



New Dangerous Liaisons. Essen: Study Group “Europe: Emotions, Identities, Politics” Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut, Essen Prof. Dr. Luisa Passerini, 09.07.2004–10.07.2004.

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New Dangerous Liaisons

As a conference participant, it is quite rare to be given an active role in the generative thought processes of individual thinkers and their work. It is even more seldom that one is successfully solicited into assuming such a profoundly dialogical role with respect to what some might refer to as a scholar’s “intellectual property.” Even more challenging is to do this in relation to group projects, where the work is the product of a group whose dynamic interactions are the cumulative result of on-going exchanges, collaborative intellectual dialogues and collective negotiations. Perhaps rarest of all is the occasion when such a goal is not only successfully achieved, but when that success is taken to another level — where the exchange itself produces new approaches to old questions and a creative rethinking and rearticulation of existing analytic paradigms. Such was the outcome of the final conference of the Study Group: “Europe: Emotions, Identities, Politics” held at the Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut in Essen, Germany.

The conference, entitled “New Dangerous Liaisons: Discourse on Europe and Love in the Twentieth Century,” was the culminating public event of a two-year collaborative research project on the discourses of love and “Europeanness,” led by Professor Luisa Passerini (University of Turin) and funded by the 2002-2004 Cultural Studies Research Prize (Kulturwissenschaftlicher Forschungspreis) of Nordrhein-Westfalen. This two-day event presented the work of an interdisciplinary group of seven scholars (the core of the research project) from Germany, Italy, Canada, Belarus and the UK, and the re-

sults of their two-year collaboration on the nexus between discourses of love and “Europe” as these have been articulated in multiple sites, historical contexts and source materials. Through an intertextual and intersubjective analysis of diverse forms of discursive production, reception and enactment, the papers presented at the conference highlighted the historical links between conceptions of love and Europeanness, while at the same time delivering a nuanced and engaged critique of the various Eurocentric assumptions that underlie them. By questioning the exclusiveness and hierarchy of traditional forms of European identification, the conference sought to explore the possibility of new ways of feeling European without losing the sedimented emotional investments they have instantiated, linking these ideas, at the same time, to a critical unpacking of the constituent relations between Europeanness and the concept of love itself.

The conference began with an opening address by Luisa Passerini on the topic of “Old and New Subjects of Europeanness.” Passerini’s presentation laid out the stakes of studying the connection between love and Europeanness as a genealogical undertaking aimed at exploring historical continuities and discontinuities and European self- and external constructions. Passerini’s presentation offered a provocative illustration of the significant historiographical implications of the project. The discussion that ensued in response to her comments set the defining tone of the conversations that followed, by initiating a careful deconstruction of key terms and con-

cepts that came to resonate throughout the conference. In particular, an engaging interrogation of the concept of cosmopolitanism and the role of mobility and difference with respect to the construction of Europeaness and its productive entanglements with the discourse of love was one important site of discussion. In addition, ideas of belonging, subjectivity and intersubjectivity also became important sites for exploring (and exploding) the meaning of Europeaness past and present, and from which to engage future modes of defining European subjectivities and forms of belonging.

The opening session of the conference, "Recasting Europe in the World," focused on the imbrications of European discourses of love in the context of its colonial legacies. Liliana Ellena's (University of Turin) paper, "Love Mirrored: Whiteness and the Impossible Romance between Europe and Africa" analyzed the obsession with love and sexuality in Italian colonial literature by questioning what this discourse stood for. Focusing on the images and presuppositions underlying a Euro-African archetypal couple within interwar Italian colonial discourse, Ellena argued that this couple mirrored in multiple ways Italy's ambivalence regarding its relationship to Europe and Europeaness. Ruth Mas's (University of Toronto) paper "Le couple (im)possible? Fethi Benslama and the Intersigne of Love" explored discourses of love and mixed unions in the nineties through the work of Fethi Benslama. Highlighting Franco-Maghrebi women as the subjects of a deployment of mixed unions in France and as a way of problematizing the "liberating" potential of such unions, Mas argued that the colonial violation of Maghrebi women is currently being reframed within a postcolonial recasting of the emotional and political tropes of "hybrid love" in France that takes Islam as the object of its failure.

The second session, "Love Across European Spaces" shifted the discussion from the colonial context to the spatial politics of European love discourse and to the spatio-political implications of Europe at its borders. Alexander C.T. Geppert's (European University Institute, Florence) paper "Lieux d'Amour: European Geographies of Love in the Last Two Centuries" attended to the cartography of love in Europe by mapping the discursive social geography of how the idea of love has functioned historically to create places and shape the spaces of the life of love in Europe. Taking a transnational approach to the spatial dimensions of what he termed the "Europe and Love-Nexus," Geppert used sites and rituals such as Paris as "ville d'amour," honeymooning, Valentines, etc., to undertake a historical analysis of a series of European

places and spaces identified with passionate love and sexual intimacy. In so doing, Geppert politicized the question of intimacy in love by introducing a spatial dimension into the historiography of love. Almira Ousmanova's (European Humanities University, Minsk) paper, "Window to Europe: Social and Cinematic Phantasms of Post-Soviet Subject" was one of the many highlights of the conference. Using film history and theory and Russian cinema as her site of engagement, Ousmanova presented a reading of the cultural memory of Europe from the perspective of its neighbours on its Eastern borders. Ousmanova's analysis problematized a longing for Europe and Europeaness as an impossible imaginary viewed through a Russian "window to Europe." Her presentation stimulated a lively discussion on the stakes of defining the limits of Europe and European belonging as these are enacted in relation to Russia and Eastern Europe and their historically ambivalent status as belonging/not belonging to Europe and Europeaness, in turn, provoking a reflection on how to best assess the contemporary status of the former Soviet states in relation to the "New Europe."

The third and final session, "Networks of Europeaness," brought together three scholars exploring the tensions of intra-European articulations of love in three contrasting contexts. Jo Labanyi's (University of Southampton) paper "Don Juan, Romantic Love and the Spanish Political Imagination from the 1920s to the 1940s" probed some of the numerous proliferations of twentieth-century Spanish publications on Don Juan as an expression of a complicated engagement of Spanish intellectuals with the shifting political status of Spain in Western Europe since the end of the nineteenth century. Focusing on a selection of political readings of Don Juan from Ramiro de Maeztu, Ernesto Gimenez Caballero and Salvador Madariaga, Labanyi argued that their defense of this seminal literary figure was not only a surrogate defense of Spain's central place in Europe, but also a defense of the foundational role of love in Western European culture. Throughout the paper she queried both the nature of love and the nature of empire as expressed in these works, linking the two by using the cultural politics of love to interrogate the relations of power expressed therein. Alison Sinclair's (Cambridge University) presentation "Love Again: Crisis and the Search for Consolation in the *Revista de Occidente*" widened the focus of the conference to engage in a more explicit gendered analysis by examining the dynamics of the discourse on gender in the early years of the *Revista de Occidente* from 1923 through to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil

War. Sinclair read the *Revista* as a dynamic site of articulation between a European discourse of love and scientific discourses on gender difference and relations between the sexes. Using a compelling archive of articles published in the *Revista* under editorial leadership of Ortega y Gasset, Sinclair focused her analysis on the collection of essays devoted to gender, social structure and sexuality. The paper developed a complex argument that revealed how the ideas expressed in these articles imported ideas from scientifically based contributors that functioned to promote a nostalgic and conservative field of relations between the sexes. Sinclair demonstrated how this series of articles reflected the construction of what she termed an *imaginary politics of consolation*, which, through the invocation of a discourse of universal, objective scientific *truths* that grounded gender relations in the biology of sex and sexuality, offered consolation in times of unrest through recourse to a series of gender norms that ran oddly counter to social developments at the time, both in Spain and Europe more broadly. The final paper, Luisa Passerini's *European Jews Between the Wars: Love Discourses Across the Continent*, examined the relationship between Judaism and Europeanness analyzed through two case studies that linked public and private loves in interwar France and Italy: the reception of the play *Dybbuk* in France and Italy in the late 1920s and 1930s, and the story of the lives and love of Giorgina Levi and Heinz Arian told through the archive of their correspondence. Juxtaposing these two very different cases against one another, Passerini explored the vexed status of European identification among European Jews, demonstrating how these two instances present Europe and Europeanness as complexly hybrid conceptions. Reading this rich material through the critical lens of cultural history, Passerini's analysis highlighted the interplay between living subjects and discourses of European subjectivity by showing how each case reveals an attempt to dissociate *being Jewish* and *being European* from essentialism in ways that recognized their multiplicity and hybridity *a hybridity in which love is an expres-*

sion of an excessive double movement between the two parallel worlds of the European Jew.

The consistent excellence of the conference papers was enhanced by the extremely high level of discussion instigated in large part by the distinguished commentators assembled for each panel *an international group of scholars that included Dipesh Chakrabarty (University of Chicago), Lutz Niethammer (University of Jena), Jutta Scherrer (EHESS, Paris), Sally Alexander (Goldsmiths College, University of London), Tina Campt (Duke University), and Etienne Francois (Technical University of Berlin)*. The result was a lively and productive collaborative intellectual exercise wherein all participants collectively rethought the meaning of love historiographically. Rather than reinstating love as either the subject or object of historical analysis, the concept of love became an analytic lens through which to both de-center the Eurocentric subject and at the same time make this decentering the condition of possibility for the emergence of a new, anti-Eurocentric, European subjectivity. In this way, the conference and the work of the project successfully fulfilled the challenge of their title by engaging at an interdisciplinary level the most profoundly *dangerous* or threatening implications dissecting the relations between love and Europeanness *the danger of confronting the limits of European distinction and exemplarity and the dissolution of the European subject/subjectivity when placed in direct dialogue with its constitutive Others*. The conference papers as well as the work of other collaborators with the group will be published next year in the forthcoming volume *New Dangerous Liaisons: Discourses on Europe and Love in the Twentieth Century* *Luisa Passerini, Liliana Ellena and Alexander C.T. Geppert (eds.): New Dangerous Liaisons: Discourses on Europe and Love in the Twentieth Century. Oxford/New York: Berghahn Books, 2005.* We can certainly look forward to seeing the ripple effects of this important project in the future research and publications of its members.

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