

# Call for papers

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## Joan of Arc's tears

Giant, luminous, mesmerising letters: JEANNE D'ARC. Shot from below to give them even more weight, they appear on the screen diagonally, as if they were projected elsewhere. In the background, another vertical lighted sign specifies where we are: CINE. It is an invitation to enter the dark room. Here, in the foreground the suffering face of Joan of Arc/Renée Falconetti appears immediately. The film shown is Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928). But now it is inside another film. We are following another poignant, fragile, beautiful girl inside that cinema hall: Godard's Nanà/Anna Karina (*Vivre sa vie*, 1962). Someone (Antonin Artaud) is telling Joan of Arc that she will soon be burnt at the stake. The girl start crying. The camera frames Nanà, who is getting uptight.. We see everything through her eyes. Joan of Arc is weeping but she also thinks that death will finally set her free. Sitting in her place, Nanà is weeping as well.

A common destiny emerges between the two characters. Godard also attempts to draw an existential parallel between a girl accused of being (also) a prostitute and a prostitute who has all the purity of a girl. However, compared to Dreyer's film, and perhaps compared to the myth of Joan of Arc itself, Godard's operation takes on a broader, almost vertiginous significance for us: the fragility, the impotence - the *pathos* of Joan of Arc - embodied in her tears, find their strength, apparently paradoxical, in their capacity to be shared with others. In their transmission of this feeling, they also reveal a formidable destituent political charge.

First of all, the issue of K dedicated to Joan of Arc would like to sound out this transformation of an expression of intimate pain into a collective emotion and, perhaps, into a politics of emancipation. Dreyer's film ends with the images of a riot. The tears of the girl as she is carried to the stake speak for themselves: they are addressed to those who are watching her, who, thanks to that weeping, step out of their role as spectators in celebration and take part in her pain, they make it their own. The notary Boisguillaume writes: "Almost everyone who was there, was crying!". It is

Nana's *sym-pathy*, it is the *sym-pathy* of those women who see that girl conducted at the stake that make a politics of tears possible.

How is it possible for a manifestation of powerlessness to become political? It is mainly women who weep when historical crises materialise. Joan of Arc cries in the face of the injustice of her judges; Antigone cries in the face of Creon; Haidi Giuliani cries; the mothers of Plaza de Mayo cry, and so on. These women do not have power, but, above all, they do not want to have it. Their tears are, in this respect, a sign of their weariness and exclusion, but it is thanks to their powerlessness and otherness (a political, social and symbolic one) that the women who cry can question power. Sometimes they can go as far as destituting it.

The Russian Revolution began with women's tears (for mourning in the war, for the hunger and cold at home) which slowly became indignation, riots, and emancipation. What happened? By taking some cues from the texts in which Derrida addresses the question of vision and the gaze, we can say that the tearful eyes of those women touched other eyes: the eyes of the others. An encounter took place, a community was created and thus a chance to act together. This can begin precisely from those tearful eyes which do not see, but do touch. According to Derrida, in order to make eye contact, the eyes must touch each other blindly: to meet the gaze of another, one must cease to look only at their eyes - one must not simply look at them - instead, it is necessary for them to touch each other.

Blindness leads us to a further decisive issue in Joan of Arc, an issue we would like to re-examine. Virgin, warrior, witch, child, whore, saint... the images that history has left of her are different and contradictory but there is one that runs through them all, and from a historical point of view, it is also the most certified one because the trial against her focusses on it: Joan of Arc is a seer. She can see angels and saints who incite her to carry out God-sent military and political actions, through 'voices' that only she can understand (« What language do they speak ?» The judges ask her),

She is sent by God, and for this reason she also claims the right to escape the authority of the Court, even going so far as to threaten her judges: «Vous dites que vous êtes mon juge, mais prenez garde à ce que vous faites, parce qu'en vérité je suis envoyée par Dieu et vous vous mettez vous-mêmes en grand danger».

It is more than a challenge to the religious and political power: Joan of Arc does not recognise it. And she decides to dodge it or tries to dodge it precisely because she thinks and behaves like a prophetess.

According to the poet-philosopher Christine de Pizan (1364-1430), Joan of Arc belongs to the tradition of the great biblical prophetesses, such as Judith, Esther, and Deborah. But, as Claude

Gauvard shows, the phenomenon of female prophetism is also widespread in the kingdom of France in the historical context of Joan of Arc. Between 1350 and 1450, at least twenty women are known for their gifts of prophecy. In moments of crisis, these women, empowered by a word coming from above, manage to come out of silence, even to impose their voice, to show everyone a way forward - the necessary revolts. Many of them come from the borders of the Kingdom, from its extreme boundaries, and are of modest origin. It is precisely this marginal condition - like that of Joan of Arc, who comes from Lorraine and is said to be a humble shepherdess - that gives their divine word a greater strength.

Charles Péguy calls Joan of Arc the “jeune fille espérance”. This representation is an efficient synthesis, and we intend to problematise it in this issue in order to understand how the words and gestures of a girl were able to crystallise the aspirations of an entire people, for a few very long months.

The prophecy of Joan of Arc rips up the monotony and inevitability of the present mainly because it can ignite a spark of hope within. By inserting herself into the historical juncture, starting from the 'voices' she hears, Joan of Arc succeeds in bifurcating history. It becomes clear that the war, to which she is called and to which she calls to, represents something higher and deeper than a mere defence of patriotic borders. Were it not so, Joan would remain within the continuity of history. Instead, she attempts to suspend the traditional course of history (prophecy disrupts historical time). Perhaps, as Bensaid maintains, her war extends to a universal boundary, an immense frontier. An outer reach/boundary/border which unjustly separates the world of the rich from that of the poor. Joan of Arc's war is an episode in the endless and interminable 'war of the poor', from Spartacus to Müntzer, all the way down to the resistance of the Mexican peasant women who, after the defeat of their revolution, set up the 'St. Joan of Arc Women's Brigades' to continue their struggle. Joan *Dark* recurs also in the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries factories, in Brecht with a religious organisation fighting for the rights of workers. Joan of Arc's tears dig footprints, furrows, and paths. Inherently solitary, they uncover an underlying fragility but they prove to be politically powerful, breaking the very homogeneity of history. The clouded-by-tears eyes glimpse at another horizon of events. The lines of research may thus focus around the following areas of investigation:

- Joan of Arc is an image. The ways in which Joan has been transformed into an image throughout the history of cinema and the arts impose a reflection on the relationship between image and politics. No image has survived to testify Joan's the real features; her body has been reduced to ashes. It is as if the impossibility of transforming her unimaginable visions into images - to which one cannot but be a witness - was embodied

in the very unimaginability of her body. It is as if what it remains of her existence and visions were voices. Although cinema and the arts have never ceased to represent her, she continues to escape any attempt at identification (as is the case with Godard, not only in *Vivre sa vie* but also in *Notre musique*, 2004). Hence, it is perhaps possible to think that in Joan's multiple representations and incarnations, in her unimaginable visions of voices, an attempt to subtract her figure in the image is at stake. This seems to allude to a paradoxical image-less status of an image (of) the politics to come.

- - Joan of Arc is a thousand shades, often contradictory. She is a saint but also a whore. She is a little girl who never stops crying, but also a beautiful woman (one of the first images of Joan of Arc is sketched on the margins of a civil register of the Paris Parliament by Clément de Fauquembergue. The chancellor who transcribes the minutes of the sessions and reports the main events, such as the news of the victory of the 'Maid' at Orleans, then imagines her in a quick drawing as a discreet woman with ample cleavage...). She is a witch and a prophetess. Great actresses have embodied her on film and on the theatre stage to emphasise or reinforce one of the varied aspects of her kaleidoscopic image. Is it possible to reconstruct these images from a female point of view? Did the actresses who embodied Joan of Arc play this role?
- Joan of Arc is a woman. The question of gender proves to be decisive in addressing our problem of the destituent power, which is precisely that gesture, also Joannesque, of challenging the power without wanting to overthrow or replace it. It is about laying power bare: this is what Joan of Arc's audacity during her trial tells us. To lay bare the existing power and not recognise it means to open up a new space for politics.
- Joan of Arc is a poor woman. She acts from a social and cultural (and geographical) position far removed from the power centres of her time. The question is whether, in this decisive and surprising action, Joan of Arc only tried to defend the soil of her homeland from invaders and traitors, according to the image that the enduring 'national myth' has created of her. Or whether she also crystallised popular aspirations into yet another '*war of the poor*', just as her resurgences, not surprisingly against that national myth, have allowed us to glimpse.
- Joan of Arc is a prophetess. She sets out from distant Lorraine because she hears 'voices'. These 'voices', and her military successes, legitimise her to the people who believe in her. In this sense, her figure arouses 'hope'. It is necessary to elaborate, from female figures, from laments, from cries, the role that prophecy plays within the crises of history to impose another direction on events.

Submit a proposal by March 5<sup>th</sup> 2023 (2,500 characters max.)

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If the proposal is accepted, the paper must be delivered by September 17 2023. After this date, the selected contribution will be automatically excluded from the journal issue.