

**ROUTES INTO THE  
FUTURE**  
NEW MAPS FOR THE  
SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES



**18 > 21 June 2008**  
\* International Colloquium

Teatro Académico Gil Vicente  
Auditorium of the Faculty of Law  
Auditorium of the University of Coimbra

## **SESSION I: The Social Sciences and the Human Sciences: A Necessary complementarity?**

June 19<sup>th</sup>, 11: 00 - 13: 00

In the Portuguese scientific landscape, the Centre for Social Studies is one of the few institutions where a strong research agenda within the social sciences has been combined with an equally strong research agenda within the Humanities. This reflexive inter-linkage built over the past thirty years has allowed for the development of innovative approaches in analysing social, political and artistic phenomena. This work has led to several collective publications and has recently made it possible to open up innovative and transdisciplinary doctoral programmes in areas traditionally presented as being more the preserve of the Humanities (interculturalism and post-colonialism), of sociology and economics (democracy for the twenty-first century, governance, knowledge and innovation), or of political science and law (law, justice and citizenship in the twenty-first century). It is now time to take this productive, reflexive meshing onto the next level that of intra-linkage, i.e., of the construction of new constellations of knowledge where the disciplinary imprint may be deeply transformed, if not altogether abolished. We consider that, in the future, this will be the most productive level for discussing the necessary complementarity between the Social and Human Sciences.

This session aims at debating the different processes of fragmentation which we have witnessed over time in the different areas of the SHS and the emerging reconfigurations of knowledge. If, on the one hand, these open up broader frameworks for the analysis and interpretation of reality (setting out from the different areas of knowledge and the different sites of enunciation), on occasion they also give rise to a certain angst of recognition with regard to the canon of the great disciplinary narratives to which institutionalised knowledge has accustomed us. How, in what ways, with what instruments and with what benefits and risks do we proceed from interdisciplinarity to transdisciplinarity or even indisciplinarity?

**Marilena Chauí | “Virtù” against Fortune and Resignation”**

At the end of the first half of the 20th century, rising up against positivist scientificism and the intellectualism of the philosophies of subjectivity, Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote a *Phenomenology of Perception*, a title bearing significance in and of itself, given its contraposition to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

In his work, Merleau-Ponty considered that two rival errors - positivist empiricism and reflexive idealism - were obstacles to an effective dialogue between philosophy and science, the former believing it grasped the real by means of ideas, the latter imagining that it captured it through facts. Thus, *Phenomenology of Perception* propounded 'a broadened conception of reason', a philosophy founded on the cognising body as an 'exemplar sensible' since it is sensible to itself, from whose sensibility and motricity space, time, desire, language and thought are birthed. The phenomenology of perception refused the cleaving between consciousness and the world, undoing the philosophical arrogance of Pure Subjectivity and the scientific privilege of Pure Objectivity.

In our time we are faced with two phenomena in the field of knowledge: on one side, the risk of a new scientificist positivism, borne by the prestige of neurobiology, which may take us back to the objectivist reductionism of psychic, cognitive and affective activity; on the other, the loss of depth in space and time, or atopia and achrony, that is to say, the spatial and temporal fragmenting and dispersion and their abstract re-unification under the effects of electronic and information technologies, which produce space compression - everything happens here, without distances, differences or frontiers - and time compression - everything happens now, without a past and without a future. The depth of time and its differentiating power (its immanent disquiet, in Merleau-Ponty's words) have vanished under the force of the instantaneous. The depth of field, which defines topological space, vanishes under the force of a locality without place and aerial overflight technologies. We live under the sign of telepresence and teleobserving, in which everything seems to be given to us immediately in the form of the temporal and spatial transparency of images, presented as proof.

We can, therefore, ask: might not the time be right for the Humanities to propose a new phenomenology of perception and a new reflection on the relations between philosophy and science?

From the socio-political point of view, the new form of capital operates by shrinking the public space of rights and by broadening the private sphere of interests, inaugurating on a planetary scale the socio-economic division between vast pockets of wealth and abundance on a scale never before witnessed, and vast pockets of poverty at a level the likes of which has never been witnessed. Inequality, injustice, exclusion and violence appear to have reached an extreme point of no return. We experience, and for a very good reason, the return of religious fundamentalisms, for the fabric of the religious imagination counters the fragmentation of space with the idea of sacred space or holy land, and counters the fleeting nature of time with the idea of sacred time or holy war. Under the impact of the collapse of Soviet totalitarianism, under the influence of the globalisation of the economy and under the sign of post-modernity and of the disappearance of the metaphysics of progress, in our time we speak of the closing of the historical horizon and of the disappearance of the idea of and the desire for the possible. In its place, philosophy and the arts (especially literature and film) have set in motion dystopias of catastrophe, fear and the inevitability of the surveillance and control society.

We may then ask: is this not the right moment for the Humanities to recover their critical powers and not be fearful of redeeming Utopian discourse, not as a programme for action (for Utopia is not a political manifesto), but as a historical project?

Ethics and politics are impossible if we regard everything as being necessary or that everything is contingent. Against this rival dualism of necessity and contingency, we must set up the idea of the possible: the possible is not the probable, nor the not-impossible, but rather the power of our freedom to lend a (necessary or contingent) de facto situation a new meaning which it can only attain by means of our action, when we are not content with reacting to evil merely with indignation or compassion. Freedom is this power to transcend the present in a new signification which transforms it into a to-come.

Merleau-Ponty once wrote that evil is not within or outside us, in things and in others, but rather in the ties we create between ourselves and others, and which stifle us. According to him, we must not counter this with suffering and compassion, but we must affirm virtù with no trace of resignation.

Let us ask: where is it to be found today, the virtù of the Humanities?

### **Graça Capinha | “Puzzles e Móviles”**

This presentation will concern itself above all with the modes of production and circulation of knowledge discourses, in this our paradigm of modernity, to centre on how poetical discourse and/or art (understood in their etymological sense, *poiein* and *ars*) has been marginalised as a space of knowledge.

Weighing the reasons whereby the hierarchies of discourse led to the loss of the social function of poetry and of the poet - the primeval function of all art - and addressing the space of resistance which was the Modernism of the early 20th century, above all in its Romantic manifestation, will be starting points in seeking to re-view the mytho-poetical constructions of modern science itself and in attempting, at the same time, to put forward a dynamic and spatial model for language and knowledge, anchored in that ‘other tradition’ which leads from Homer, through Dante, Shakespeare, Mallarmé, Joyce or Stein.

Some North-American poets, resisting the emergence of 1950s North-American imperialism - an imperialism underpinned by scientific and technological power at the service of the prevailing power structure - conjugate this entire tradition, to which they viewed themselves as heirs, and, recovering Whitman’s democratic ideal, set out to propose a new/old form of knowledge which could only be expressed in open language, in a poetics understood as the practice of citizenship - in an ongoing process (of creation and/or knowledge).

This is the ultra-modernist ‘post-modernism’ which still challenges us as a possibility of epistemological rupture.

### **About the Participants**

Chair:

**Isabel Caldeira** is Associate Professor of English, American, and African American Studies at the Faculty of Letters and Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra. A former president of the Portuguese Association for Anglo-American Studies, she is the Portuguese Delegate on the Board of Directors of the European Association for American Studies. Her areas of interest and research are American Studies, African American Studies, Comparative Literary Studies, with special emphasis on literatures of the African diaspora. Her publications

include co-authorship of *Literatura Norte-Americana* (Lisbon, 1999) and editorship of *Novas Histórias Literárias/New Literary Histories* (Coimbra, 2004).

Speakers:

**Marilena Chauí** is Professor of Political Philosophy and History of Modern Philosophy at the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Human Sciences, University of Sao Paulo. Among other works, she has written *Cultura e democracia. O discurso competente e outras falas, New, expanded edition*, São Paulo: Editora Cortez, 2006.

**Graça Capinha** is Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Letters, Coimbra University, and a Researcher at the Centre for Social Studies, where she is a member of the Research Group in Comparative Cultural Studies. She also coordinates the Oficina de Poesia (Poetry Workshop), and the collective project "New Poetics of Resistance: the Twenty-first Century in Portugal". Her areas of interest and research are American Studies, identities, the poetry of emigration, poetics and contemporary poetry, the politics of language, the sociology of Culture and Literature. One of her most recent articles is "Robert Duncan and the Question of Law: Ernst Kantorowicz and the Poet's Two Bodies", in Albert Gelpi & Robert Bertholf (eds.), *The Poetry of Politics, the Politics of Poetry* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2006).

Comments:

**Miguel Vale de Almeida** is a Professor in the Anthropology Department of ISCTE. He has conducted research on gender, sexuality and race, with field-work in Portugal, Spain and Brazil. He is the Editor of *Etnográfica*, a publication of the Centre for Social Anthropology Studies and author of, among other titles, *Outros Destinos. Ensaios de Antropologia e Cidadania*, Campo das Letras, 2004.

**Vítor Neves** is an Assistant Professor at the School of Economics, Coimbra University, and a Researcher at the Centre for Social Studies, where he is a member of the Research Group for Studies on Governance and Economic Institutions. His current interests include open systems and the social links of economics, the "economic" and the interdisciplinary isolation of economics. He is the author of, among other articles, "Situational analysis beyond 'single-exit' modelling", *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 6, (2004), 921 - 936.