juxtaposing these thinkers is not to discuss the similarities and differences in their philosophies and philosophical traditions. Rather the aim is to underline the article's appeal to challenge the routine political imagination prevalent among women feminist activists and thinkers. These thinkers demonstrate, albeit in different ways, a rather similar sensitivity regarding the intimate relations between the private and the collective, the spiritual and the social, religiosity and the public good. They induce us to formulate a new manifest for feminist active and devoted struggle against forms of operation in a form of a spiritual quest for care, responsibility and Human growth.

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The Concept of Utopia and European Identity in a Post-Metaphysic Age

The Western overall modern mission stem from the Judeo-Christian quest for Utopia. The aim of this paper is to discuss from a speculative philosophical point of view this mission as a new form of quasi-religiosity. At the heart of this semi-religiosity lies a wishful purification from an alleged sin. This act takes the form of a new myth which triumphs in our contemporary *Zeitgeist* made of the exile of Spirit. Though it differs from everyday New-Age spirituality, this approach is still containing a connection to religiosity, offering perhaps a last possible holiness in

the era of the exile of the spirit and the deconstruction of the ethos of universal utopianism.

The paper points out further that this new mission is made of a form of a hatred of the not-I within the self. More particularly, from a western historical perspective, such an approach is committed to purification from the otherness of the Jew within Western culture as the most infamous dimension of Judeo-Christian civilization. Thus, it informs a new anti-Semitism making it perhaps the constitutive ethos of our times. Within the present historical change the power of anxiety, frustration and fury which are incubated in the new anti-Semitism are fertilized by the downfall of modern Utopia. Western "self-hatred" has replaced then the quest for Utopia, the spirit of reflection, and the erotic presence. Yet, the present end of Western Utopia is not the end of its vitality but rather its transformation from an erotic one into a Thanatos-oriented vigor. The absence of Western erotic strength appears as "hospitality"; hospitality that is an invitation to home-returning into nothingness.

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Dissenting Commemoration. *Kristallnacht* and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in the Memory of the East German and Polish Opposition

East German as well as Polish dissidents organized several independent commemoration ceremonies in the 1980's. Though the commemoration of historical events by opposition groups was quite common in Poland and to a lesser degree also in East Germany this practice is still remarkable. In contrast to other events remembered, Holocaust memory was neither taboo, nor was it ignored by the communist rulers. Thus the dissident commemorations of *Kristallnacht* in East Germany and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in Poland, which also stood for the Holocaust as a whole, coincided with official commemorations.

This paper shows how dissidents did not only commemorate the victims of the German mass murder of European Jewry in an alternative way, separate from in the official ideologically corrupted ceremonies; more radically they denied the moral right of the communist governments to commemorate the Holocaust victims, while violently suppressing their own people and using anti-Semitic stereotypes for their propaganda. Yet, concurrently, the dissident commemorations were also not apolitical. Any independent historical narrative concerning World War II and related events questioned the historical legitimacy of the communist governments, which saw their power morally justified through the Red Army's victory over German fascism. Thus, the opposition groups also used these commemoration events to communicate their own political agendas.

Still, the dissident efforts to commemorate the Holocaust stimulated debates about why and how to memorialize the extermination of Jews under Nazi rule among different spheres of the East German and Polish populations. This debate promoted

the process of reconsidering the meaning of the Holocaust for the respective societies and proved effective also far beyond political struggles.

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In Fear of Relativism: The Crisis of Historicism Reconsidered

The "crisis of historicism" that plagued Central European thought at the turn of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century, has often been characterized as a crisis of historicist methods. In particular, the crisis that leading historians such as Ernst Troeltsch experienced has been commonly portrayed as an expression of uncertainty in matters of morality, religion, or philosophy, caused by a rejection of historicism. In following Friedrich Jaeger, this article suggests that the crisis experienced by Troeltsch and his contemporaries is to be understood, not as a crisis *caused* by historicism, but as one which the historicist tradition tried to *face*. It argues that the fear of "nihilism" and "moral relativism" expressed by Troeltsch's generation was not caused by an alleged abandonment of historicism, but by the growing implausibility of what nineteenth-century historicists had called "development" (*Entwicklung*). While in nineteenth-century Germany this notion had provided historical justifications of *bildungsbürgerliche* values, the collapse of this notion, especially after World War I, led to a reconsideration of such a justification. In identifying the crisis of historicism with the problem of justification, or with the collapse of trust, this essay provides some explanation as to why such a fear expressed in words like "crisis," "relativism," and "nihilism" at that time, signaling the awareness that values could perhaps not be justified at all.

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Uriel Tal on Anti-Semitism as Weltanschauung

Uriel Tal's research has evoked comments, such as, "comprehensive and pioneering," "monumental," "a prototype for all scholars," "a work that is paradigmatic in every sense of the word." Yet, since his tragic death in 1984, studies overlooked his historiographic legacy. The following article focuses on this legacy, by focusing on Tal's writings on anti-Semitism.

The paper argues that in his research of German anti-Semitism Tal creates a universal theoretical structure which addresses the nature of anti-Semitism and the hatred of the other in general. In doing so he challenges Israeli hegemonic assumptions regarding the nature of anti-Semitism, such as those made by Jacob Katz, Samuel Etinger and others. Against these theories, Tal goes one step further in his universal approach by finding anti-Semitism to be a set of ideas that involves a "rebellion" against the ideas of the Enlightenment and more particularly against

Immanuel Kant and his legacy, as well as its manifestation in political forms, i.e., democracy, liberalism and socialism. In drawing on his examination of the various political factions in Germany Tal fleshes out the manner in which anti-Semitism glorifies the nation by using myth and its inherent political religion on one hand and Darwinism on the other. The political collective is consequently portrayed as "exclusive" and the "other" is barred from it. Thus for Tal the common political grounds in Germany were in fact rooted in a general worldview rather than in the particular hatred of Jews.

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"Your Ashen Hair": On Paul Celan

World War Two and the Holocaust have created an unbridgeable divide between German literature on the one hand, and German-Jewish literature on the other. For Jewish authors writing in the German language, the trauma of Auschwitz casts a shadow over their works which sets them apart within the larger corpus of post-war literature written in German-speaking countries. The poet Paul Celan, more than any other German-Jewish author of the Holocaust generation, was deeply aware of this divide. The article describes how his life as much as his poetry, were deeply informed by this understanding.

Born in Czernowitz in 1920, Celan's second mother tongue was Romanian. From early on, however, he made German the language of his poetry; at the same time he settled in Paris, outside the German speaking sphere where, in 1970, he would finally commit suicide. In close readings of selected poems and passages of Celan's prose, the article shows how this two-fold decision of writing in German while living outside its geographic sphere, has shaped the language of his art.

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