



**ICLA Research Committee on Literary Theory
XXth Annual Workshop
“May ’68 at 50: Politics and Literature”**

AGENDA
NYU ABU DHABI SAADIYAT CAMPUS
Institute Conference Center (A6), Room # tbc
9-10 May 2018

9 May 2018 | DAY 1

8:00 AM --	Breakfast (Campus East Café)
9:15-9.30 AM	Registration Institute Conference Center Meeting Room Foyer
9:30 AM	Welcoming Remarks Robert J.C. Young, Dean of Arts and Humanities, NYU Abu Dhabi
9:35 – 11:00 AM	PANEL I: Chair, Robert Young, President
<i>9:35 - 10:00 AM</i>	<i>The Ethical Appeal of the Indifferent</i> Vladimir Biti , Zhejiang University in Hangzhou (University of Vienna)
<i>10:00 - 10:30 AM</i>	<i>The Memories of Imagination</i> Divya Diwedi , Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi
30 min.	Q&A
11:00 – 11:30 AM	Break & Refreshments

Atrium

11:30 AM – 1:00 PM

PANEL II:

Chair, Stefan Willer, Secretary

11:30 - 12:00

Events, Epochs and Turning- Points: Time vs Period in critical history

Anne Duprat, University of Picardie

12:00 - 12:30 PM

"I would prefer not not-to": Critical Theory after Bartleby

Woosung Kang, Seoul National University

30 min.

Q&A

1:00 – 2:00 PM

Lunch

The Torch Club

D2

2:00 – 3:30 PM

PANEL III:

Chair, Vladimir Biti, Honorary President

2:00 - 2:30 PM

Friendship in "Dark Times": Moscow Unofficial Art after 1968

Kyohei Norimatsu, University of Tokyo

2:30 - 3:00 PM

"We shall therefore never write about what took place or did not take place in May."

Politics of Literature, '67/'68

Robert Stockhammer, Ludwig Maximilians University Munich

30 min.

Q&A

3:30 - 4:00 PM

Break & Refreshments

Atrium

4:00 PM

Expedition Louvre Abu Dhabi

7:00 PM

Dinner

Byblos, Intercontinental Hotel

10 May 2018 | DAY 2

8.30 – 9:00 AM

Coffee

Institute Conference Center

Meeting Room Foyer

9:00 – 11:00 AM	PANEL V: Chair, Robert Stockhammer, Honorary President
<i>9:00 - 9:30 AM</i>	<i>1968: Romanticism's Longue Durée</i> Galin Tihanov , Queen Mary University of London
<i>9:30 - 10:00 AM</i>	<i>The Future of 1968</i> Stefan Willer , Center for Literary and Cultural Research Berlin; Humboldt University of Berlin
<i>10:00 - 10:30 AM</i>	<i>May 1968 as a theoretical event</i> Robert J.C. Young , NYU
30 min.	Q&A
11:00 – 11:30 AM	Break & Refreshments Atrium
11:30 AM – 1:00 PM	<i>A theory of subversion that could not serve the cause of oppression?</i> <i>Revolution as institutional psychotherapy: From Fanon and Sartre to Deleuze and Guattari</i> Guest Lecture: Jean Khalfa , Cambridge University
1:00 – 2:00 PM	Lunch The Torch Club D2
2:00 – 3:30 PM	Business Meeting
3:30 - 4:00 PM	Refreshments Atrium foyer
4.00 PM	Tour: Grand Mosque
7:00 PM	Dinner Sontaya, St Regis Hotel



RESEARCH COMMITTEE ON LITERARY THEORY
INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE LITERATURE ASSOCIATION
ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DE LITTÉRATURE COMPARE

PRESIDENT: ROBERT J. C. YOUNG
SECRETARY: STEFAN WILLER

May '68 at 50: Politics and Literature

Annual workshop of the AILC/ICLA Research Committee on Literary Theory

New York University Abu Dhabi, 9–10 May 2018

Fifty years after the events, May '68 is still predominantly viewed as a generational countercultural revolt. This Cold-War notion has been rejected after 1989 both from the “objectivist” position of the world-system (Wallerstein) and from the “subjectivist” viewpoint of political subjectivation (Ross). Moreover, both approaches have rebuked the Cold-War reception of May '68 as a mere counterculture by expanding the spatio-temporal perspective (thereby also sophisticating their own respective “objectivism” and “subjectivism”): the former through the Braudelian *longue durée*, and the latter via a Rancièrian updating of Foucault’s archaeology of knowledge.

Yet such a broadening of the evental (*événementiel*) in the direction of the conjectural (*conjoncturel*) enables us not only to demythologise the counterculture, but also to conceptualise culture as such. And while both the Braudelian and the Foucauldian approach have achieved the former, they have arguably neglected the latter. While they both successfully broaden the perspective beyond the event of countercultural explosion, they still observe culture in general from the evental perspective, the very viewpoint which they surpass as they address other dimensions of May '68. Having produced the perspective from which they can criticise the Cold-War reduction of May '68 to a counterculture, the two approaches seem to forget to use this perspective to take a new look at counterculture itself, which therefore remains isolated in space from culture in general, including the arts, as well as isolated in time from the conjuncture of Paris in 1968.

As a result, the Braudelian approach completely refrains from addressing culture, while the Foucauldian approach addresses it from the outdated position of the event. In this way, the two approaches unwittingly work together to produce a certain lacuna; taken together, they force upon us the impossible choice between silence and outdated speech when it comes to the culture and particularly the arts of May '68.

This forced choice can itself be rejected, though. We can take the new, expanded point of view and use it to look at the culture of May '68. And we can do that by relying on recent studies which have been returning to Braudel and Foucault to demonstrate that they themselves allow for, if not practice, a discussion of modern culture and arts from the new, conjectural position; Braudel has recently been reread in this way by Pascale Casanova and Franco Moretti, and Foucault, by Jacques Rancière himself.

The events metonymically termed May '68 resonated both in the venerated halls of Sorbonne, where students displayed their red and black flags, and on the summits of the

Himalayas, where the foremost climber of the era ceased to display the national flag after learning about the events; protesters included both anonymous industrial workers in Southern France and already (in)famous student leaders in Paris; the movement engulfed both students in Mexico or Jamaica and workers in Italy or Japan, and students both of Columbia University and of South Carolina State University. But the events were also met with disapproval both by liberal and by socialist regimes; they were rejected both by such incorrigible humanists as Adorno and by such provocative anti-humanists as Lacan; finally, and perhaps most crucially, silence was the ultimate message both of students and of workers as they tried in vain to lead the revolt together. Given this enormous scope of the events, be they events of demonstration or of silence, it is all the more remarkable that such central parts of the field of culture as literature and critical theory have so far been relatively neglected in scholarly accounts of May '68, as these have mainly focused on politics and economy.

With this lacuna in mind, the workshop will address topics such as:

- literature before, during and after '68;
- theory before, during and after '68;
- '68 beyond Paris, France and Europe;
- '68 beyond boulevards, campuses and factories;
- world movement, world literature;
- New Novel, New Wave, New New Novel, New Philosophers, New Left, Neo-Avantgarde;
- *The Book to Come* ('59), "The End of the Book" ('67), "The Absence of the Book" ('69);
- narratives of '68, '68 as narrative;
- 1917 – 1968 – 1989;
- why anniversaries?

ICLA XXth Workshop Abstracts

1. The Ethical Appeal of the Indifferent

Vladimir Biti

Zhejiang University in Hangzhou (University of Vienna)

Since its very emergence, the modern concept of revolution rests on an ambiguity. While it insists on the present's intellectual sovereignty over the past, it cannot get rid of its pre-modern predecessor, re-evolution, which insisted on the present's genetic dependence on the past. Hannah Arendt pointed out how much the idea of *re-volvere*, or the turning back of the historical process, inspired both the American and French revolutionaries. I will therefore claim that the modern concept of revolution, from the very beginning of its historical trajectory, inconspicuously interferes with the pre-modern concept of re-evolution as a cyclical return to origins. However, contrary to the New Philosophers' argument that "whatever alternative is set up in opposition to the Master will yet be another Master", the cyclical logic never smoothly absorbs the linear one without simultaneously being displaced by its uncanny residue. The same uncanny leftover operates in the opposite direction, accompanying the putative liquidation of the cyclical logic by the linear one. The delineated disjunctive conjunction of the present and past characterizes the relationship between the events of May '68 and the theoretical work that followed it, known under the label of *l'après-Mai* or post-May. On the one hand, the trauma associated with the failure of May '68 separated the revolutionary practice and theory from one another, but, on the other, the obligation of theory to rescue the traumatized political energies reconnected them. What the theory now aimed at was not to abolish the past but to draw attention to its uncanny residues that stubbornly persevered in the present by limiting its sovereignty. Rather than being homely and familiar, the post-May thinkers' present was interrupted by the interventions of the remnants from the colonial past and the Holocaust. They understood contemporariness as "that relationship with time that adheres to it through a disjunction and an anachronism" (Agamben). This will be the point of departure for my interpretation of the ethical appeal of the indifferent in the works of Michel Foucault and Maurice Blanchot.

2. The Memories of Imagination

Divya Diwedi

Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi

L'imagination au Pouvoir is what '68 called for in its vision of an immediate but also interminable future. To have done so, to have imagined this itself, was to have made imagination — this still young faculty—actual. For Jean-Luc Nancy, the concrete form of the time of that event has eluded all those who measure the political results of what unfolded, as they forget the political intimations that were gathering the memories of their own loss — of the idea of democracy, of the missives of totalitarianisms, and of youth of freedoms. Both Heidegger and Arendt, even as they discerned the problematic of politics of our time in the most urgent ways, could not see beyond the measure of politics, through the piety of thinking for the former and the purity of power for the latter. Perhaps they were not romantic enough. At fifty, *May '68*, should be remembered as the actual way in which the generation of the memory of this actualisation of imagination, and thus the memory of imagination, took place.

3. Events, Epochs and Turning- Points: Time vs Period in critical history

Anne Duprat

University of Picardie

My paper will get back on the notion of critical event, as the anniversary of May '68 allows French literary history to reconsider it. It will rest upon the complex relationship entertained by what was immediately constructed as an event per se, on the one hand with the definition of the period that would give it its specific meaning and inscribe it in a continuous — if reassessed — critical historiography, and on the other hand with the broader cultural sense of time that was to be derived from it.

4. “I would prefer not not-to”: Critical Theory after Bartleby

Woosung Kang

Seoul National University

ICLA Theory Committee candidate

At fifty years after May 68', we seem to remain still in the uncertainty, if not the abyss, of thinking and conceptualizing what the theory is and why theory. After the collapse of socialist experiments in 1989, neoliberalism was not the only obstacle that the theory has to resist: the so-called 'ethical turn' has also plagued our theoretical thinking in general. Whether poststructuralist or post-Marxist, the habitus of critical mind has been suffering much severely from the self-inflicted *aporia*. As Gilles Deleuze once succinctly summed up, the function of theory would be to search for impossible answers at the situation where “*there is only desire and the social, and nothing else*” to the painful question, “Why do men fight for their servitude and stubbornly as though it were their salvation?” (*Anti-Oedipus*, 29). Discursive deconstruction, politics of implosion, pure performativity, ethics of the Real or infinite responsibility, ontologies of event, sovereignty of *homo sacer*, politics of affect, new materialism, and so on. These theories have been claiming themselves to be the outcome of serious reflection on the failure of the spirit of May 68': the impossibility of revolutionary 'subject.' Bartleby becomes the most representative figure of 'passive resistance' in this era of the death of 'political subject.' But Bartleby is more *symptomatic* than representative. Symptomatic both in the sense that he symbolizes the uprooted in neoliberalist capitalism *and* that he problematizes the poverty of political imagination in the theories after 68'. I would like to critically re-examine what might be called “politics of Bartleby” and try to suggest why and how new political imagination could be possible through the act of literature, culture, and critical thinking: there is surely *something else* than the desire and the social.

5. Friendship in “Dark Times”: Moscow Unofficial Art after 1968

Kyohei Norimatsu

University of Tokyo

In the Soviet Union, the year 1968 was marked by the violent end of the Prague Spring and the emancipatory mood of the Thaw period. It radically changed the nature of the Soviet “counterculture” that blossomed after Stalin's death. As was symbolized by the exile of Solzhenitsyn in 1974, the dissident counterculture was suppressed and became marginalized in society. This did not mean, however, the extinction of the counterculture. Having abandoned the official public sphere, it survived in the underground private sphere. Late Soviet society has been often characterized by this sheer division between the official and the

private. It is reminiscent of the “dark times” that Arendt described: deprived of the light of the public sphere, intellectuals in these times flee to the warmth of private friendship.

As an example of this friendship in “dark times,” this paper discusses the Moscow Conceptualism group, the most prominent movement in Soviet unofficial art and literature. In the 1970s, the works and activities of Ilya Kabakov, the leader of the school, showed an apparent inclination toward the warmth of the friendship within the closed group. Later in the 1980s, however, Kabakov embarked on the “total installation” project which would light the dark private sphere by various means and deconstruct the simple dichotomy of the official and the private. By analyzing Kabakov’s changing attitude towards private friendship, this paper examines possible forms of the resistant subject after 1968.

6. "We shall therefore never write *about* what took place or did not take place in May." Politics of Literature, '67/'68

Robert Stockhammer

Ludwig Maximilians University Munich

According to several French intellectuals (Maurice Blanchot, as quoted in the title of this paper, but also Michel de Certeau and Roland Barthes), the *event* of May '68 consisted not so much in a topic of future writing, but rather in an interrogation of modes of writing/speaking 'in general'. By relating these immediate reactions to May '68 to a sample of investigations and interventions from 1967 – Derrida's *De la grammatologie*, among others, but also some interesting and underestimated German texts or even English/US-American experiments in 'Pop music' –, I propose to understand the "exploration of basic linguistic structures" (a main task of literature, according to Walter Höllerer) as a *political* enterprise. Instead of simply producing literature about politics, 67/68 paved – or rather unpaved: "Sous les pavés, la plage !" – the way for a politics of literature in the most 'basic' and rigorous sense, which has been suppressed in the dominant 'thematical' reception of "68".

7. 1968: Romanticism's *Longue Durée*

Galin Tihanov

Queen Mary University of London

At the heart of this paper is the desire to understand how discourses and ideas are transposed in time, indeed how entire domains of ideologically constructed meaning get relocated and grafted in the tissue of a historically different culture. I offer a case study of this complex and evasive process: post-romanticism as a discursive formation that modifies the Romantic legacy and responds to it from the perspective of new, previously unknown, social, economic, and political challenges. Ultimately, the theoretical concern behind this paper is captured in the question: how does one describe the life of discursive formations, their impact on, and their changes at the hands of, later generations? I will try to approach this problematic by considering discursive acts produced by the Left during the 1968 student protests.

8. The Future of 1968

Stefan Willer

Center for Literary and Cultural Research Berlin; Humboldt University of Berlin

Secretary, ICLA Theory Committee

In August 1968, the German left-wing quarterly "Kursbuch" appeared with the issue title

"Kritik der Zukunft" ("Critique of the Future"). Among the contributions was a collage of German science fiction literature under the sarcastic heading "Exercising the Free World," implying that literary depictions of the future, at least in the sci-fi genre, were rather a part of universal delusion and manipulation than a representation—let alone an instrument—of societal progress. But how would the protagonists of progress envision the future? The final contribution to the "Kursbuch" issue is a "Colloquy about the Future" between the editor, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, and three spokesmen of the Berlin student movement, Rudi Dutschke, Bernd Rabehl, and Christian Semler. Challenged by their interviewer to give "a pure outline of the future" without merely speaking about necessary transformations in the present, the three interlocutors start, more or less reluctantly, to draft prospects of the upcoming society as one big university, of urban collectives centered around factories which also function as schools, of highly developed canteen kitchens, and of the necessary emigration of those who are unfit to participate in such a society.

I will use this constellation of putatively trashy science fiction and political utopia/dystopia to ask for the imaginary of the future in 1968. I will argue that in the late 1960s, when the 'future shock' of the early 1970s was yet to come, the future was still conceived of in a genuinely modern way, i.e., radically open, and all the more shapeable by means of futurology. Nonetheless, the role of future imaginations had become questionable, especially among those who wanted imagination as such to gain political momentum. Could it be that the future of 1968 was incomplete ("lückenhaft", according to Enzensberger) in a historically specific kind of way?

9. May 1968 as a theoretical event

Robert JC Young

NYU

President, ICLA Theory Committee

In this paper I shall argue that May 68, with its refusal of the hierarchical concept of the state, implicit in Leninist politics, in favour of the elision of institutional boundaries and other kinds of borders, of the politics of situationism and "third worldism", constituted an event that marked the emblematic moment of an epochal epistemological shift from the analog to the digital age, from time to space, from the perspective of archaeology, history, text and dialectic that had defined the grounds of knowledge since the 19th century to that of spectacle, surface, image and dialogism that characterises our own era. Academic disciplines in the Humanities have largely yet to recognize the theoretical significance of the event of May 1968 for their own fields.

10. GUEST LECTURE

A theory of subversion that could not serve the cause of oppression? Revolution as institutional psychotherapy: From Fanon and Sartre to Deleuze and Guattari

Jean Khalfa

Cambridge University