Vulnerabilities:

Weaknesses, Threats, Resilience in the U.S.A. and in Global Perspective

21-23 September 2023

Department of Philosophy, Social Sciences and Education

University of Perugia

Polo scientifico-didattico di Narni, Centro di Ricerca sulla Sicurezza Umana

(CRISU)

Confirmed keynote speakers:

Martha Alberston Fineman (Emory University)

Giuseppe Nori (University of Macerata)

David Roediger (University of Kansas)

Jennifer Travis (St. John's University)

The COVID-19 pandemic has alerted us not only to the state of our health, but also to an endless list of vulnerabilities. The environment, personal freedoms, the role of science and medicine, tourism, labor and work conditions, migration, economics, domestic and social life, to quote only some of the fields affected by the pandemic, have undergone profound changes in their structures and in the way we perceive them.

Thus the aim of this conference is to tap into our new awareness in order to address representations and histories – past and present – of vulnerable aspects of life, be it the life of individuals, of literary characters, of social structures, of the environment, or of any other culturally identifiable text or context.

Vulnerability being the main theme, it can be broken down into multiple sub-topics and encompass established and innovative critical approaches to American Studies, including but not limited to cognitive, disability, animal, trauma, dream, celebrity studies, as well as gender, race, class and politics.

An investigation of vulnerability inevitably involves its opposites, and the way it is responded to: from the all-American virtue of resilience, to problem-solving, and pragmatism, the reactions to weakness and threats can provide a paradigm of counterhegemonic responses that question the definitions of "vulnerable".

Center and periphery, porosity, domestic and international, home and the wild, are spatial definitions that involve vulnerable as well as strong practices and phenomena, whose mutual interaction, dialogue, confrontation and contrast can be the focus of proposed papers.

Since the concept of vulnerability is historically and culturally determined, we encourage the study of vulnerable social (ethnic, national, class, gender, racial) groups, but we must be on the alert for those who capitalize on the purported weakness of minorities or on the need to protect hegemonic bulwarks (borders, purity, family, race, privilege). We must be aware that fictitious vulnerabilities can be weaponized to attack and weaken freedoms through, for instance, uses and abuses of censorship.

The mediating potential of vulnerable assets should also be taken into account, as they could serve to balance the instability of systems. Historical research and literary criticism can provide a gauge for the oscillation of the idea of the vulnerable versus the un-attackable in texts, social and cultural strategies, groups and phenomena.

Vulnerability also acts as catalyst for violence, oppression, discrimination, opacity, and fraud, but at the same time it can function as a site for secrecy and dissidence that proves productive rather than destructive. Recent studies have suggested that our present is marked by an "endless disclosure", where the catchword is mandatory transparency. The so-called transparency society, apparently rooted in the visibility of social networks, has indeed been traced back to Early Modernity, connecting self-exposure to discourses on power and surveillance and to their opposites: vulnerability and freedom.

Besides history and literature, the panels will ideally address the (past or future) vulnerability of such entities as archives, printed texts, performances, literary canons, translated texts, religions, democracy, and educational institutions.

Within the frame of critical approaches sketched above, vulnerability and its sub-themes can be investigated including, but not limited to, the following fields and topics:

Activism
Autobiography / Autobiographical Literary Criticism
Body Shaming
Cultural Appropriation
Diaspora Studies

Digital Humanities

Disability Studies

Environmental Studies / Ecocriticism

Film Studies / Star Studies / TV Series

Food Studies

History of Sexuality

Human Rights

Intellectual Property

International Relations

Literary Criticism / Literary History

Medical Humanities

Memory Studies / Memorialization / Memoryscapes

Museum Studies

Popular Culture

Prison Studies

Social History

Soundscapes

Sports Studies

Textual Poaching

Transcultural Studies

Transmediality

Trauma Studies

Urban Fiction

Utopian / Dystopian Literature

YAL (Young Adult Literature) / Children's Literature

Youth / Age Studies

TIMELINE

The updated **deadline for panel proposals** is **March 13th, 2023**. The submitted proposals will be reviewed by the conference organizer committee and the AISNA board. A selection of panels will be issued by March 20th, notified to the submitters by email, and published on the Conference website. By May 2nd paper proposals should be sent to panel coordinators, who will notify accepted participants by May 15th.

Submissions should be written in English and include:

• a panel title

• a clearly stated description of the proposed topic in no more than 250 words

• contact details of the panel's coordinator or coordinators (max. 2), including professional affiliation.

Each panel will host no less than two papers, including the coordinator's or coordinators', panels with more than four papers will be split into 2 sessions. We remind aspiring coordinators that their task will include a brief introduction of the speakers, a strict monitoring of the observance of the allotted 20-minute time for each presentation, and a supervision of the following question and answer session, aimed to stimulate a fruitful discussion in the last but essential part of each panel. **All panel proposals should be sent by e-mail to the conference organization at the following address: aisna23unipg@libero.it**

Local organizing committee

Alessandro Clericuzio

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