

Imagining the Body in France and the Francophone World

Friday 19 - Saturday 20 January 2018

Conference report following receipt of LCS PGR Experience Fund

'Imagining the Body in France and the Francophone World' was co-organised by Antonia Wimbush (University of Birmingham), Maria Tomlinson (University of Bristol and Reading), and Polly Galis (University of Leeds), and was generously supported by the Institute for Modern Languages Research (£746), the Society for French Studies (£419), the University of Birmingham PGR Development Fund (£800) and the University of Leeds LCS PGR Experience Fund (£400). It took place in the School of Mechanical Engineering and the Hills Building at the University of Birmingham, on Friday 19 -Saturday 20 January 2018.

This two-day conference consisted of a cross-cultural, bilingual and interdisciplinary exchange of ideas centred on the body and its representation in French and Francophone culture. Papers and ensuing discussions unfolded in both English and French, and themes ranged from neuroscience to medieval manuscripts. This variety notwithstanding, lively conversations unfolded over both days. This was testament to the running threads that arose across all papers, particularly the question of the seen and unseen, the word made flesh (or the flesh made word), fragility and power, and rites of passage, from young to old age, home to exile or one sexuality to another. Performances and videos prepared by invited artists on the topic of women's writing and the body were particularly well received, and allowed for a bridging of theory and practise; an innovative addition to traditional academic conferences.

Being situated in the midlands with a nearby airport, the conference was easily accessible for participants based across the UK and beyond. Delegates arrived from Northern Ireland, Scotland, Switzerland, France, Italy, Colombia and the USA. For those unable to secure travel permits in time, papers were presented via skype, with delegates speaking from Tunisia and Paris. All in all, there were 50 people in attendance over the course of the conference. One MA student in French and Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds (Sophie Bramley) presented a paper on Bettina Rheims, and Dr Claire Lozier of the French department chaired one of the artist's presentations.

Each participant was presented with a conference tote bag and programme upon arrival, along with pens and USB drives. Tea and coffee, refreshments, lunch and wine receptions were provided on both days, and a dinner was held on Friday evening at Côte Brasserie. This allowed delegates further opportunity to network and share research ideas. We received thanks and compliments from everyone present for the hospitality they received, and for what was termed a rich and well-structured programme.

We also received positive feedback from academics and interested parties following our tweets online. Throughout the organisational process, information and updates were not just forwarded to appropriate mailing lists (Anglophone and Francophone ones alike), but posted onto social media sites and our conference website in order to receive maximum traction.

Going forwards, we hope to secure the legacy of this conference with a publication edited by us, the organisers, either as a special journal issue for *L'Esprit Créateur* or the *Journal of Romance Studies*. We will make enquiries in the next few weeks, and circulate a call for proposals in due course. The University of Leeds will, of course, be provided with a copy, and Sophie will be invited to submit a proposal, benefitting ongoing research and the visibility of researchers here in LCS at Leeds.

In the meantime, we will post blog posts and bulletins on funders' newsfeeds where appropriate, and two follow-up events will be taking place at the University of Leeds in the next week. Nice-born artist Fiorenza Floraline Menini, an invited keynote at our conference, will run two workshops

for final year students in French on the Sex, Gender and Cinema module called Creative Writing Body Movement, on Tuesday 30 February. Fiorenza will then present two artworks on Thursday 01 February as part of the International Writers at Leeds initiative. She will present a video ('Les Attractions contraires / Opposite Attractions') and a new performative piece entitled 'Pourquoi je n'aime pas Francis Bacon / Why I Don't Like Francis Bacon' with English subtitles. MA Translation students will subtitle the performance, and a discussion will follow on the relationship between the body, performance and interpreting/interpretation. Invitations will be addressed to PGRs and staff members in LCS, FAHACS, PVAC and the Leeds College of Art, as well as LEAP (Leeds Excellence in the Arts Programme) students, and the session will be advertised to the general public too, particularly its French-speaking members. All remaining funds from the Leeds PGR Experience Fund (approximately £100) will cover outgoings for this public engagement activity, directed by LCS staff.

By Polly Galis

