

## **For the 2027 conference the HFRN will engage in scholarly discussions on the topic of ‘Power and Politics in Historical Fictions’**

The 2027 conference in Amsterdam will continue to critically interrogate one of HFRN’s longstanding lines of enquiry: that historical fictions are anything but a banal engagement with the past, but explicitly and implicitly shape and propel political claims, identities and agendas.

We seek to reflect on the multifarious ways in which power and politics intersect in historical fictions and contribute to the (re)negotiation of past–present–future relations. Against this backdrop, we understand politics and power in the broadest possible sense: in the Schmittian sense of “the political” as an adversarial field shaped by antagonistic struggle and premised on the “ever-present possibility of conflict” (Schmitt, *Concept*: 32–33), or, alternatively, as a more neutral, or reconciliatory arena of rights and duties. Equally relevant for our understanding of politics are processes of depoliticization, namely the effacement of political causation in favour of either individual, natural or cultural causation. According to Brown, depoliticization involves removing a political phenomenon from comprehension of its *historical* emergence and from a recognition of the *powers* that produce and contour it (Brown 2006:15).

Departing from ideas of power as formulated by Stuart Hall, we believe that the following statements are useful to further situate this conference theoretically: 1) Power is historically contingent; 2) Power is not reducible to the state. Rather, powers – always in the plural – are “dispersed through the plurality of practices in society.” 3) Power can never be located for good, can never be permanently fixed, which does not mean that it is place-less; 4) Power is productive of truth (Sedlmayr 2018: 18–20, Hall and Hay 2013). This final proposition recalls Foucault’s understanding of power as productive rather than merely repressive or reductive: “We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.” (Foucault 1995: 194). Power, of course, is also discursively interconnected with ideas of freedom and agency (Luhmann 2017).

In this vein, recent historical British fiction illustrates how contemporary neoliberal politics are historicized through a return to the Thatcherite past, posing questions of freedom and agency (Vardi 2018 ). Historical fictions can also offer a stage to imagine political change. For instance, period drama films produced at the end of Franco’s dictatorship in Spain promoted a politics of reconciliation for the restoration of democracy (Faulkner 2016). Since the workings of power cannot be fully understood through abstract, purely theoretical approaches nor through solely synchronic ones, but reveal themselves only in their historical specificity (Sedlmayr 2018: 12), historical fictions offer an excellent field of exploration for the interplay between power and politics.

### **Papers are invited on topics related but not limited to:**

- how and why historical fictions historicise relations of power and politics through engagement with specific pasts
- how historical fictions imagine alternative futures and new political possibilities
- how history is rewritten to serve present concerns
- how individuals and groups have been excluded both from ‘history’ and from ‘History’
- how fiction addresses historical reparations and imaginings of justice and peace
- how power and politics are constructed, legitimized, or contested
- how political spaces are (re)imagined and to what ends
- nostalgic narratives and retro-memory

- figurations of past, present, and future political crises
- representations of political power
- all genres within historical fiction, including biofiction, crime fiction, fantasy, neo-Victorian fiction, neo-historical fiction, political Gothic, and political thrillers
- other intersections between power and politics, and historical fictions

#### References:

Brown, W. *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*. Princeton University Press, 2006).

Faulkner, S. 'Rehearsing for Democracy in Dictatorship Spain. Middlebrow period drama 1970–77, 88-106. In Sally Faulkner (ed.), *Middlebrow Cinema* (Routledge 2016).

Hall, S. and Hay, J. 'Interview with Stuart Hall'. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 10(1): 10–33. 2013 DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1080/14791420.2013.768404>

Foucault, M. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

Luhmann, N. *Trust and Power* (German originals 1973/1975). Ed. with revised trans. C. Morgner and M. King. Original trans. H. Davies, J. Raffan and K. Rooney. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).

Sedlmayr, G. 'Stuart Hall and Power', *Coils of the Serpent: Journal for the Study of Contemporary Power* (2018): 7-26.

Schmitt, C. *The Concept of the Political*. 1932. Trans. George Schwab (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996).

Vardy, C. 'Historicizing Neoliberal Britain: Remembering the End of History' (School of Arts, Languages and Cultures, University of Manchester, PhD thesis 2018)

#### Keynote Speakers:

Sally Faulkner, 1933 Professor of Spanish at the University of Cambridge.

Dorothea Flothow, (Associate Professor, English and American Studies Department, Universität Salzburg).

#### Further Details:

HFRC 2027 will be an in-person event taking place at Universiteit of Amsterdam

The venue is situated in the city centre of Amsterdam (Faculty of Humanities, Kloveniersburgwal 48), 15 minutes walking distance from Amsterdam Central train station. The nearest airport is Schiphol (15 minutes by train from Amsterdam CS).

The organizers are Marleen Rensen and Yolanda Rodríguez Pérez (Department of European Studies, University of Amsterdam, research schools ARTES and ACES).

Proposals (max. 250 words) for 20-minute papers with a short bio note (max. 150 words) are due **15 September 2026**. Papers must be presented in English.

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