CFP: International Symposium on Allegory

The German Research Foundation (DFG) will sponsor an international symposium on Allegory at Villa Vigoni, Lake Como, Italy, on May 19-23, 2014. Papers are invited from a variety of disciplines, including—but not restricted to—literature, art history, classics, visual culture, film studies, philosophy, theology, music, and theatre. Each paper should address the problem of allegory at a specific historical conjuncture, and draw out the theoretical implications of the analysis. The languages of the conference will be German and English; all participants should be able to follow discussions in both.

In particular, the symposium aims at resuming and developing the discussion of allegory in the wake of Walter Benjamin and Paul de Man. For both critics, allegory constituted a form of figural language that exposes itself and comments self-reflexively upon its own status as a trope. Since the 1980s, this approach has proved increasingly useful in the analysis of (post)-modernist devices such as fragmentation, quotation, sampling, and collage, as well as the various ironic strategies of meta-narrative and meta-fictionality that characterize (post)modern discourse. The "cultural turn" in humanistic studies has likewise produced new historical accounts of the cultural work that allegory has done and continues to do at different times and various locations. The symposium will attempt to map historical sites of allegorical production and the debates that currently surround them in four – partly overlapping – sections.

1) Places of Crossing / The Placelessness of Hybridization
Section directed by Daniel L. Selden, University of California, Santa Cruz

Allegory initially gained prominence in the era of intensified transcultural contact that followed the campaigns of Alexander the Great, when—for the first time—allegory also became a topic of systematic discussion. The rise of allegory can thus be linked to the development of cosmopolitan centers of cultural and economic exchange: as a figure of *mouvance* (Zumthor), allegory is accordingly predicated upon the movement of texts across temporal, geographical, and cultural boundaries.

Traditionally, allegory has been characterized as a mode of writing that preserves the signifier of an older sacred (or classical) text by giving it a new meaning. Allegory and allegoresis must accordingly be regarded as ways of both remembering and forgetting a tradition that has become obsolete. This mode of cultural memory is in turn bound up both with acts of imperial appropriation, as well as with locally specific processes of cultural hybridization. Allegory thus both relies on and subverts discourses of tradition-formation, of imperial unification, and of cosmopolitan cultural interdependence. For this reason, it may be regarded as constituting a unique and overdetermined site of cultural self-reflexion.

This section will focus on the transcultural dynamics that favored the production of allegorical texts (images, buildings, rituals, etc.) and/or their allegorical reading at historically cosmopolitan centers such as Alexandria, Cordoba, Florence, Paris, Vienna, New York, or today Dubai and Shanghai. Contributions concerning the circulation of literary genres, such as the ancient novel or the troubadour lyric, as text networks are particularly welcome. The section aims at analyzing allegories as overdetermined, transcultural objects, as well as allegory/allegoresis as a practice of identity formation.

Possible topics include: allegory and cultural memory – allegory as a phenomenon of transcultural contact – allegory, empire, architecture — allegory and cultural critique – allegory and cultural crisis – allegory/syncretism/hybridity – allegory and translation – allegorical genres – allegory and philosophy/theology.

2. **The Location of Allegory in Critical Discourse**
Section directed by Bettine Menke, Erfurt University

This section will discuss such discursive practices as semiology, rhetoric, exegesis, hermeneutics, and poetics, which have defined allegory and determined its relative value at different times and for different (religious/national) interpretive communities.

Rhetorical handbooks define allegory as *metaphora continua*. Challenging notions of transparent meaning, allegory thus shares a certain amount of conceptual ground with enigma and with irony, though allegory also bears structural links to narrative and fiction. In religious exegesis, allegorical readings compete, on the one hand, with grammatical and syntactic analyses (philology), and, on a different level, with the combination and permutation of the letter (e.g. *gamatria*). In Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, as the rhetorical tradition and exegetical practice converged, allegory was reconceptualized as a language of things, which could be adapted to a range of different historical and communal contexts: *res* were recoded as signs of a second order, be it as elements of the Book of Nature, whose meanings were guaranteed by the divinity of its author, or be it—without such transcendent moorings—as myths of everyday life (Barthes). Aesthetics, moreover, tended to repudiate allegory as the opposite of the Beautiful: since allegory does not lend itself to a *gestalt*, but is bound up with the decomposition and dissection of knowledge, it was held to threaten the viewer's psychical integrity. Allegory likewise opposed the notion of representation as mimesis: while mimesis is based on the idea of seeing (and of recognizing that which has been shown), allegory relies on the act of reading. Finally, critics have hailed allegory as a device that breaches the limits of the autonomy of art.

Possible topics include: allegory vs. symbol, fictionality, fact, mimesis – allegory and grammar – allegory and practices of exegesis – allegory, cryptogram, rebus – allegory and the notion of literal meaning – allegory, parable, exemplum – allegory and citation – allegory and the 'melancholia of art' – allegory and irony - allegory and the textuality of images – the aims and rules of artistic production in different epochs, which lead to a preference for allegory or its repudiation.

3. **The Politics of Allegory**
Section directed by Ulla Haselstein (FU Berlin)

Allōs (or *allon*) *agoruein* means, in the first instance, to differentiate the literal from the figurative; at the same time, however, *allēgoria* refers to the practice of speaking *other*-wise in public (be it consciously or unconsciously). To read allegorical texts (and to read texts allegorically) not only requires specific forms of knowledge: it necessarily relies on a specific community—intellectual, religious, national, territorial, psychoanalytic—which negotiates and validates such readings. The practice of allegory is thus intrinsically bound up with discourses (and counter-discourses) of textual production and textual interpretation, insofar as these are anchored in political discourses regarding the composition of the public sphere, the

regime of truth, the legitimacy of power, and the relation between the (officially) sayable and the (strategically) secret.

The concept of allegory can be brought to bear on very different forms of art: on dazzling collective spectacles and ritualized performances of power, no less than on discrete works of "genius", modernist fragments, or postmodern installations. Tracing the impact of the "cultural turn", this section will discuss the ways in which allegory has served as a multifaceted political tool in an array of different historical contexts. It will also consider allegoresis as an activity connected to specifically political agendas. Possible topics here range from the political contextualization of manifestly allegorical texts, images, pageants, theatrical or operatic performances to critical readings of realism or allegories latent within cinema. Cultural interest in mystery cults, in hieroglyphs, or cryptograms could also profitably be explored for their political implications. (Post)modernist and (post)colonial practices of textual composition, and the contemporary fascination with the unrepresentable constitute other important fields of inquiry.

Possible topics include: allegory as a strategy of secrecy – allegory as a strategic integration of the culturally prohibited or the politically precarious – allegory as political rhetoric – allegory and the authority of the sacred – allegories of political rule – allegory and the politics of cultural memory – allegorical reading as cultural critique – allegory and institutions of knowledge – allegories of the unrepresentable (history, death, trauma, utopia).

4. **Delimitations of the Allegorical: Art and Everyday Life**
Section directed by Friedrich Teja Bach (University of Vienna)

Today allegorical phenomena have become ubiquitous. Our age is characterized by a certain propensity for allegory, 'if one takes the term to signify a cognitive relation which makes everything mean more than it can honestly claim to mean' (Musil). The concept of allegory is thus essential in rendering legible certain foundational structures of contemporary life: the co-existence of globalization with the disintegration of society into a patchwork of micro-cultures; the submission of all resources of meaning to the logic of the market; or the hyperbolic production of signs and concomitant inflation of meanings which only lapse rapidly into indifference.

This section will discuss the extension of the concept of allegory since the 1980s. Its principal focus will be on the interdependence and transaction between two different domains: on the one hand, the paradoxical "presence" of allegory in modernist and post-modernist (or supermodernist) art and, on the other, diverse allegorizations of quotidian life (i.e., their transformation into commodities). In part, this section will investigate the allegorical dimension of diverse artistic media and diverse artistic strategies; allegorical forms of display or performance in the public sphere; and the function of allegory in the emergence of global art. Beyond this, however, the section will also consider forms of allegorizing space and time, and the production and consumption of what might be called "allegorical capital".

Possible topics include: allegorical topographies (public spaces, cities, the sea, the "foreign countries" of tourism) – allegory and architecture (signature buildings) – allegory and the return of narrative art – allegories of desire (commodity, fetishism, brands) – dematerialization of things – event culture: allegorical spectacles (advertizing, design, fashion) – allegory and strategies of symbolic difference – allegorical dimensions of early modernist art –

collage, assemblage, performative rituals, multimedia – allegorical rewritings, postcolonial art, appropriation art – allegory and display in contemporary museum culture – allegories of global art – allegorization as a principle of production in the contemporary humanities.

Proceedings:

The symposium will focus on the discussion of the papers, which will be distributed to all participants in advance. After the symposium, the papers will be published together with summaries of the discussions. The maximum number of participants will be 35. Contributors are expected to be present during the entire time of the symposium and to engage actively in the scholarly debates.

Interested scholars are asked to inform the conference convener Ulla Haselstein (ulla.haselstein@fu-berlin.de) about their intent to participate, send a short exposé of their paper, and identify the section in which they wish to be placed. The section directors will submit the list of selected contributors to the German Research Foundation, which will send out invitations. Print-ready papers must reach the section directors by December 1, 2013 (max. 30 pages); shorter papers are welcome.

Schedule:

March 1, 2013 : suggestion of topic, submission of short exposé
June 2013: official invitation of participants
December 1, 2013: electronic submission of print-ready papers to the section directors
January 2014: distribution of papers to all particpipants
May 19-23, 2014: symposium at Villa Vigoni

Travel costs and per diems will be covered by the German Research Foundation.

Adresses of the curators:

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