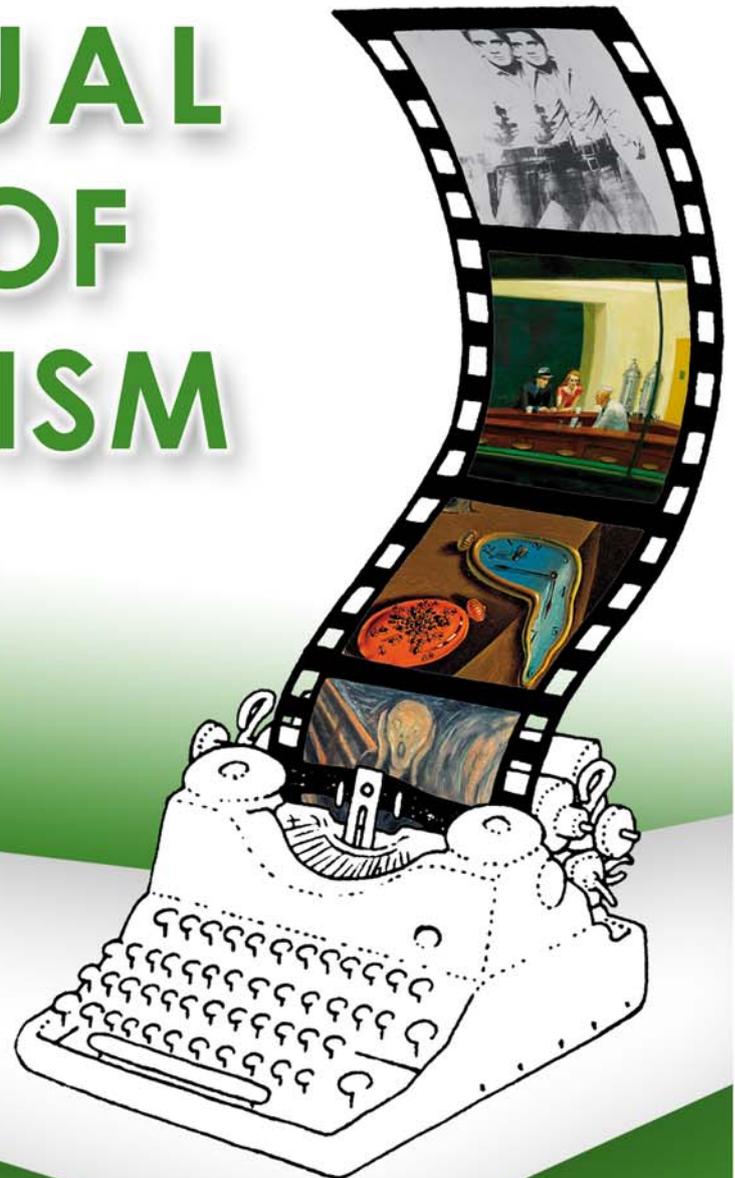


37th International Conference of the Austrian Association for American Studies  
in collaboration with the Swiss Association for North American Studies

# THE VISUAL CULTURE OF MODERNISM



A B S T R A C T S

## Keynote Speakers

**Elisabeth Bronfen**, University of Zurich

**Scott Curtis**, Northwestern University

**Thomas Elsaesser**, University of Amsterdam

**Vinzenz Hediger**, Ruhr-University Bochum

organized by:

Department of American Studies, University of Innsbruck  
English Department, University of Geneva

**November 12–14, 2010, Innsbruck**

## KEYNOTES

**Friday, November 12, 14:30–16:00**

### **Vinzenz Hediger, "Body Rebuilding. On the Obsolescence of the Body at the Dawn of the Cybernetic Age"**

In his book *The Human Motor*, Anson Rabinbach argues that in Western industrialized societies, the 19th and early 20th centuries are marked by a system of thought that he proposes to call "transcendental materialism", i.e. a regime of knowledge that evolves around the question of the human body as the bearer of energy and power, but also of fatigue and decay. Rabinbach's "transcendental materialism" largely coincides with what social historians like Philip Sarasin propose to call the "thermodynamic age", i.e. an age focused on the processes of transforming energy into performance, which in the middle of the 20th century gives way to a "cybernetic age", i.e. a regime of knowledge focused on questions of control and systems engineering. But if in the "thermodynamic age" and under the conditions of "transcendental materialism" the human body is the focus of attention, then what happens to the body as an object of knowledge at the dawn of the cybernetic age? Taking film as its point of departure, this contribution addresses the question of the body's obsolescence at the dawn of the cybernetic age from the point of view of "Darstellung", i.e. of both representation and performance. Examples include the ergonomic and industrial films of Frank Gilbreth as well as fiction films and television programs.

**Vinzenz Hediger** is Professor of Film Studies at the Ruhr-University Bochum and a founding member of NECS, the Network for European Cinema Studies. Between 1993 and 2000, he worked as media journalist as well as film critic. In 2001, he published his seminal contribution to film trailers, *Verführung zum Film. Der amerikanische Kinotrailer seit 1912*. He also edited another volume on film advertising, namely, *Demnächst in Ihrem Kino. Grundlagen der Filmwerbung* (2005). Other publications include *Kinogefühle. Emotion, Emotionalität und Film* (2005) and *Filmische Mittel, industrielle Zwecke. Das Werk des Industriefilms* (2007). His current research focuses on animals in film and the industrial film.

**Saturday, November 13, 09:00–10:30**

### **Elisabeth Bronfen, "Engendering Historical Evidence as Visual Reality: The Choreography of Battle in Hollywood Cinema"**

The lecture engages with the way Hollywood Cinema in general but the war film in particular re-conceives history aesthetically, with Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* serving as my paradigmatic example. At stake, thus the argument, is a complex recycling, borrowing as much from literature as from battle painting and panorama, but also exhibiting what Bachtin called genre memory. The claim is that the authenticity of depiction does not consist in the question of referential verisimilitude but in the survival of the pathos formulas of battle.

**Elisabeth Bronfen** is Professor of English and American Studies at the University of Zurich. Her impressive body of work includes several seminal contributions within research areas as varied as gender studies, psychoanalysis, film, cultural theory and art, such as *Over Her Dead Body. Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (1992) and *Die Diva. Geschichte einer Bewunderung* (2002). Her most recent publications are *Crossmappings* (2009) and an introduction to the work of Stanley Cavell, *Stanley Cavell zur Einführung* (2009). Her current research centers on Hollywood and the representation of war as well as Queen Elizabeth I as the first diva.

**Saturday, November 13, 17:00–18:30**

**Thomas Elsaesser, " Modernism and Visuality – The Troubled Tropes of Modernity "**

**Thomas Elsaesser** is Professor Emeritus of the Department of Media and Culture at the University of Amsterdam, where he built up the very first Film Studies programs in The Netherlands, and was the Chair of the Department of Film and Television Studies from 1991 to 2001. He is general editor of the series *Film Culture in Transition* (Amsterdam University Press), which has published volumes on, among others, film theory and history, European directors, and early cinema. He has received the Jay Leyda Prize and the Kovacs Book Award of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies for his *New German Cinema: A History* (1989) and again the Kovacs Book Award for *Fassbinder's Germany: History Identity Subject* (1996). His latest publication is *Hollywood heute: Geschichte, Gender und Nation im postklassischen Kino* (2009).

**Sunday, November 14, 11:00–12:30**

**Scott Curtis, "The Politics and Poetics of Surgery: Mina Loy's Feminist Monstrosities and Grotesque Textuality"**

As we know, the frenzy for efficiency of all sorts - technological, social, even artistic - was especially pronounced in the United States and Europe during the first three decades of the twentieth century. A technical term transformed in the nineteenth century into a social ideal, "efficiency" meant many things to many people, but it most often referred to a wise use of resources that prevented or eliminated "waste." In Imagist literature or Precisionist painting, the efficient use of words or lines - only as many as necessary to get the job done - became an artistic goal as well. Even the graphs and models of efficiency engineer Frank Gilbreth resembled and influenced modernist painting and sculpture. In other words, "efficiency" is a very familiar trope in the visual culture of modernism.

This presentation will pursue one aspect of this configuration: the idea that images, especially moving images, are particularly "efficient." Edison was only one of many to make this claim when he declared that "on the average, we get about two percent efficiency out of schoolbooks as they are written today. The education of the future, as I see it, will be conducted through the medium of the motion picture ... where it should be possible to achieve one hundred percent efficiency." On one hand, this claim is simply a modern invocation of the presumed directness of pictures and perception (as opposed to words), a concept dating at least to Descartes and Locke. On the other hand, Edison's boast carries something more than the usual philosophical baggage: it assumes that images, especially moving images, are themselves modern, and that they can be implemented with scientific precision to solve social problems. The public discussion of film as an educational tool makes an especially pronounced connection between motion pictures and modern efficiency. So this presentation will explore the varieties of cinematic efficiency by focusing on the early discourse of the educational film. The paradox of this rhetoric is that the efficiency of the moving image was both a solution and a problem, echoing modernity's similar dilemma: efficiency, as we sadly know all too well, cuts both ways, for good and for evil.

**Scott Curtis** is Associate Professor at the Department of Radio/Television/Film at the Northwestern University, Evanston (Illinois). He is the President of Domitor, an international association dedicated to the study of early cinema, the founder of Block Cinema, and a co-chair of Chicago Film Seminar. His research focuses on the history of film (early and silent cinema in particular) as well as on institutional and scientific uses of movies. His most recent publications include "Between Observation and Spectatorship: Medicine, Movies, and Mass Culture in Imperial Germany" (2009) and "Douglas Fairbanks: King of Hollywood" (2010).

# PANELS

Friday, November 12, 16:30–18:00

## Panel I: Representations of the Grotesque in (Late) Modernism I

### Florian Sedlmeier, "The Politics and Poetics of Surgery: Mina Loy's Feminist Monstrosities and Grotesque Textuality"

The talk will investigate the tension between several political discourses in Mina Loy's "Feminist Manifesto" and the visual display of the text. As will be argued, Loy's literary manifesto performs what could be called a politics as well as a poetics of surgery, which are closely linked to the notion of the grotesque. On the political level, as has been frequently claimed, her manifesto can be read as a critique of the misogyny embedded in the Futurists' narrative of energetic newness. Yet, Loy's radical vision of surgically removing the virginity of women not only provides a subversive satire on macho culture but is, at the same time, deeply enmeshed with the Futurists' proto-fascist projections, particularly since her manifesto sketches a fantasy of regulated procreation that is supposed to elevate women to a higher level of education and self-consciousness.

Accordingly, these conflicting discourses, where the grotesqueness of a radically feminist politics of surgery collides with a proto-fascistic one, haunt the textual surface of the text in various ways. On the one hand, formal features, such as bold type, various font sizes, capital letters, and underlining, provide a direct comment on Marinetti's "Futurist Manifesto." Since Loy criticized Futurism for its gendered political program, an argument can be made that she literarily and visually performs a critique of Futurist political fervor. On the other hand, however, the visual display of her text reproduces a modernist and propagandistic shrillness that, while it satirizes tabloid culture, is, as will be argued, tied to what could be called a surgical poetics: the grotesque vision of tweaking the female body by surgically cutting off its virginity finds its formal expression in an equally grotesque textual surface that disrupts the reading process.

Loy's text, then, is even more paradigmatic for (American) literary modernism than is commonly assumed since it expresses the nexus between avantgarde and proto-fascism. It performs a complex visual surgical textuality that, despite its polemic design, ultimately taps into a grotesque vision of regulated reproduction while it exposes the insufficiencies of women's liberation as well as the misogyny of the Futurist project.

### Ralph J. Poole, "Breton on Haiti, Césaire in Paris: Crosscurrents of the Marvellous and Grotesque"

Between 1931 and 1946 a unique series of encounters took place between Caribbean artists and French surrealists marking not only an important moment in the anti-colonial struggle, but also the emergence of a transcultural aesthetic that linked the European Avant-Garde to Caribbean folklore. As much as the French surrealists were drawn towards the exotic world of the Caribbean as can be seen in the 1931 Colonial Exhibition in Paris and Nancy Cunard's anti-colonial tract *Negro: An Anthology* (1934), artists from the Caribbean flocked to the French cultural center seeking to form a Caribbean Surrealist Group of their own. Of the various cultural crosscurrents occurring during this period, the paper focuses on three particular instances of artistic dialogue between Western European and (Latin-)American sensibilities: Wifredo Lam's seminal painting *The Jungle* (1942) and his recognition of voodoo mythology, Aimé Césaire's poetry and essays promoting the concept of *negritude*, and André Breton's Haitian lectures linking Surrealism with 'Primitivism'. These crossroads culminated in 1944/45, when all three were present in Haiti on the verge of the fall of the Haitian government a year later, uncannily participating in a merging of politics and aesthetics that sheds light on the negotiation of cultural variants of the magic and the grotesque.

## **Annette Keck, "Working Girls Go Grotesque: Crosscurrents of Humor and Gouvernmentality"**

Ally McBeal, Bridget Jones, Charlie's Angels, and even Lee Holiday in Steven Shainberg's *Secretary* not only share being Working Girls but also a tendency towards the grotesque. Beyond the often discussed topic of the status of over the top sex/gender performances, this lecture seeks to concentrate on the working part of the Working Girl. Taking into account Gilles Deleuze's *Postscript on the Societies of Control*, disciplinary societies have ceased to be; the "generalized crisis in relation to all the environments of enclosure – prison, hospital, school, family" is the result of "new forces knocking at the door [...] of *the societies of control*". Due to these forces, work itself has changed; the office as a site of enclosure does not exist anymore, at least not in this form. *Secretary* discusses the issue with much melancholy and lust. Moving away from the past, Ally McBeal illustrates, among other things, how work corrupts the distinction between work and leisure nowadays, and Charlie's Angels mark their preferences when choosing team-work over marriage. Following Peter Fuss, who defines the grotesque as the site where cultural boundaries are projected as well as negotiated, this lecture will discuss the status of these humorous representations on behalf of the governmentality of societies of control first and its relation to (flexible) representations of sex/gender differences later.

## Panel II: Racial Aesthetics and Representation

### Miriam Strube, "African Art – Modern Culture: The Aesthetics of the Harlem Renaissance"

"The problems raised by African art are now recognized at the very core of art theory and art history," claimed the leading philosopher of the Harlem Renaissance, Alain Locke, in "Note on African Art." Additionally, extending Roger Fry's *Vision and Design* (1920), Locke not only pointed to the growing influence of African art upon innovative European painting but also understood African art to be the imaginative awakening to the prevailing limitations of black people. Similarly, W.E.B. Du Bois perceived the cultural importance of Africa and its significance for African Americans in general and black painters like Aaron Douglas in particular.

This paper focuses on the relationship between modernism, Africa, African Americans and aesthetics – after all (if debatable), Henry Louis Gates has claimed, "by imitating the European modernists who so clearly have been influenced by African art ... African Americans will become African by being modern." I argue that some of the most complex connections and seeming paradoxes can be untangled when looking at the aesthetics of the Harlem Renaissance as pragmatic (a perspective widely neglected but not too surprising given the fact that both Locke and Du Bois studied with William James). Locke claims that black artists have to be aware of their "racialism ... as a sign of aesthetic objectivism" but then ends emphasizing the need to judge and create art "largely in terms of its universal values," clearly utilizing James's pragmatist notions of pluralism. Indeed, anticipating the pragmatism of John Dewey, Locke and Du Bois provide examples of an effective rapprochement between a life committed to aesthetics and the social reality of racism. They do this through their modernist pragmatism connecting politics and aesthetics, which produced a new conception of the relationship between aesthetics and social change, particularly for a multiracial and pluralist democracy. Indeed, with their modernist pragmatism they mediate between the aesthetic and the political, thereby moving beyond this dichotomy.

### Gerwin Gallob, "Denial of Visuality as Resistance of the Object: Racial Bodies, Racial Performance, and the Irruption of Phonography"

The dawn of US modernism roughly coincides with the termination of Reconstruction, and with the imposition of the social order and "scopic regime" of Jim Crow. Utilizing the increasing reach of popular cultural forms and visual media, white Americans sought to alleviate their racial anxieties by exercising control over the representations of the Jim Crow experience, and by enacting and dramatizing it as spectacle.

In that context, the emergence of phonography in the 1880s poses an interesting problem. Sound recording involves the splitting of a sound from its source, its capture and preservation in the form of a peculiar type of inscription on the surface of an object. Modern Americans were particularly unsettled by the fact that the human voice—a privileged type of sound—could so easily be severed from the body from which it emanates.

Exploring the links between black bodies and the phonographic apparatus, I will touch on several key questions related to the problem of (audio)visual self-reflection in modernist culture. Using late 19<sup>th</sup>-century recordings in the popular "coon song" genre as my main example, I will discuss some aspects of the disturbance that the phonograph introduced into white American society, such as the question of aurally locating the (absent) performer's race, of telling "black" from "white" vocal sounds.

Like the very black bodies that at one time were considered to be mere objects, the record-object offers its own types of resistance. As a consequence, to moderns used to relying on vision as the preferred path to knowledge, records remain stubbornly opaque. Attuned to the relations between resistant objects, race, and the senses, I will explore the famous case of Blind Tom Wiggins, an ex-slave musical prodigy derisively dubbed "the human phonograph" by novelist Willa Cather.

Deficient vision and denied visuality are tropes that still haunt the phonographic medium today. Leaping ahead one hundred years, I will conclude by discussing Detroit techno, a late 20<sup>th</sup>-century black sonic culture that fully embraces the radical possibilities of phonography. In its "alien" sound worlds, the racially marked artist as a legibly human (and human-legible) figure all but disappears.

### **Anna Iatsenko, "‘Hovering’ Onscreen in Jonathan Demme’s *Beloved*"**

Although theorists of adaptations tend to view the latter as independent works rather than inseparable from their "original" sources, when major works of African-American authors become adapted to the screen, critics seem to become anew judges of the authenticity of the adaptation to the original work. This is the case of Jonathan Demme's *Beloved* – a film adaptation of Toni Morrison's novel of the same name. Indeed, a brief overview of the critical material of the film, scholarly or otherwise, reveals a great polarization of rather opinionated criticism, where critics engage themselves on a perilous ground of appreciation and comparison between "Beloved-the-film" and "Beloved-the-book" with an overwhelming propensity to favour the latter. Although I agree that the ways in which Morrison chooses to portray the themes of memory and trauma in her novel can not be easily translated to the screen, in this paper I will argue that Demme's attempt to adapt *Beloved* to the screen must not be seen as a complete failure. On the contrary, I see Demme's work as precisely exemplifying the problematic of remembering and its representation in a visual medium. Indeed, as I will argue in this paper, Morrison's idea of a "hovering" – a continuous presence which stays with and haunts the victim – is effective on screen. However, instead of directly transposing Morrison's problematic metaphor on the screen, Demme drastically transforms it by seeking out a relationship with the uncanny. Nonetheless, what Demme problematizes in his representation of the character of *Beloved* is the terrible physicality of Morrison's novel, thus creating a disturbing work which deeply echoes its original.

## Panel III: Icons of US Modernism

### Klaus Rieser, "Conceptualizing Iconicity"

In my presentation I will delineate the construction, maintenance and mutability of icons, i.e. images which emerge from the flood of images which define and constitute modernity. As we all know, some images tend to grasp the attention of a large number of people and often remain highly in use beyond the exigencies of the moment, but which and why? These are the guiding questions in my search for these outstanding images. I understand icons to be not only abstractions of a certain purity but rather paradoxical and tension-fraught. They are images that often from the start supersede social barriers, are read in different ways, are contested and in time often tampered with. Thus on the formal, as well as on the meaning and ideological levels icons are a procedural phenomenon which demands careful attention. Icons are situated between the ordinary (the everyday) and the extraordinary (the artful), between inscription and repetition, between soft schematizing (images) and hard schematizing (formalization, symbolism) and, on the content level, between the democratic (accepted by a large number of people) and the ideological (filtered through and controlled by powerful institutions such as mass media and resonant with hegemonic narratives and symbols).

### Michael Fuchs, "'Don't Believe Everything That's Written about You': George Herman Ruth, Iconicity, and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Media"

The Babe. The Bambino. The Sultan of Swat. He was a member of seven World-Series-winning teams and re-wrote the Major League Baseball record books. George Herman Ruth seemingly single-handedly revolutionized baseball, becoming the first-ever 'slugger' in the history of MLB, leading the league in home runs twelve times and slugging percentage thirteen times. In fact, in 1920, his first year with the New York Yankees, only the Philadelphia Phillies (aside from the Yankees, of course) hit more home runs as a team than the Bambino as individual.

Ruth's on-field achievements are second to none and it is no coincidence that he was one of the first five members of the Baseball Hall of Fame. However, I would like to argue that it was not so much his legendary on-field presence that ensured Babe Ruth iconic status, but rather his translation of his on-field achievements into lucrative off-field appearances and sponsorship contracts. Ruth's larger-than-life persona lent itself to the lionizing sensibilities of the newspaper and newsreel coverage of the time. It was the Jazz Age and the moral fiber of America was split along the lines of the rigid puritan work ethic and a hedonism that honored individual achievement and upward social mobility. No public figure represented these seemingly binary ideas better than Babe Ruth. His Horatio-Alger-story-like life became a blueprint for American success to the point that 'Ruthian' came to signify individual success and even heroism (cf. Warren Susman's *Culture as History*). The media used Ruth's life and antics to attract large audiences, who demanded ever more material on the iconic sports star.

As Patrick Trimble argues, "Fact and fiction came to blend in the image of Babe Ruth." This becomes most prevalent in Babe Ruth's films, in which he always plays Babe Ruth. By investigating Ruth's film roles, it becomes evident how the media commercialized the image of Babe and formed a web of information that turned his life into narrative drama.

### Thomas Austenfeld, "Parallel Lives: Kay Boyle and Tamara de Lempicka"

Few modernist writers were as synaesthetically sensitive as Kay Boyle, who sprinkled her novel, *Process* (written in 1925 but published only in 2001), with phrases such as "The river sucked at the flat breast of Kentucky" (2) or "White eyes of the switchboard lolled upon the heat" (17). In the novel, Brancusi sculptures become the object of contention at a meeting of factory workers and union organizers. Boyle's intellectual proximity to Dadaism, her language experiments in *transition* and *This Quarter*, and her later marriage to sculptor Laurence Vail immersed her in a world saturated with contemporary art during the first decade of her writing career, in the nineteen-twenties. Only in the mid-thirties, as a witness to the totalitarian turns in the political life of Austria and Germany, did Boyle begin focusing her attention primarily on political and social subjects.

Boyle's biographers have not yet taken notice of the parallels between her life and that of Tamara de Lempicka, Art Deco precursor of what would later be called "cool modernism," when transplanted to 1950s California. Stylized, smooth-surfaced, offering poster-like clarity yet clearly representational, placing giant nudes into industrial landscapes, de Lempicka's canvases seem to express Kay Boyle's prose visually as much as Boyle's 1925 *Process*, with its opening scene of young Kerith Day at the wheel of a car, unknowingly paralleling de Lempicka's iconic 1925 "Auto-Portrait: Tamara in the Green Bugatti." The mechanistic, industrial energy of the nineteen-twenties finds expression across the art forms, and the two women artists here discussed - both expatriates in Paris, both as young as the century itself (born in 1898 and 1902, respectively) - found characteristic ways to channel those energies.

Literary and visual arts have been compared since classical antiquity; the comparative urge reached a climax in the Victorian Age. Instead of continuing that line of inquiry, my paper will examine the possibilities as well as the limitations of reading one art form through another while asserting that modernism's essential qualities run across the various art forms. Rebecca Beasley, Karen Jacobs, and Desmond Harding have recently offered arguments about the aesthetic relationships of the visual and the literary. For Boyle and de Lempicka, professionalization of the artistic effort was equally important. Biography and representation, women's lives lived and women's lives represented, are thus the two poles of Boyle's and de Lempicka's careers which offer the impetus for the stereoscopic examination I wish to perform.

**Saturday, November 13, 11:00–12:30**

**Panel IV: Representations of the Grotesque in (Late) Modernism II**

**Verena Laschinger, “The City as Corpse and Candy: The Grotesque in Elif Shafak’s *The Flea Palace*”**

The paper explores the ways in which contemporary Turkish author Elif Shafak employs the grotesque in *The Flea Palace* and thus stylistically synthesizes some contradictions characteristic of Istanbul's society. Set in an apartment block in the Turkish metropolis, the 2004 novel narrates the history of the building and the life stories of its various tenants. The community of Bonbon Palace Number 88 functions as a metaphor of Istanbul's modern, multilayered and multicultural society. While the episodic structure of the text formally deploys the life-affirming Bakhtinian grotesque, the ending reveals a grotesque scene of heart-rending life denial, in which Shafak, following the tradition of the American urban novel, exposes the city as an entropic system.

**Kimberly Frohreich Gaydon, “Making the ‘Monstrous’ Visible? The Question of Passing in Contemporary Fantastic Film and Television”**

The early 20th century was a time in which the boundaries between races and normative versus non-normative gender and sexuality were carefully controlled through visibility. A cultural practice such as the freak show as well as certain laws, such as the One Drop Rule and the Jim Crow laws, paradoxically rendered the Other highly visible as well as extremely invisible through its creation of a space separate from the rest of society.

The practice of passing was therefore highly threatening to white, heterosexual Americans as it violated the definitions of racial and sexual categories, suggesting that race, gender, and sexuality could not always be identified and controlled through visibility but could be performed. Passers could then have access to social and political power they would have otherwise been denied.

However, since the 1960s civil rights movement, African-Americans and queer activists have attempted to break down legal and social barriers, to make themselves visible in addition to defining the manner in which they are visible.

The figure of the vampire in film and television has followed this movement. Earlier vampires passed as human to fool their victims, but were coded as monstrous figures, foreigners, and aristocrats, and thus remained easily identifiable to the spectator. In the current HBO television series, *True Blood*, vampires have “come out of the coffin” and are now fighting for equal rights, thereby making themselves visible and positioning themselves as the “disenfranchised”. Similar themes and plotlines can be found in the X-Men films with the figure of the mutant in the place of the vampire.

While it would seem that with such “visibility” the need for passing would then altogether disappear, these texts continue to question the social relevance of such a practice and whether or not power can be gained from their visibility. In my paper, I would like to explore these TV series and films in their use of contemporary social discourses surrounding race and homosexuality, specifically with regard to passing and its link to racial, gender and sexual performance.

## Panel V: Vision and Representation in Modern Writing I

### Heike Schäfer, "The Modernist Search for Immediacy: Literary Innovation and the Cinema"

Modernist experiments with literary form frequently grew out of the writers' conviction that they had to leave behind the certainties of Victorian culture and with it the transparency effects of realism in order to create new forms of representational immediacy that could capture the complex flux of experience and thus invest reality with dynamic forms of order and meaning. As part of their effort "to make it new," numerous modernist writers turned to early film. The cinema provided them with a model for their break with literary tradition because it combined the thrill of visual spectacle with representational self-reflexivity. Early film offered viewers a sense of immersion while confronting them with the processes of representation and reception that mediated their experience. This oscillation allowed the cinema to train viewers in the new forms of attention required by the accelerated pace, fragmentation, and informational density of modern urban life, while also providing compensatory relief from such self-reflexive negotiations.

This paper examines the impact that the autoreferential recasting of immediacy effects in early film had on literary culture by focusing on an author who began writing during cinema's early years and who was particularly invested in the modernist reworking of American literature - Gertrude Stein. Stein used film as a model to explain to her baffled readers her use of serial repetition and non-mimetic representation in her early literary portraits of the 1910s. By employing a cinematic form of serial variation that locates the text's meaning in the movement of its sentence permutations rather than its mimetic capacities, Stein keeps the readers focused on the workings of language and the temporal unfolding of the text. Stein's use of autoreferentiality to create a sense of temporal and perceptual immediacy radicalizes the cinematic strategy of embedding immediacy effects in overtly self-reflexive 'texts.' By reworking cinematic aesthetics, modernist writers such as Stein and Dos Passos expanded the repertoire of literary technique and asserted the continued relevance of literature for a media culture increasingly shaped by mass media technologies and a logic of spectacle and consumption.

### Viorica Patea, "Modernist Poetry and the Avant-Garde of Visual Arts"

This paper considers the interrelationship between poetry and the visual arts, especially painting in the modernist poetry of Pound, Eliot, Williams and Stevens. The aesthetics of twentieth-century Anglo-American poetry is based on the principles and techniques of non-figurative arts, which it constantly seeks to appropriate, integrate and translate into its own poetics. With modernist poetics the literary text has become a visual object.

In their treatment of the image, modernist poets look to visual arts for inspiration and example. The *calligramme*, the vortex, the ideogram or the objective correlative become key concepts rooted in the philosophy of impersonality, absolute objectivism or extreme subjectivity.

The interaction between poetry and painting marked the beginning of the twentieth century and remained the hallmark of postmodernist poetics. Cubist, DADA, Expressionist, Surrealist and abstract painting articulated the technical repertoire that was to be adopted later by modernist poets. By means of their association with painting, poets find a way to break poetry's reliance on discursive statements and re-orient their projects on abstract designs.

The quest for a new poetic idiom is premised on the aesthetic of the "image", the key concept of all poetic programs of the twentieth century such as imagism and Vorticism, the two movements that revolutionized the poetic language of the twentieth century. As a reaction to Victorian sentimentalism and discursive modes of expression, both led a campaign against the mimetic principle of art. The image was not a mirror reflecting the given world, but a lens with which to refashion the world anew. It shared the common impulse of the avant-garde to dehumanize art, to challenge rational discourse and to frustrate the intellect's capacity for translating everything into recognizable patterns.

Pound argued that Imagism had "an inner relation to certain modern paintings and sculpture." Vorticism consciously attempted to formulate "a correlative aesthetic" between literature and visual arts and to promote a "sort of poetry where painting and sculpture seems as if it were just coming into speech".

## **Kangqin Li, "Searching for the Real: Hopperesque Updike in 'In Football Season'"**

Visual art plays an important role in John Updike's fiction. This has been asserted both by Updike himself and by his critics. In his *Picked-Up Pieces* (1975), Updike has described himself as a "highly pictorial writer" (509) and remarked that "the author's deepest pride ... [is] in his ability to keep an organized mass of images moving forward" (453). According to James Plath, in his "Verbal Vermeer: Updike's Middle-Class Portraiture", Updike uses similar painterly techniques to those of Vermeer and has created Vermeeresque "portraits of the upper-middle-class domesticity" in his fiction (207).

This paper will further explore Updike's painterly techniques in his short fiction by putting him alongside the American Realist painter Edward Hopper. Juxtaposing Updike's short story "In Football Season" (1962) with a series of Hopper's paintings, a formalist analysis will explore Updike's compositional methods in his short fiction writing. Gaston Bachelard's spatial theories will be used and Jean-Francois Lyotard's Postmodernist definition of Realism will be applied.

The purpose of the paper is not to claim how similar Updike and Hopper are in their artistic sensibility, nor to subvert Updike's status as an American Realist writer by imposing upon him a different title. Rather, it is to see Updike's short fiction in a different light and to understand how differently Updike uses visual art in his short story and novel writing. The paper, therefore, hopes to serve as a way-in to a study of John Updike and visual art in short stories.

## Panel VI: Envisioning Emotion: Melodrama, Modernism and Victimhood

### Scott Loren and Jörg Metelmann, "Mind the Image, Close the Gap: Towards a Critical Visual Literacy after the Pictorial Turn"

Rethinking the "pictorial" (Mitchell) or "iconic turn" (Boehm), as well as warnings of a return to medieval times, with its picture-based forms of communication (Eco), current debates on the shape of signifying practices for the next century are being articulated as a question of "image/picture criticism": How can we find ways of establishing and elaborating critical approaches on a par with what cultures of modernity achieved in the "Gutenberg galaxy"?

Such an undertaking would integrate various fields of research, both within and outside the humanities. The manifold approaches to this question in the last two decades have already provided considerable knowledge. The problem is that the dynamics of the digital era keep shifting the grounds on which such critical reflection is set up: twenty years ago, the triumphal procession of the MTV video-clip generation and precursor to the 24/7-world was unforeseeable; ten years ago the YouTube global-community was unthinkable. These and similar events change our every day social and communication practices and, moreover, have a significant impact on the social and signifying practices of future generations.

Our talk will focus on two aspects in which the "silent revolution" (Inglehart) of pictorialized/digitalized communication might be contextualized within a critical perspective: 1) What are the possibilities for creating spaces and positions of critical viewership? 2) How can we reflect on these positions and transmit knowledge, either as teachers, as cultural theorists and social scientists, or as creators of cultural artifacts?

With a background in Film, Media, and Cultural Studies, we will rely on recent findings in narratology and picture/image theory in order to develop a framework for what we have termed an "aesthetics of irritation." Certain types of feature films - mostly, but not exclusively - made by so-called "auteurs" implement various distancing techniques that can help make transparent the mainstream processes of viewer-positioning and strategies of engulfment for the 'ideal' viewer. By developing an aesthetics of irritation, we endeavor to make evident these 'distancing strategies' in particular narrative films. In so doing, our aim is to re-define the space of criticism and critical positions in the pictorial era.

An aesthetics of irritation attempts a kind of socio-cultural didactics of 're-educating' viewers by perpetually creating critical distance, by demanding a repositioning of the viewer vis-à-vis the images in front of her and in relation to internalized, habitual viewing practices. Such an aesthetics moves toward an essential re-exposing of the gap in visual signification.

By minding the image, we might close the transitional gap in types of signification (textual vs. pictorial) by making the 'open gap' of visual signifying processes apparent to viewing audiences.

### Julia Straub, "Pathetic Copycats: Gestures of Female Melodramatic Victimhood"

This paper seeks to explore cinematic depictions of the female melodramatic victim by drawing upon Jean Baudrillard's work on the simulacrum. The genre of melodrama manufactures victims that the audience can easily identify with. Furthermore, they are easily identifiable as victims. They owe both their potential for identification and their recognizability to reductive modes of representation which highlight the typical rather than the individual, thereby minimizing their otherness. Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* serves as a prime example of how victimhood privileges sameness over difference to the extent that subjectivity eventually becomes fluid. In the hope of gaining access to an otherwise unavailable, rare emotional experience (the male protagonist's love), *Vertigo*'s Judy Barton chooses to become a copy of a woman who herself is an effigy. Her act of transformation into a victim can be read as a parable of the spectators' empathic desire to temporarily share emotions that are not meant for them.

One aspect that this paper wants to elucidate is the formulaic quality of female victimhood, thereby focusing on selected examples from 20th century cinema. The visualization of female victims, it will be argued, makes use of distinct emotive means of expression which form a repertoire of codes available for citation and reduplication. This effect of resemblance is taken further and instrumentalized to the point where victims become indistinguishable from each other, growing indifferent to their subjectivity.

## Panel VII: Modern Visual Epistemes

### **Christian Knirsch, "Piercing the Veil: Visuality and Epistemology in Modernist Literature"**

Severe changes in the media and technology combined with new psychological concepts of seeing led to new conceptualizations of the visual in philosophy and, eventually, to a new understanding of reality in the age of modernism. These changes manifested themselves in modernist literature.

One master metaphor which reflects this development is the veil in the sense of a 'veil of perception.' T.E. Hulme, among others, draws heavily on this metaphor when he argues that poets can pierce the 'veil of perception' "that is dense with the ordinary man" (*Speculations* 158). This seeing through the veil, however, does not imply any kind of direct or indirect access to eternal truths! Each work of art is simply considered to offer an alternative perspective on reality from an individual and temporal point of view. Therefore, the aimed-for piercing of the veil is rather a re-definition and individualization of the metaphorical 'veil of perception' formerly believed to be universal.

This change in epistemology can also be traced in modernist novels – again via an analysis of the veil as a visual and epistemological metaphor. Two American modernist novels employing this metaphor are John Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. In *Invisible Man*, the development of the protagonist can be interpreted as a succession of veilings and unveilings; piercing one veil, however, always only reveals another. In *Manhattan Transfer*, different characters see the world at different points of the novel through individualized veils, be it "veils of reflected lights" in the case of Joe Harland or an ordinary "veil floating," which can be interpreted as a metaphor of the temporal quality of reality. Therefore, the depictions of the veil in the two novels are suggestive of changes in visuality and the modernist reality conception.

### **Louis J. Kern, "'Movies ... , the Science of Photographic Thought' Become a Medium for 'Writing History with Lightning': D.W. Griffith, Modernity, and the Transformation of the Popular Historical Epic"**

The paper will focus on four historical films produced by D.W. Griffith in the period 1913-24 and will emphasize Griffith's pioneering role in the creation of a new visual language of film combined with a revolutionary transformation of dramatic space and a deconstruction of perceptual time. Griffith's role in transforming film from moving pictures to cinematic art as an aesthetic expression of modernism will be emphasized.

### **Sämi Ludwig, "The Sin of Perceptualism; or: The 'Long Modernism' and Why I Am Glad It's Over (Soon)"**

This presentation will not argue against Modern art or aesthetic experimentation. Instead it traces multiple strands of Modernist theory from the early to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century in order to demonstrate their shortcomings, i.e., Modernism's idealist origins and its common denominator of formalism favoring very particular patterns of thought. The many post-movements of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century have not overcome these premises but merely made them more elaborate.

I will argue that all these strands are deeply implicated in a "perceptualist" fallacy, treating concepts like precepts in a semiotics that denies the nature of cognitive processing in time in favor of a flattened-out phenomenological reality as a basis of understanding. Perceptualism stands for an uncanny analogy between the visual and the verbal, which are not opposed but merge in formalism. As a consequence, the theoretical patterns of 'long Modernism' connect very specific qualities of non-referentiality, extra-morality, timelessness, and mechanistic logic with an ahistorical and strongly anti-humanist stance.

The prison-house of these shortcomings can only be overcome in a paradigm change that comes from outside formalist premises. Recent theoretical developments may pick up theory before 'long Modernism', where it was left by late 19<sup>th</sup>-century pragmatists whose psychological models were much more sophisticated than 20<sup>th</sup>-century theory would admit. Such a reorientation has powerful interdisciplinary implications that point beyond the playpen of the humanities towards an ethos of the life sciences.

**Saturday, November 13, 15:00–16:30**

**Panel VIII: The Legacy of Modernism: Visualizing the (Post)modern Body**

**Susanne Hamscha, “The Art of Being GaGa: Visualizing the Aesthetics of the Grotesque Body”**

Since early 2009, the international music scene has been dominated by a pop culture phenomenon that is second to none. Going by the somewhat odd name of “Lady Gaga,” the singer/songwriter Stefani Germanotta single-handedly revolutionized pop music in the last twelve months with her thumping dance beats and catchy lyrics, but even more so with her theatrical live performances, her campy video clips, and her bizarre outfits. In her self-creation, Lady Gaga relies on a vast reference library: Madonna, David Bowie, and Boy George are often named as her most direct influences. What distinguishes Lady Gaga from these three artists, however, and what I will explore in my paper, is her appropriation of modernist visual cultures. I will show that visual aesthetics, in particular modernist practices of staging the body, are central to Lady Gaga's success. She frequently incorporates elements of vaudeville, the “freak” show, the grotesque, and sensationalism in her live shows, her music videos, and her public appearances. In her performances, her own body is very often stylized as monstrous and grotesque; she likes to refer to herself and to her fans as “monsters,” refuses to comment on the rumor that she is intersexual, and sings about wanting the “ugly,” the “sick,” and the “diseased.” In short, Lady Gaga establishes a new aesthetics of the grotesque according to which, as I will argue, the imperfect and abnormal becomes desirable and cool. In this aesthetics of the grotesque, the body comes to figure as a site of exploitation and sensationalism, as an attraction and a projection screen for monstrous desires. By setting up “sick” as the new “cool,” Lady Gaga's performances subvert—if not invert—the normal/abnormal binary and explore the pleasures of being a freak.

**Jennifer Moos, “Shelley Jackson: Bodily (De-)Fragmentation and Textual Re:visualization”**

This talk explores the interconnectedness of visual and textual images of the body as represented in the works of New York-based writer and artist Shelley Jackson. In Jackson's hypertextual fictions *My Body – a Wunderkammer* and *Patchwork Girl* we encounter fragmented bodies ready for rearrangement. *Skin – A Mortal Work of Art* is a 2095-word story published in tattoos on the bodies of volunteers. Depictions of the grotesque or monstrous body can also be found in Jackson's story collection *The Anatomy of Melancholy* and her first novel *Half Life*, whose protagonists Nora and Blanche are conjoined twins. As shall be demonstrated, in her hyperfictional, postmodernist work, Shelley Jackson's portrayal of the fragmented body in flux (de-fragmentation) relies heavily on an intertextual dialogue with visual and textual predecessors (re:visualization).

**Nadine Farghaly, “Claiming the Human: Bestiality and Zoophilia in Romance Novels”**

During the last decades, romance fiction has evolved as much as other genres; normative heroes and heroines have been joined by werewolves, vampires, shape shifters, and dragons to name but a few. Although these new protagonists function under the same laws as more normative characters, it needs to be acknowledged that there is one trait that seems to belong dominantly to paranormal romance fiction, bestiality. Using Katie MacAllister's Silver Dragon and Aisling Grey series and J.R. Ward's Black Dagger Brotherhood series, this paper analyzes how these authors reshape and reinterpret the aspects of bestiality in their stories. Both authors use explicit animal descriptions; MacAllister's dragons need to mate in their dragon form and Ward's character Rhage shares his body with a beast. Different theories of sexuality as well as bestiality and theorists like Michel Foucault will be used not only to interpret and evaluate these stories, but also their influence on the romance genre and, more importantly, the readers. This work examines the possible reasons for the inclusion of bestiality in these paranormal romance novels. What makes this topic acceptable today? How is it perceived by the audience? This paper demonstrates what draws readers to these kinds of stories and how this new trend influences not only their

reading habits, but also their perception of these kinds of sexual activities. In how far are intimacy and love affected by these “abnormal” pairings and how do the authors’ ideas reflect modern desires?

Considering that the romance novel genre occupies over 50% of the book market and is read by millions of people (predominantly women) all over the world, this new development needs to be analyzed thoroughly. I illustrate how these beastly protagonists are able to reshape society’s view of “abnormal” and “grotesque” sexual practices synthesizing examples from both the Black Dagger Brotherhood and the Dragon series with the critical cultural theories of Michel Foucault, Gaston Dubois-Desaulle and the works of Midas Dekkers and Paul Vincent.

### **Giulia Grillo, “From Object to Subject: The Black Female Body in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*”**

This paper is drawn from my Doctoral research on the Black female body in selected works by Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison. During the presentation, I will illustrate how the Black female body is used to express the emancipation of the female characters in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. I will also argue that the female characters use their subjectivity with the aim of undertaking an interior development. How does the female body move from object to subject in the selected novel?

In order to show the use of the body as a device for the expression of female emancipation of body, mind, spirit, and lastly the creation of a voice, the body will firstly be considered fragmented. The audience will follow a presentation of the female body originally in the form of separated body parts, and eventually depicted as a whole. For instance, body parts as hands, feet, mouth, as well as voice, will become expedients that will contribute to the understanding of the journey towards successful emancipation of the female characters, and acquisition of a Black female voice in the novel.

## Panel IX: Vision and Representation in Modern Writing II

### Hartwig Isernhagen, "Prurience and Exploitation: Literary Reflections on/of the Modernist Eye"

This paper is actuated by an interest that essentially derives from discussions of so-called 'minority' literatures. It will focus on the representation of the Other (whether gendered, class, or racial) in moments of intensely visual perception; or perhaps it is safer to say that it will be concerned with gestures of othering that occur in such moments. The theory and criticism of the last few decades has tended to view such moments as compromised, as always already tainted with guilt. To all intents and purposes, the view that all forms of knowledge entail a degree of guilt or are always already guilty has become axiomatic. It has generated a focus on injustice-in-representation, particularly in visual representation, that appears incompatible with older views that attempted to find justice-in-representation in what was often called "the innocent eye."

That modernist literature is replete with moments of seeing is obvious. In such moments, modernist texts adhere to neither view in any simple way, but rather engage the problem of justice and injustice self-reflexively. For almost invariably, those moments entail a degree of self-reflection, and frequently of self-reflexive critique, that may appear and be critically discussed as primarily epistemological, metaphysical, pragmatic, ideological, or political—and undoubtedly in additional ways. Thereby, they incorporate negotiations of the contingencies of seeing and of the contingencies of judging acts of seeing. This presentation will work through a series of necessarily very brief discussions of such self-critical moments of seeing in texts and explore their implications. It will argue, at least by implication, that in so far as the texts concretely and practically engage the question of justice and injustice, in acts of judgment, they do casuistically what theory cannot do in more general and absolute ways: i.e., come to terms with the contingencies of acts of seeing and knowing, and with the contingencies of their ethics. Or, in other terms, it will attempt to explore some of the theoretical dimensions of some literary texts.

### Claudia Olk, "Seeing Innocence: The Ambivalence of Vision in *The Age of Innocence*"

The category of vision is not only central to many modernist texts, but it also plays a significant role in the unfolding discourse of modernism itself. The received sense of a modernist break with realism, its pervasive interest in the workings of the individual mind, and its generic reclassifications of the novel also intimately affected the role of vision, which gained a conceptual and reflexive rather than natural status. This paper examines the reflexive strategies in which vision is presented in Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*. The very beginning of the novel where the protagonists interact as spectators to a performance of Gounod's *Faust* is representative of the novel's overall presentation of viewing situations where innocence, truth and familiarity are mediated and defined in an intricate network of visual relations. My paper focuses on the novel's preoccupation with these processes of seeing, with visibility and the aesthetic object, and analyses the ways in which it exhibits the ambiguities of the innocent, the familiar and the natural gaze. If the world of the novel is "a hieroglyphic world, where the real thing was never said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs" (Aol, 29), vision implies both a critique of conventionalized ways of perception and an affirmation of the immanent potential of the text to bring forth new kinds of perception and insight. I will address the role of the visual arts and look at the novel's strategies of dealing with perspective, spectatorship. Vision will be discussed both as a subjective constitution of meaning and as a failure to bring about meaningful relations. The main argument of this paper is that the loss of confidence in the equation of seeing and believing and the concomitant destabilizing of an overall reliance on visual representation produce new forms of visual relations.

## **Christian Quendler, "Autopsy and Autography: Retinal Screens in Avant-Garde Film Diaries"**

As a medium of perception and recording, film has come to represent a double gesture of testimony, which may be described as a technological synthesis of autopsy and autographon. Film not only serves as a medial surrogate for what can be witnessed with one's own eyes and written with one's own hand, it also provides a vehicle to probe the deeper meanings of these terms. Just like autopsy not only refers to an act of eyewitnessing, but also signifies reflecting on the self in the presence and absence of life, the autograph extends its literal meaning when it promises to trace something (about the writer or writing) that is irreplaceable and individual. Diaries and journals are perhaps the earliest genres that come close to reconciling these notions of autopsy and autography. This paper starts out by showing how the revival of the journal in the first decades of the twentieth century is intricately connected with filmic approximations to the diary form. I will then examine later cinematic experiments in diary films. More specifically, I will review single-framing techniques in avant-garde diary films of the 1960s by placing them in the context of earlier modernist approaches to literary and filmic diaries and discussing them as a response to contemporary changes in social and media landscape.

## Panel X: Identity and Authenticity

### Flutur Troshani, "'Self-portrait(s) [as Other(s)]' and Its Identification: Complex Modernist Dynamics in Contemporary Experimental Writing"

Talan Memmott's "Self-portrait(s) [as Other(s)]" is a sophisticated example of the self-reflexive turn that contemporary writing is undertaking in overcoming boundaries and producing works that are increasingly nuanced by the specificities of the media. On that account, this piece resonates the complex dynamics that develops inside the work itself – implicitly distanced from the fixed and the static, the whole construction subsists in interplay between media – text and image – as the reader/viewer interacts with it.

"Self-portrait(s) [as Other(s)]" is combinatorial and generative. Its modus operandi is that of "portrait and biography generator." Memmott has cut up fragments from about a dozen self-portraits by painters and about as many fragments from textual biographies. While interacting with it, this piece creates multifaceted combinatorial permutations. These permutations are the key to understanding not only how the whole apparatus subsists on an aesthetic and philosophical level, but also how one medium is situated to frame the other, both non-linearly and anti-mimetically (ELO). This paper thus attempts to understand the progressive dissolution of borders among individual texts, texts and images, presence and absence, author and reader as "Self-portrait(s) [as Other(s)]" tends towards a flux of shifting and a state of indeterminacy. In this sense, this piece explores the aesthetic legacy of modernism in bringing to the fore its concerns about the work of art as a 'poly-semiotic' object in contemporary culture.

### Erwin Feyersinger, "Augmenting Reality in Modernism"

Augmented Reality is a buzzword in American news media, which has gained widespread public use during 2009, almost 20 years after computer engineers first coined it. The term Augmented Reality describes a superimposition of virtual objects onto a real environment in real time. It is strongly associated with our contemporary digital culture and, accordingly, virtual objects are usually thought of as computer-generated visual elements in applications of Augmented Reality. Human beings have, however, always had a desire to enhance and expand their perception of reality either to marvel at magical wonders or to gain insight into hidden natural and cultural structures.

The current experimentation with various visual tools is specifically reminiscent of the 19th century's fascination with visual phenomena. There are many parallels between the on-going developmental period of Augmented Reality and the inventiveness of the 19th century as both are determined by a blend of technological experiments, scientific and artistic visions, a pursuit of economic profits, and a heightened public interest in these developments.

In this paper I will discuss several inventions and experiments from the modernist period which aim at a modification or an enhancement of the perception of reality. My examples include occult parlor games such as the Ouija board, physiological and psychological experiments with optical contraptions (upside-down glasses), electricity, and drugs, as well as popular entertainment in the form of magic lantern shows, Pepper's ghost illusions, pre-cinematic devices, and optical toys. From this mix of scientific rigor, entrepreneurship, mass amusement, and artistic transgressions, I will draw conclusions about our contemporary visual culture.

## Panel XI: The Geography of Dreams and Memory

### Ulrich Meurer, "Spectacles of the Soul: Albert Grass's 'Dreamland' and the Coney Island Amateur Psychoanalytic Society"

In 2009, a small exhibition in Brooklyn's Coney Island Museum documented how shortly after World War One the visionary entrepreneur Albert Grass attempted to build his Dreamland, an amusement park according to Freudian principles and accommodating attractions such as the "Libido Pavilion" or the "Consciousness Globe Tower." However, Grass's utopian project of materializing psychoanalytical concepts in fairground rides was never put into practice. Thus, in 1926 he found another way of transferring expressions of the soul into media spectacles by inaugurating the Coney Island Amateur Psychoanalytic Society, whose members re-create their dreams on film and analyze them in monthly gatherings. The venture (made possible by the introduction of Kodak's first 16mm camera and "safety film" in 1923) was inspired by Freud's own proposition that, in dreams, ideas and wishes are dramatized as "mental pictures".

Both projects strikingly illustrate modernism's regime of the visual: while Freudian theory is a process of detection which relies mainly on narrative, 'Dreamland' as well as the Society's amateur films reveal a strong impulse to convert the linear structure of therapy and case history into paradigms of visual or even optical representation. On the one hand, the paper therefore engages in the connection between psychoanalytical concepts, popular culture, and movies as a decidedly modern and multilayered complex of visualization. On the other hand, it introduces the exhibition on Albert Grass as a systematic extension of this complex. For its curator, Zoe Beloff, is also a filmmaker and digital installation artist who, like Grass, is interested in ways to graphically manifest the unconscious or produce "mental images." Her work constantly explores the roots of cinematic technology and the new media through their relationship to hallucination and the projection of dreams so that the exhibition appears as a logical sequel to her overall artistic activities.

### Georg Drennig, "Little Nemo in the Land of Visual Reference: Sequential Art and the Dreamscape of Modernity"

Winsor McCay's comic strip *Little Nemo in Slumberland* deserves attention as both a reflection of and a pioneering work in new visual trends in the early 20th century. McCay worked in several emerging media. Having experimented with visual narration in his early days as a chalk-talk vaudeville artist, he further developed these techniques for the cinema and broke new grounds in animation. His most famous creation, the comic strip *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, appearing from 1911 to 1914 and then in the years 1924 to 1927, can be read as a panoramic examination of the visual culture of his times. In the strip's dream sequences, the visual manifestations of modernity provide the background for the protagonist's adventures. The comic makes full use of then-new color-print technology to depict dreamscapes resembling the dazzling attractions of Coney Island, quotes from the visual vocabulary of Méliès' films in the fantastic and stage-like settings, and creates surreal cityscapes that are rendered from perspectives only imaginable because of the skyscraper.

Yet McCay's surreal images - houses and beds sprouting legs, an anthropomorphic moon, or skewed perspectives - ometimes refer to the challenges of sequential art itself. In one instance, the comic's dream-like quality stems from the copresence of different levels of abstraction, as several characters next to the protagonist devolve into stick-figures. And even though the strip ran for several years alongside other early work in the medium, thus ceasing to be a manifestation of a still emerging form, McCay numbered the panels of Little Nemo stories even in the 1920s when readers had become familiar with sequential art. This should therefore not only be read as the author's attempt to guide readers through the conventions of a new form of narration, but also as a deliberate way of highlighting the specificity of it. Because of such acts of self reflection, *Little Nemo in Slumberland* provides an excellent case study of an artist in a new medium reflecting on its growth and emerging conventions, and on the visual cultures that surround him.

## Eric J. Sandeen, “Constructing the Ruins of Modernity”

This paper will examine two interrelated visions of American urban modernism: the first sketched out by a European architect in the mid-1920s and the second systematically framed by a Chilean-American photographer in the 1990s. These two visions of the American city allow us to trace the history of Detroit, for example, during the modernist period, from the ambitious construction of the early decades of the century to the death and ruination of the modernist core by the end of the century.

In 1925 the German expressionist architect, Erich Mendelsohn, journeyed to the United States to experience the modernity of American cities and picture the modernist cultural forms on display, particularly in the metropolises such as New York, Chicago, and Detroit. The photographs in his book, *Amerika: Bilderbuch eines Architekten*, present a litany of subjects and perspectives from the urban core of industrial America: skyscrapers, districts of night-time illumination, chaotic street scenes, advertising, and representations of speed. Of particular interest to me for this presentation are his photos of and comments about Detroit. Here Mendelsohn described the epicenter of an American form of modernism: industrial, monumental, intensely capitalist, isolating, and even insolent.

The modernism that both fascinated and appalled Mendelsohn in Detroit is now dead, buried under vacant lots, marked by urban gardens, and memorialized by an anthology of abandoned structures – a grand train station, a movie palace, an automobile factory, and now-dilapidated skyscrapers. This is the Detroit that Camilo Vergara displays in his 1995 book of photos and commentary, *American Ruins*. Vergara self-consciously references Mendelsohn as he constructs his proposal for an American Acropolis, a 45-hectare section of mostly abandoned and decaying downtown skyscrapers that would allow visitors to meditate on the death of the modernism that Mendelsohn witnessed in its expansive youth. Whether one takes Vergara's proposal for Detroit literally or not – many inhabitants of that troubled city took great exception to his vision – the idea of an acropolis of American modernism gives the observer a way of contemplating the development and subsequent decline of that city from the period of industrial expansion and modernization to the current moment of ruin and disaggregation.

**Panel XII: Constructing Reality with Magazine Photography – Imaging the Face**

**Michael Röösl, “Picturing the Depression: Ambivalent Politics of Representation in FSA Photography”**

During the Great Depression, the Farm Security Administration (FSA) produced a considerable corpus of photographic documentary material from all over the United States. This project was developed at a moment when new reproduction techniques enabled the mass circulation of photographs and when these documents needed to acquire a conventional apparatus in order to be harnessed to the task of representation. New reading conventions were thus forged by various FSA photographers, invested the medium with political leverage, and rendered the images appealing and accessible to a large and heterogeneous readership. However, the crystallising of a new mode of conveying meaning to readers across the country was attacked by Walker Evans, another photographer for the FSA. This paper will show how Evans' work systematically confronts, negates and short-circuits the hidden assumptions emerging from FSA documentary photography (produced by famous photographers like Dorothea Lange). The particular focus will be on Evans's portfolio for *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), which he published together with James Agee. The juxtaposition of a new visual practice with its immediate attack by Evans helps to outline the stakes, power and extent of paradigmatic changes in the visual culture of the 1930s, many of which have remained operative until the present day.

**Meghan A. FitzGerald, “Who was the Real ‘It’ Girl of the Early Twentieth-Century: A Look at Charles Dana Gibson’s ‘Gibson Girl’”**

During the early twentieth-century, periodicals developed into a fundamental organ of American culture, due in part to their numerous and expressive illustrations. American women and children were encouraged to cut out images that spoke to them and to hang them up in appropriate rooms in the house. In this paper, I will explore how well-known magazine illustrators Charles Dana Gibson and Harrison Fisher sought to provide the American woman with solid answers to the period's unnerving question about women and their place in the new century. Charles Dana Gibson's “Gibson Girl” illustrations adorned various magazine covers from 1890 to 1915. He is recognized as being sympathetic to the New Woman. The “Fisher Girl” was frequently portrayed in periodicals from 1905 to the start of World War I. Fisher has never been noted for his concern about the New Woman cause. Instead, he is often portrayed as a suave businessman who was very aware of what was sold and what did not sell.

In my work with both Gibson and Fisher, I have uncovered another side to both men. I have discovered that Gibson was not truly interested in the New Woman and that his illustrations are the first true pin-up girls, while Fisher's images are supportive of the New Woman, and his girls cannot be claimed as simple pin-up material. Gibson's images focus on the physical beauty and sensual nature of women while Fisher's images capture and support the ideals of the New Woman, who is able to be beautiful, independent and agile. The Gibson Girl is an object of male desire and can be gazed upon, while the Fisher Girl is the equal of her male counterpart and is the one who actively gazes on both males and females.

**Julia Faisst, “Teach Germans Disobedience:’ Gertrude Stein, Popular Media, and Post-Sovereignty”**

In this paper, I trace how Gertrude Stein's peculiar brand of modernist aesthetic inserted itself into popular American magazine culture after WWII. More specifically, I analyze Stein's photo-essay “Off We All Went to See Germany” in 1945 *LIFE* to show how the expatriate engaged in photography, performance, and theatricality towards the possibility of a new political order in Europe.

Describing her postwar trip through Germany, she depicts contemporary history through the lens of photography, literally as well as figuratively. Both the photographs and the text tell the same story: Stein's experimental writing was energized by the war. What borders on a whimsical, if not farcical account of a writer's German visit, stresses a decidedly American form of life-embracing vitalism. Stein aims at defeating a despicable part of history by mimicking it. She does so, for example, by staging a Hitler pose with a group of GIs as well as boldly redefining Hitlerian household items. Re-establishing the idea of self-determined individuality from a decidedly American viewpoint, Stein provides ground for a selfhood that is inspired by an American tradition, yet can only be enacted away from home.

A political writer as well as one of the least assimilationist of modernists, Stein appeals to Thoreauvian civil disobedience as a possible founding myth of a new German democracy. For Stein, a prime dealer in disobedient narration, disobedience equals confusion, and confusion equals peace. The Hitler pose image in particular demonstrates the human need for re-staging history in the absence of the human. In the disguise of childish humor, Stein affirms the possibility of a successful European democratic order. The post-sovereign subject that seems emptied of all democratic potential and self-determination is yet plastic; it can be reshaped. In the face of disembodiment and self-annihilation, Stein and her particular way of writing thus return with a vengeance, for she has consequently entertained shrewd but successful claims of non-figurative subjectivity from her earliest days of writing on.

## Panel XIII: Aspects of Modern Cinema

### Cornelia Klecker, "Hollywood's Fragmented Narrative and Avant-Garde Montage"

Still today, the dominant view of contemporary mainstream films is that they adhere to the conventions of Classical Hollywood style. This style, as so influentially described by David Bordwell, is mainly characterized by its following a clear and comprehensible narrative flow and a complete disguise of the film's artifice. Linearity and causality are, arguably, the main traits of Classical Hollywood narrative. However, when we look at today's landscape of popular film, the large number of non-linear plots employed is astonishing.

The central question posed is why discontinuous narrative has emerged in mainstream film as late as it did even though these narrative techniques as such are not a novelty. Modern novels as well as avant-garde films throughout the twentieth century have employed unconventional plot structures rather successfully, yet in mainstream film Hollywood narrative has remained quite dominant – until recently. The discussion of the concept of montage as the governing principle of film, as well as the long tradition of unconventional editing in avant-garde film will help approach this matter.

Noël Burch's elaborations on filmic time and space will play a central role. While there has been a long tradition in film theory that believes that realism is an inherent quality of film, Noël Burch argues that commercial films have always had a strong tendency to consciously 'naturalize' their storytelling in order to create an illusion of life. Burch calls this practice the "Institutional Mode of Representation" which is completely stripped of the many expressive - and thus interfering – possibilities of film. He explains that this mode of realism has been so dominant for such a long time that today we perceive it not as one of the many ways the development of film narrative could have taken but as an entirely natural evolution of filmic storytelling. I share the same line of thought. Montage and the formation of imaginary space through the focus of the gaze are the two main film principles. However, these two principles are so quintessentially modernist that their rooting in classical illusionist narrative makes for an all but unmanageable paradox that I will attempt to dissolve in this paper.

### Nevena Dakovic, "Cityscape and Denied Modernism: Ghetto Film"

The concern of this paper is to explore the cinematic cityscape as the text of the genre of ghetto film and its Euro-American translations and appropriations like *film de banlieue* and New Belgrade ghetto film.

The genre case study of ghetto film originated in American cinema (as the site of the intersection of gangster film, film noir, urban cinema ) and soon got its inter/trans/cultural counterpart in *film de banlieue* (from Kassovitz's *La Haine* (1995) to *Banlieue 13-Ultimatum* (d. Patrick Alessandrin)). Via EuroAmericana it influenced the films about New Belgrade as mediatory territory, the space of denied modernism - in terms of architecture but also of cultural studies. A reading of cinematic cityscape confirms it to be the point of intersection of aesthetics, history, ideology and cinema. It means decoding the traces of the historical, urban socio-economic dynamics that are rendered more relevant due to the indexical nature of film media.

Serbian ghetto film is mainly and almost exclusively situated in New Belgrade - consistently planned and constructed as a functional city. New Belgrade represents a unique example of a modern city/city of modernism which "performed as an *integrative structure* to the two independently developed historical centres of Zemun and Belgrade. Its site, on the opposite side of the historical city of Belgrade across the river Sava, served for centuries solely as a military territory, or rather a *no-one's-land between the shifting borders of divided and conflicting empires*."

Concerned with the range of films from *Absolute Hundred* (*Apsolutnih sto*, 2001, Srdan Golubovic) to *Here and There* (2009, Darko Lungulov, an American-Serbian production) the paper seeks to map out the cinematic representations of New Belgrade. The representations of the cityscape range from the prosperous new City, via the project of social housing in decay and gangland culture, to the recovering re-urbanizing territory, as the indexes of the real transformations brought and imposed by history, economy, social context, state's will and ideology.

## **Johannes Mahlknecht, “Showing by Telling: The De-Visualization of Film in Novelizations of the Early 20th Century”**

Ever since the massive marketing strategy of *Star Wars* (1977, George Lucas) showed film producers how much money could be made with tie-in products, the movie novelization has come to be appreciated as a lucrative source of additional income for Hollywood studios. Essentially adaptations of screenplays into novel form, novelizations, are routinely published before a major cinematic release in order to boost awareness of the film they advertise. As artistic products in their own right, however, they are generally held in low esteem.

If today's novelistic retelling of movies is often seen as little more than a calculated marketing device geared at unassuming fans, in the early days of cinema its function was more significant: not only did novelizations help clarify the often obscure narrative language of the fledgling new medium, they were also seen as an attempt to promote film as an autonomous art form.

In my talk I will examine a selection of short novelizations based on installments of popular movie-series, which were published in then ubiquitous fan magazines like *Motion Picture Story Magazine* and *Photoplay* as well as in Sunday editions of more highbrow newspapers like *The Chicago Sun Tribune* in the 1910s. By analyzing the narrative techniques of and the interrelationships between these early novelizations and the films that are novelized, my talk draws attention to a cross-pollination between different media that has hitherto been little explored by scholars.

## Panel XIV: Mediating War and Trauma

### **Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet, “‘The Flower that Blooms above the Head’: Poppies and Other Flowers in the Visual Rhetoric of War Commemoration”**

The quoted line of the title is taken from American humanitarian Moina Michael's poem, "We Shall Keep the Faith" (1918), a direct reply to Canadian soldier-poet John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" (1915), the poem that was to make the poppy the international symbol of World War I sacrifice and Armistice Day. The blood-red poppy continues to be the symbol of soldiers' sacrifice in many countries, including the US, where the American Legion distributes millions of paper poppies every year around Memorial Day in order to raise donations. This presentation will examine the visual rhetoric and ritual function of flowers in American war commemorations as they were transformed and developed after World War I. The Memorial Day holiday was originally called Decoration Day, a federal holiday enacted in 1865 to honor the Civil War dead, and specifically referring to the practice of decorating soldiers' graves with flowers. After World War I, Decoration Day was expanded and Armistice Day (on Nov. 11th) was added to the American federal holiday roster (and has since been renamed Veterans Day). The ubiquitous but often unexamined presence of flowers at memorial ceremonies on these two occasions (as well as at soldiers' home-coming ceremonies) will be examined both from a sociological and gender perspective, with a specific focus on the visual grammar of war commemoration that emerged after World War I.

### **Michael Barton, “Victory at Sea as Modernist, Patriotic Documentary”**

Television critics in the 1950s in the USA were unanimous in their praise for NBC-TV's *Victory at Sea*, the 26-episode series documenting the actions of the US Navy in World War II. VaS was the most famous if not the first of its kind - a visual military history for the masses. *Harper's* magazine proclaimed it "a new art form," and *The New Yorker* announced that its images were "beyond compare." My interpretive paper and brief video presentation will focus on the unique combination of modernism, factualism and patriotism that suffused this prize-winning television series. Rapid-fire editing and staccato narration were accompanied by a driving, romantic musical score. Another modern feature of its "restrained majesty" was its moderate nationalism. The Japanese were the main enemy, but they were rarely villified in the script, and their portrayal as a people was often humane. I conclude that the most recent military documentaries owe their inspiration and execution to *Victory at Sea*.

### **Tate, William, “STEP FORTH: Working Black Memory in the Land of Lowndes County”**

This is a project about freedom and change. It is a design project to make in the landscape a daring memory of what people have lived through, believed, and realized. It is focused on Lowndes County. Lowndes is unknown; but in American history, it was the fulcrum point of change. This was the county that people marched through from Selma to Montgomery. It was Klan country and 80% black. It was the county that first elected black sheriffs, black school board officials, black mayors. It was the first.

We are making a project for Lowndes. It is to make 10+ acres of land speak the beliefs of a people. It is to resurrect the forgotten. Martin Luther King, Jr. preached nonviolence. If you practiced nonviolence in Lowndes, you were a 'dead nigger'. The people of Lowndes formed a grassroots network to make change happen. Against the formidable odds of white supremacy and control of the courts, Lowndes made change happen. Against all odds of lynchings, shootings, firings, displacement, and corralling, Lowndes made change happen.

This paper is an exploration into the content, imagery, references, symbolism, and darkness of making the land speak to American memory/American future. It is about designing a landscape project from the dark side, moving into the realms of hope and belief. How do we do this now? The paper will bring references of landscape, media, and memorial (Maya Lin, Anne Davies, Richard Serra, Juhani Pallasma). And it will portray a radical interpretation of American history. It will show the design process, development, and historical references of the project for Lowndes. It will dare to ring true.

### **Carola Moresche, “Visualizing Surrealism in Erich von Stroheim”**

Surrealists felt strongly that the common practices in the arts were outdated, detached from every-day life and reserved for the elite. They aimed at visualizing their ideas – which were to transform the individual and society at large – in poetry, painting, photography, sculpture and film. Especially the quintessentially modernist medium of film gave hope to Surrealists that they would ultimately be able to translate their ideas into a sur-reality that would infuse reality. They regarded this medium as a fresh chance for the avant-garde to put forth their radical ideas and reach out to a broad public and affect it. Film was, in the eyes of the Surrealists, still unrestricted and not influenced by traditions and conventions like the other arts. Thus, they thought they would be able to shape this medium according to their wishes. Ultimately, however, the developments in the film industry were an utter disappointment for the Surrealists, who had had high hopes in the medium film as a society-transforming medium. In the end, the Surrealists gave up on film, save for such exceptional filmmakers as Luis Buñuel, Salvador Dalí or the script writer/film theorist Antonin Artaud. They continued to discuss films and filmmakers whom they regarded as being in the surrealist spirit or continuing the surrealist tradition of radicalism. Just as Surrealism exerted a tremendous influence on art, artists and audiences, so did Erich von Stroheim. He was among those filmmakers who were greatly admired by the Surrealists. Erich von Stroheim's films *Greed* (1924) and *Queen Kelly* (1932) comply with surrealist cinema in terms of imagination, boldness and creativity. Erich von Stroheim broke with many conventions in these two films, regarding content as well as the visualization of feelings, which the Surrealists expressed through poetry, painting, sculpture or prose. The analysis of Erich von Stroheim's films based on the Surrealists' discussion of the cinema adds a new component to the understanding of the reach of modernist film-makers and movements beyond the national boundaries of the countries in which they were working and exerting their influence.

### **Barbara Laner, “A Cannibalistic Aesthetic of Early Movies: The Vampire as an Emblem of Intermediality”**

Early movies – especially of European avant-garde cinema – display a constant negotiation of the relation between the newly developed medium film and its sister art forms, above all literature and painting. On the one hand, the pictorial and literary approaches are very influential whereas, on the other hand, the early directors tried to fathom a new and unique way of artistic composition. As a result, what nowadays is labeled as intermediality was the actual origin of cinema. F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu. A Symphony of Horror* (1922) is emblematic of this development as the movie displays a very painterly style. The vampire as a creature who feeds on human blood stands for the medium film, which incorporates its sister art forms. Hence, within a cannibalistic aesthetic, *Nosferatu*, the film character, represents a meta-filmic reflection of the movie and cinema in general.

### **Carina Lesky, “Flesh, Stone and Celluloid – Film as Mediator of Hapticity”**

Film is an urban offspring. It emerged at a time when there was a significant collective need for a new art form that would be fit to capture the modern metropolis and its effects on perception. It has been associated with the modern metropolis and is a product of the visual culture that the urban lifestyle brought forth. The late 20<sup>th</sup> century released a lively discourse on the revitalization of the senses and the body in philosophy, anthropology and geography. Similarly, the field of computer science has discovered the value of the senses. The question of hapticity within virtual worlds is vital for the development of user-friendly interfaces (Robes-De-La-Torre 24). These insights and tendencies have not only inspired film technologically to relaunch the attraction of 3D cinema, but also triggered a shift within film theory. A cinesensual discourse of phenomenological studies evolved, acknowledging the medium's inherent tactile qualities. The development of the visual medium towards hapticity raises questions about cinema's locus of origin. Revisiting the modern metropolis, this paper explores film as a tactile medium that sprang from a haptic environment. The evaluation draws from early and contemporary theories of film and phenomenology, including texts by Benjamin, Kracauer, Simmel, Certeau, Pallasmaa and Sobchack.

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