

Editorial Turning Point... But Where To?

This issue began with the realization that the words *crisis* and *disaster* are invoked incessantly and carelessly to describe our current realities. Our examples are well known: the financial collapse, the earthquakes in Haiti, Chile and Mexico, and the ongoing occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, to name a few. The heavy circulation of these words and their often-manipulative deployment left us asking: How do we define "crisis"? What are the less examined contexts of these words that we can consider? How does crisis relate to disaster (if it does at all)? Rhetorically, aesthetically, politically, economically and sexually, what does it mean to face disaster or to be in a state of crisis?

Originally meaning the decisive moment in a patient's struggle to overcome disease, the word *crisis* has had, since Hippocrates, an ambiguous meaning. Considering that this turning point could result either in the decline or in the improvement of the health of the patient, it is important to acknowledge that there is a positive way of considering crisis. This possibility is highly pertinent when reflecting on the often-fatalistic rhetorical framing of the aforementioned so-called crises and disasters. Tightening crises with disaster, our society often denies of the possibility of constructive, or even simply ambivalent, change. Our intention has been to analyze this radical displacement of ambiguity and to track the remainders of this turning point. The concept of *turning point* provided us with a fruitful terrain for thinking and discussing *crisis* and *disaster*. Ultimately, it made us wonder how do the *turning point*, *crisis* and *disaster* intertwine with our own praxis within academia and our communities, our own efforts to make *Tiresias* a creative and viable space, and the ongoing defense of public education and workers' benefits.

As American academics, we saw defiance of convention and collective action as hallmarks of a turning point when our colleagues first in California and later in Puerto Rico stood up for public education. Their refusal to acquiesce to further privatization as an acceptable trajectory for public universities dealing with budgetary shortcomings illustrates the result of a turning point: a new beginning. We appreciate and salute their stances and recognize that we will face similar struggles when as graduate students and workers begin to negotiate our own contract for the next three years.

We at *Tiresias* tried two new strategies for this fourth issue, both of which produced ambivalent results. First, this issue includes papers by several of the many dynamic scholars that joined us in March, 2010, for the 17th annual Charles F. Fraker Conference, organized by our department's graduate student body. This year the central topic of the Fraker Conference was also "The Turning Point: Crisis and Disaster". Additionally, instead of publishing articles by faculty members, which we did for the past three issues, we opted to include the conference's keynote addresses as podcasts as a way to address and think through yet another turning point, namely, how new media affects the way we share and consume information and ideas.

In combining these two projects (the journal and the conference), we sought to foster communal imaginings and dialogue around these inquiries. The results, however, were uneven although the experience proved to be very enriching. On the one hand, it gave us a common theme to discuss over the year that extended across different spaces such as classes, job talks and pre-Fraker lunches, not to mention the cafés and bars where we carry on our conversations. On the other hand, given the organizational nature and demands of a large conference such as the Fraker, our energy, time and commitment was mainly devoted to its successful completion, thereby leaving

Tiresias circumscribed to the conference's dynamic. Even if we do not discard the possibility of once again joining forces in the future, we have come to the realization that both projects operate with different dynamics and require dissimilar types of energy and timeframes, and therefore their creative processes must be acknowledged.

The second strategy we explored consisted in instituting an organized structure with defined positions for the members of our editorial board. *Tiresias* had been functioning as a loose collective with tasks being shared and taken on without assigned roles. The goal of the new structure was to increase efficiency and to decrease intragroup tensions by dividing up work in a defined way. However, in institutionalizing the project (and in many ways turning towards convention) lots of the most creative and dynamic parts of the project were lost. *Tiresias* began to feel more like a job or an obligation and less like a creative space to test out new scholastic practices. While our initial impetuses for a new method of organization were and are valid ones, our experience shows that in the future, achieving these sought after goals will require continued effort and new arrangements that in addition to accounting for organization and efficiency, simultaneously foster discussion, creativity and community.

Both the protests in California and Puerto Rico and the experimental nature of *Tiresias* illustrate the kind of collective action and creative thought that are hopefully part of turning points. While, as our own experiences illustrates, the results might be ambiguous and definitely do not always lead to the desired result, they also are not always limited to the narrow definition of a turning point that we find in today's meaning of the word crisis. In this issue of *Tiresias* we invite readers to examine the multitude of other creative responses to the questions posed above and to consider how such responses challenge our often limited notions of these two highly ambiguous words.