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Affinity Group Report: *Politics, Poetics, and World Literature 2*

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We had wonderful and engaging conversations on the topic of “Politics, Poetics, and World Literature,” and we came to the table with various definitions of these terms and the resultant implications for our work. Our discussions of politics morphed into a series of critical questions that we found useful to shape our discussions and to refine our research agendas:

- What are the impacts of local, state, and national political structures on lived experiences and what is the role of the author, text, and critic in responding to them? What is the role of literature in constructing, critiquing, and reflecting political realities?
- How do politics shape bodies, individuals, communities, the environment, and definitions of life?
- What role does identity politics play in our discussion of politics?
- What are the politics of exception, wartime, struggle, and resistance?
- What are the politics of accessibility, especially as it relates to literary texts? Who is the target audience of a literary work and who does it exclude?
- What are the implicit and explicit politics of criticism and literary analysis? How do we and should we combat the tendency of criticism to sometimes read political intentions into literary texts when they might not be there? What politics do we bring to the text?

- What is the relation between external politics (historical-social-political conditions or ideologies) and internal politics (within the literary work)?
- What conditions must be met for a work to be considered “political”? Must it raise awareness? Must it resist? Must it challenge? If so, on what scale or does scale matter at all?
- What are the politics of translation? When do/should/might we translate? Under what conditions do we decide not to translate? How do we deal with issues of untranslatability of some political terms even within the same language as they travel in time and place?
- What are the political potentialities of different genres? What does a comparison of the political histories and impacts of different genres reveal?
- What is the relation between history and politics? What should contemporary discussions of politics include? Must discussions of politics be expedient?
- How do we situate ethics in relation to politics and literature? What would a politics and poetics of justice look like?

Stefania Porcelli (The Graduate Center CUNY) explored “the multifaceted relationship between violence, speech and power in *Titus Andronicus*, taking as her point of departure Hannah Arendt’s reflections on violence as opposed to power, and as something “incapable of speech” (Arendt 1990, 19).”

Iulia Sincaian (Simon-Fraser University) shared her preliminary work on “Paul Celan, specifically the impact of trauma on his use of language.”

Nathanael Pree (University of Sydney) examined Charles Olson’s *The Maximus Poems* “to investigate the affinities that modern, transnational poetry can create and express across time and space.”

Kritish Rajbhandari’s (Northwestern University) presentation explored the theme of betrayal in Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *A Grain of Wheat*, interpreting “betrayal, in the light of what Derrida calls ‘the aporia of responsibility,’ the paradox that irresponsibility as a possibility for dissidence is the very condition of responsibility”

Silvia Riva (University of Milan) discussed her new research on the concept of “tiers-paysage” or “third landscape” from the work of Gilles Clément as a way to interpret the political landscape of the Congo.

Vincenz Serrano’s (Ateneo de Manilla, Phillipines) book project “aims to constellate the following concerns: (1) an analysis of the formal dimensions of Philippine long poems prior to and during the Martial Law period (1972-1981); (2) an examination of the transnational aesthetics which constitute these poems; (3) an analysis of the ways in which the poems engage with— either in terms of complicity or resistance—the national context during Martial Law.”

Nicole Sparling (Central Michigan University) presented a preliminary draft of her most recent work on Brazilian writer Rubem Fonseca's crime fiction, which has oft been examined through the lens of its blunt force, obscene and vulgar language, and harsh representations of violence. I argue that Fonseca's short story, "Intestino Grosso," ["Large Intestine"] holds the key to decoding what I'm calling Fonseca's satiric aesthetic theory of crime fiction, and can help to illuminate the function of violence and its politics in his work.

Nitzan Tal's (Hebrew University) careful analysis of Shani Boianjiu's novel concluded that "The empathy experienced by the reader of *The People of Forever* is no doubt *unsettled*, positioned on the knife-edge between pity and/or identification to criticism and/or aversion; but it is also *unsettling*, requiring of the reader an introspection and raising questions as to her own ethical position in the world."

Maria Tepavac's (University of Vienna) research centered on poetic and political readings of the "modernization of dramatic structure in Serbia and censorship in it," specifically in terms of the "dramatic opus of Jovan Hristić," who was "one of the most influential individuals on the Serbian literature and theatre scene in the second half of the 20th century."

Ahmet Turan Bulent (Bilkent University) gave a visual presentation, in which he discussed the topic of humor in the graffiti from the Gezi Park protest that took place in Istanbul in 2013.

Melinda Vasari (Eotvos Lorand) interpreted a scene from Péter Nádas's novel, *Parallel Stories*, through the lens of sound studies and musicology, specifically "those textual features that cannot be unequivocally described by meanings – such as attunement, mood, atmosphere and other sensual, material effects of the literary texts –, yet, that play a fundamental role in the working of the texts and in the way we understand them." She is "interested in the borderline cases when these distinctions are ambiguous, when noise can become meaningful and part of an artwork, or the reverse, information can become noise and disturbance."

Wang Nan (Beijing Normal University) brought forth a grant proposal on "Narrating AIDS in China: Moral Duty of Representation," in which she plans to explore the literary and cinematic representations of AIDS in the Chinese context and their accompanying social, political, and ethical implications. On the contribution of her work, she writes: "This research will accordingly delve into the three most easily neglected but conspicuous aspects of Chinese AIDS narratives: the stigma around AIDS found in Chinese AIDS literary and cinematic narratives, the absence of ethical and humanistic concerns resulted from the excessive post-social modernization progress as well as imperative appeal for collective social support to restore HIV patient dignity and recall humanistic concerns in China."

Wang Zhu's (Tsinghua University) primary research interests are in critical theory and he presented his comparative project that contemplated the possible intersections between new historicism and cultural studies.

Raelene Wyse (University of Texas at Austin) introduced us to Brazilian author Moacyr Scliar (1937-2011), whose first novel, *A Guerra no Bom Fim*, focuses on daily life before and just after World War II in a small Jewish neighborhood in southern Brazil. “Even though the novel explicitly appears unrelated to the military regime,” she argues that “its representations of Jewishness critique the Brazilian military regime’s discourses about race and capitalism and creates a critical Jewish oppositional voice, a kind of Jewish Tropicália.”

Xia Xiaoyu (Fudan University), in a research proposal on the topic of modern Chinese sensibility, asked “Why modern Chinese writers had been repeatedly invoking those psychiatric and neurological terms, particularly “nerves” (shenjing), “nerves endings” (shenjing moshao), or “nerve fibers” (shenjing xianwei)?”; “How they appropriated these terms to call for new discoveries in the realms of feeling and action, to unsettle and refresh Chinese sensibility, and to configure a world order that resembles the nervous system, thus projecting the possibilities (and impossibilities) of an organic, interconnecting whole—a human nation and a common world?”; and, above all, “How writers linked an individual’s nerves and neuroses to the sensory mechanism of a whole nation, and in doing so, incorporate themselves as “nerve endings” to modern China?”

Liesl Yamaguchi's (Princeton University) presented a selection from her dissertation proposal, which “considers the radical formal developments of late 19th century French poetry through the lens of the contemporaneous fascination with colored hearing, a variety of synaesthesia. It traces the novel emergence of colored vowels, first attested in Europe in 1812, examining the unprecedented shift in sound-color correspondences from their traditional hosts, the tones of music, to the elements of language, predominantly vowels. Beginning with the curious chapter on vowels in Hermann von Helmholtz's monumental study of affective tone in music, *Die Lehre von den Tonempfindungen als physiologische Grundlage für die Theorie der Musik*, the dissertation proceeds to trace colored vowels through major symbolist works by Rimbaud, Verlaine, and Mallarmé, including “Voyelles,” “Art Poétique,” and “Crise de vers.””

Lusia Zaitseva (Harvard University) shared her dissertation work on “the political implications of childhood in the Stalinist era (addresses to childhood, performances of childishness, and so on),” where she analyzes the work of Kornei Chukovskii and Osip Mandelstam. She “contend[s] that Chukovskii’s “Tarakanishche” and Mandelstam’s “Stalin epigram” form a nexus through which the political stakes of childhood in their respective praxis and poetics (seemingly obvious in Chukovskii’s case, less so in Mandelstam’s), as well as in the Soviet context writ large, can be seen.”