

Sapienza University of Rome
International PhD in Germanic and Slavic Studies
Graduate conference 2022

Edificio "Marco Polo", Circonvallazione Tiburtina 4

July 5th/6th 2022

Losing the world, losing the Self within the world
Observations and expressions concerning estrangement

*Naked and alone we came into exile. In her dark womb we did not know our mother's face; from the prison of her flesh
have we come into the unspeakable and incommunicable prison of this earth.*
Thomas Wolfe, Look Homeward Angel, 1929

The aim of this international doctoral conference is to reflect on the concepts of estrangement, alienation, lack of orientation, disorientation and the loss of a stable identity understood as cultural phenomena related to historical fractures, collective traumas and the collapse of value and thought systems, with special attention going to the manifestations of these phenomena in the countries belonging to Germanic and Slavic areas.

Taking a cue from the questions posed by Ernesto De Martino in *The End of the World* (La fine del mondo, 1977), we intend, specifically, to investigate the sense of being shipwrecked and disorientated as linked to the experience - emblematic and viscerally 'double' by nature - of loss 'of' the world, and loss 'within' the world, following traumatic cultural fractures that can be understood as moments of crisis, encounters and clashes with different cultures or manifestations of social and natural disasters. Estrangement and change of cultural paradigms become direct consequences, albeit unpredictable and traumatic, of the end of a personal or collective identification with a predefined context; the estrangement connected to the cultural disappearance and transformation of specific ethnical groups that were forced to align with a dominant culture could serve as an example. In this regard, we can look at *Still Storm*, the "Slovenian play" (Höller 2013) by Peter Handke, where the "timeless bench", in accordance with the Theatre of the Absurd's tradition, becomes a starting point for an illusory return to the image of Carinthian Slovenes. These ancestors were eradicated, along with their Language, by the brutality of Nazism, by Britain's rule and by Austria's hegemony after the Second World War. Similarly, the end of a political and cultural system evokes a feeling of instability, as explained in Stefan Zweig's *The World of Yesterday* (Die Welt von Gestern, 1942), which describes the uncertainty provoked by the end of the Austro-Hungarian empire, and in Svetlana Aleksievich's *Secondhand Time* (Время Секонд Хэнд, 2013), which recounts the historical fracture between a Soviet and Post-Soviet space and the resulting feeling of estrangement.

Inscribed in memory, associated with everyday life, the cornerstones of tradition are unhinged by the traumas of History, and being-in-the-world renders one's own character destabilized and lost within the artistic-literary representation. The discussion of estrangement involves, in our perspective, the analysis of the concepts of crisis and fracture, as related to an historical or cultural context; special attention is therefore devoted to the notion of rewriting and intertextuality, as well as the act of questioning the literary, linguistic, ideological, philosophical and artistic canon. The aim is to reconstruct a bond with lost or ancient cultural elements, with an imaginary or reconstructed past, which sometimes leads to historical and cultural revisionism.

In this regard, it is advisable to consider the role of nostalgia, depicted by Svetlana Boym in *The Future of Nostalgia* as a desired return to a comforting, reconstructed and idealized past which clashes with a disappointing reality; when it comes to the Russian post-soviet context, the concept of *Nostalyaschee* (Ностальящее. Собрание наблюдений, 2002) is equally relevant. Furthermore, there are several fictional characters who embrace strategies in order to flee real life but later end up reuniting with motionless and hopeless realities. This is the case of Tunda from *Flight without End* (Die Flucht ohne Ende, 1927), carried by the wind of history and forced to undertake an allegorical pilgrimage through a perpetually unfamiliar world, or escape into an extraordinary and mythological world. Following this perspective, we can reflect on the theme of escaping to an imaginary world, which is expressed through the use of the absurd and of science fiction in contemporary Russian literature, as seen in Tatiana Tolstaja's *The Slynx* (Кысь, 2000) or in Viktor Pelevin's works *Omon Ra* (Омон Ра, 1992) and *Generation P* (Generation «П», 1999), which decontextualize Soviet forms and symbols of the past. In addition to this, this attitude is also exemplified by the role of the "uncanny", as seen in the use of grotesque anti-positivist visions throughout literary and figurative sciences of the early twentieth century, as well as being noticeable in the representations of apocalyptic landscapes and decaying worlds (see also: *The Other Side*, Kubin 1914).

We encourage proposals concerning Germanic and Slavic contexts and related to the following research areas: (geo-)literature and comparative literature, linguistics, philology, comparative history, ethno-anthropological disciplines, philosophy, visual arts. Proposals, redacted in Italian or in English, should be no longer than 250 words (title and references not included), come with a short biography of the speaker and be sent as a PDF file renamed as follows: **Name_Surname_GCSapienza2022**. The deadline for submissions is April 30th 2022. The graduate conference refers to an international audience, therefore English will be the speakers' *lingua franca*. The presentations should not exceed 20 minutes and include a power point presentation. Acceptances will be communicated by May 15th 2022. The papers submitted by the speakers will then be published prior approval of the Conference Committee and the Scientific Board. At the present time, the Graduate Conference is planned to be held in a hybrid format. More details and any updates will be provided after acceptance has been confirmed (May 15th). For further information, please contact the Conference Committee via email at gradconference.uniroma1.2022@gmail.com

Organization Committee

Valentina Bagozzi; Maria Diletta Giordano; Thomas Höhne; Alessandro Pulimanti

Scientific Board

Prof. Alessandro Catalano; Prof. Gabriele Guerra; Prof.ssa Barbara Ronchetti