

Call for proposals

International and interdisciplinary conference

“The past that will not pass¹”: propaganda at the crossroads of interdisciplinary perspectives

organised by:

Institut de Recherche en Langues et Littératures Européennes (UR 4363),
Université de Haute-Alsace, Mulhouse, France

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Historically associated with the totalitarian regimes of the xxth century, the term “propaganda” has recently received a negative connotation. It emerged in 1622 with the foundation of the “Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith” in connection with the verb “propagate”. The Congregation’s purpose was to spread christianity through missionary networks. Negative connotations only emerged in the xxth century. Firstly, during World War I when the excessive control of the printed media was set up and the propaganda phenomenon started growing. Soon after the October Revolution, Bolsheviks created the “Agitprop” (Department for Agitation and Propaganda) in 1920. In 1928 Edward L. Bernays, American theorist and pioneer in the field of Public Relations, noted that the term propaganda was massively perceived as “unpleasing²”, the author tried to “rehabilitate” it by giving it a positive meaning. However, this interpretation did not survive the final blow of World War II. “Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda” headed by Joseph Goebbels solidified the pejorative semantics of the term.

Throughout the last century propaganda has been a rampant socio-political phenomenon. Representing an instrument of political indoctrination, propaganda penetrated all the aspects of life: politics, religion, education, medicine, sport, advertisement and family. Ideologies use numerous supports and media to convey propaganda messages: press, theatre, arts and literature. For example, “Wellington House”, created by the British during World War I, recruited famous writers to encourage war in their publications.

Just like official literature, literature that goes against state dogma is always present in a censored society. Some writers pay the opposition to the ideology of the authorities with their lives, while others have to flee the country. Those who stay appeal to “the Aesopian language³” to address forbidden subjects. They seek to conceal the initial meaning behind metaphors, allegories and other figures of speech. The dystopian genre is also of a particular interest for propaganda studies. The imaginary universes of dystopian literature can imitate propaganda instruments of authoritarian regimes.

¹ The article of Ernst Nolte published in 1986 in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.

² BERNAYS Edward, *Propaganda. Comment manipuler l'opinion en démocratie*, Paris, Zones, 2019, p. 40.

³ LOSEFF Lev, *On the beneficence of censorship: Aesopian language in modern Russian literature*, Munich, Otto Sagner, 1984.

Propaganda does not only concern the artistic and literary movements, it uses and deeply transforms the language. Having barely taken power, Bolsheviks introduced the reforms of Russian orthography, prohibited some words and designations, and replaced some of them with new ones. The German language was also subject to Nazi propaganda repercussions⁴. A “new man” needed to speak a new language which would reflect the new ideology.

In the last decades, the digital revolution made its contribution to the spreading of propaganda messages offering new instruments, techniques and supports⁵. Nowadays, propaganda represents a particular genre of communication which is considered to always come from outside⁶. The term splits off from its Latin origins to be associated with lying: fake news, disinformation, conspiracies, brainwashing, deep fakes, trolls, gossips and manipulations. Studies linking art and propaganda are becoming rare for the benefit of studies linking propaganda and the press, digital media and social networks.

Picture has always been one of the most common propaganda instruments, for example in propaganda posters. Nowadays, as communication is becoming more visual than ever, pictures are as instrumentalized in propaganda as language: photo editing, photograph manipulation, deep fakes, Internet memes.

As a political phenomenon of dominating opinions, propaganda is especially a linguistic, literary and cultural instrument of manipulation and mental control. It may be dangerous, intolerant and may exclude other points of view. Studying propaganda, questioning its functioning would help understand how the manipulation attempts are being conducted and how to oppose them.

We suggest to study the concept of propaganda according to the following axes:

- **Propaganda and Literature**

How can literature be at the service of propaganda (including the creation of ideological works as well as the reinterpretation of written works)? How does literature resist propaganda and the state (risky open polemics, clandestine editions, emigration to regain freedom of speech, “inner emigration” as a means of an independent creation)? What are the modes of artistic expression in literature of propaganda and in anti-propaganda literature? How does the “Aesopian language” allow more prudent and wiser expression? What literary genres are associated with propaganda (the historical novel, children’s books, youth literature)? How does the genre of dystopia depict the propaganda universe?

- **Propaganda and Translation**

How can propaganda impact the process of translation? How to propaganda discourses and writings? How does propaganda affect the translated works (languages, authors, genres)? What was the fate of the censored or prohibited translations in the totalitarian regimes? Who were the clandestine translators working despite the censorship? What kind of relationship did the translators have with the political figures of totalitarian/authoritarian regimes? How did this relationship impact the publication of translated works?

- **Propaganda and Language, Propaganda and Discourse**

⁴ KLEMPERER Victor, *The Language of the Third Reich*, Continuum Impacts, 2006.

⁵ Peter Pomerantsev describes the new propaganda techniques which involve television and Internet in his books POMERANTSEV Peter, *Nothing Is True and Everything Is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia*, New York, PublicAffairs, 2020 ; *This is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality*, London, Faber & Faber, 2019.

⁶ BANKS David, Introduction in *Aspects linguistiques du texte de propagande*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2005, p. 5.

How can language be transformed by a political regime? How is propaganda reflected in language policy? What is a discourse of propaganda? What elements determine whether or not the discourse becomes associated with propaganda? What are the specificities of “political doublespeak”?

- **Propaganda and Digital Discourse**

How do fake news contribute to propaganda in the digital space? What is the difference between disinformation and misinformation and what is their place in the discourse of propaganda? How and why social networks become breeding grounds for propaganda discourse? How do digital memes mould political opinions? What role do the trolls play in forming public opinion? What discursive and media procedures make the digital press a perfect propaganda tool? How do digital algorithms participate in political propaganda?

- **Propaganda and Semiotics**

How do pictures serve propaganda? How are we being manipulated by images? How do propaganda posters contribute to the installation and consolidation of political regimes? What role do the photo and video editors play in political propaganda? How are ideologies being spread through cinema?

- **Propaganda and Art/Art of Propaganda**

How may art be used by political regimes? How does art help to maintain or overturn political powers? Are there any artistic movements created by propaganda? Music of propaganda or propaganda of music? How does cinema participate in the diffusion of official ideologies? What are the particularities of cinematographic and artistic genres of propaganda? Are there any genres specific to propaganda? How does the portrait genre contribute to the establishment of cults of personality?

Submission of proposals:

Abstracts in French or in English (500 words excluding references) followed by a biographical note of the author (50-80 words) and 5 keywords, institutional affiliation and email address should be submitted to the email address: colloquepropagande2023@gmail.com before March 1, 2023. Notifications of paper acceptance will be sent on April 1, 2023.

The conference will be held at the Faculty of Literature, Languages and Human Sciences of the Université de Haute-Alsace, 10 rue des Frères Lumière, Mulhouse, France.

Communications should not exceed 20 minutes.

Registration Fees:

Standard registration fee: 100 €.

Reduced registration fee (for PhD students): 30 €.

No registration fees for ILLE members.

Organising committee:

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