**“INTERIOR TEMPTATION”: EARLY MODERN IMAGINATION**

PSI/MPIWG Workshop

5-6 December 2003
Northwestern University
Evanston, IL

**Prospectus**

In the *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, William Shakespeare famously depicted the lunatic, the lover, and the poet as being “of imagination all compact.” The three share a susceptibility to the force of the imagination – which only the poet, however, puts to positive creative use. While artists prided themselves on their abilities to control their imaginations and give them, as Shakespeare said of the poet, “a local habitation and a name,” others were governed by its powers. This was the plight of the melancholic as well as of the witch, as she came to be figured in medico-philosophical literature of the later sixteenth century. Musicians and doctors – and, in the case of Marsilio Ficino, a combination of the two – worked to temper the effects of the imagination, as did religious discipline.

As the quotation from Shakespeare suggests, the imagination was located within early modern culture at the intersection of several discursive and practical fields. Early modern theology, artistic theory and the arts, philosophy, and medicine described, mused over, represented, and diagnosed the various agents and figures of the imagination. More often than not, they were concerned with its social, moral, and clinical perils -- with effects that the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), the most influential early modern treatise on witchcraft, referred to as “interior temptation.”

Generally speaking, the imagination was understood as one of the primary cognitive faculties – a processing mechanism which, as Aristotle had suggested, permitted the mind to perform its various functions, judgment and memory especially. All that was perceived by the external senses was transferred, as it were, to the medium of the imagination. The mental images so produced were then subjected to the further operations of the mind by the internal senses. Combinatory imagination was also a subject of discussion: the imagination was deemed capable of producing wholly new images from what it was provided by experience. And in some instances – most famously in accounts of maternal imagination – the imagination was thought to be capable of producing bodily effects. These and many other representations of the imagination were widespread in early modern Europe, where theories of its operations explained mental function and malfunction, dreams, artistry, the effects of music, witchcraft, various maladies, and religious contemplation.

This workshop follows on a workshop similarly co-organized by PSI and MPIWG, whose focus was on a later period: “Rethinking ‘The Sleep of Reason’: Enlightenment Imagination” (Berlin 2002). The December 2003 workshop will explore an earlier chapter in an as yet unwritten history of the imagination. Its aim is to bring together scholars from a variety of disciplines to chart and discuss various formulations and practices of the imagination, its powers, its dangers and its benefits.

Some of the historical issues we wish to highlight include its cognitive and physiological status; political agency; and the gender implications of its early modern definitions and uses. In what ways did understandings of the imagination, its role and powers, influence conceptions of the senses? Of the passions? Of method? In what ways are conceptions of the imagination as an image-based mechanism or faculty of mind linked to the production and reception of three-
dimensional images? Of other forms of representation? What influence did medico-philosophical considerations on the role and powers of the imagination have on other domains? In other words, how does the imagination figure in the theory and praxis of mind-body relations as they come to be delineated over the course of the early modern period?

Papers will be 30-35 minutes in length, and each followed by 10-15 minutes discussion.