

1920-2020: Phantasmagories of war in contemporary literary experiences – Prof. Daniela Tononi

The project investigates the relationship between phantasmagoria and war in contemporary western and oriental literatures and its varieties in social, political and artistic-literary contexts. The term was coined in the late-1700s with reference to the shows made with the magic lantern, which impressed the audience projecting demonic figures. Today, these shows are considered as a sort of precursors to contemporary cinema. In the 20th century, the concept migrated from theatre towards literature, describing narrative expedients that could give back the sequence of colours, sounds and images, usually exploited in the fantastic genre.

Thereafter, phantasmagoria, influenced by psychoanalysis studies, as well as by the change of the social, economic, technological and media frame, acquires a more complex resonance, being a personal representation of a disturbed reality.

These preliminary considerations highlight how phantasmagoria, as a multimedia and polysemic concept, must be analyzed as the object of a historical, social and cultural investigation, in an interdisciplinary way. The project investigates the reallocation function process that transforms phantasmagoria, and the phantasmagorical, in rhetorical and aesthetical-conceptual categories.

Based on the extensive studies on the 18th century fantastic element, the project focuses on forms of reality, manipulation, alteration and suspension. These forms distinguish a time span that goes from the first Post-war to most recent times, on which the state of the art, instead, appears incomplete. Even in the constant theoretical reference to the 19th-century phantasmagorical element, the research identifies in the crisis of realism the fundamental and propulsive moment for the transformation of phantasmagoria, now freed from the register of the fantastic.

The reasons are to be traced in the impossibility of a mimetic return of reality in the aftermath of the two wars which pushes for new developments of modes of representation capable of restoring reality, also due to the occurrence of new perceptive stimuli.