International Conference

**Le Tenebrose.**

Figures of *Femme Fatale* in European Cinema and Media between Myth and Contemporaneity

Organizers: Cristina Jandelli (Università di Firenze) and Chiara Tognolotti (Università di Pisa)

University of Pisa, 1-2 December, 2022

In 1930 the female spectator Ester Caviglia attentively describes, on the pages of the magazine «Kinema», the characteristics of the «donna fatali» with a passionate yet almost indignated voice:

Of course, one can immediately understands who the major exponents of fatality are: a word, fatality, that means, in poor language, women without souls, hearts of ice, persons who are given an unbelievable presumption. Greta Garbo and Brigitte Helm are the divas of fatality […]. Greta and Brigitte do not live on screen, nor do they talk or love; they pose with joy, love or suffering, and they pose with a regal attitude, disdainfully stepping on all the sweet things that belong to life: kindness, and humble dedication. There is no point in deluding yourselves, my passionate friends: your favorites are dolls made of luxury and sin, dolls molded of cruelty and marble.

Ester’s words, recently rediscovered by Elena Mosconi (2019), enlighten the main characteristics of the tenebrose, or «shady women» (Jandelli 2016): coldness, cruelty, indifference, sensuality, arrogance, and above all the ability of pretending to be someone else, standing still in the unchanging, highly codified attitude of the pose. A «doll of luxury and sin, molded of cruelty and marble», the *femme fatale* is a returning figure in the
characters, performances, narrative, and visual forms of film stardom: the Conference will aim at tracing its appearances and variations in the context of the multifaceted dynamics of European cultures and societies, where they were born.

The narrative and visual construct of the tenebrosa derives from theater – the role of the seconda donna in the late XIX century companies – and finds its roots in the representations of femininity seen as a threat an element perturbing the pre-constituted patriarchal order. Therefore, the first issue at stake will concern the constellation of meanings revolving around the tenebrosa, starting from the universe of mythical figures – Lilith, Medusa, Ananke – migrating in different times, spaces, and arts, according to Aby Warburg’s theory of the Nachleben der Antike.

Secondly, we will try to trace its appearances as a cultural pattern both in the plot and visuals of the films, from the silent era to contemporary works, framing every case study in its broader context (e.g., the system of the genres).

Moreover, cultural studies have taught us that cinema and national identities are tied in a tangled bond. Forms and modes of representation are intertwined in different historical and cultural contexts in a mutual relationship where the film is inspired and molded by society and vice versa, in a fertile exchange. In this perspective, studying the tenebrose as a rupture of the dominant normativity leads us to enlightening the shifts in the perceptions of gender identities through different national frames, also in regards of the definition of different spectatorships.

Lastly, the bodies of the tenebrose define their characteristics on the one hand via the construction of stardom and the star persona (Dyer 1979 [2003]), on the other through the modes of the performances. Thus, particular attention will be dedicated to the analysis of postures, attitudes, and facial expressions typical of the roles of the femme fatale; together with the study of the recurring motif of the shady women in the different narrative forms tied to the public personae of the stars, from traditional media to social media, explored through the lens of the «divagrafie», or «actresses in writing» (Rizzarelli 2017; 2021).

Keynote speaker:
Jacqueline Reich, Dean, School of Communications and the Arts, Marist College, NY

Scholars wishing to participate to the Conference should submit a 250-words abstract in Italian, English or French, together with a short bio (up to 150 words) to tenebrose2022@gmail.com

The languages of the Conference are Italian, English and French.
Conference proceedings will be published via an academic publisher.
The deadline for submission is May 31st, 2022
Abstract will be evaluated by June 30th, 2022

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