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Autor(en): **Klarer, Mario**

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Introduction

The topic of this volume "The Visual Culture of Modernism" immediately provokes two related questions: why bother with the visuality of a historical period which is separated from our own times by almost an entire century? And, what is the relevance of such an historically informed topic for the present?

The recent paradigmatic changes in media culture, which occurred around the turn of the millennium, parallel the media revolution before and after World War I in more than one way. Groundbreaking transitions in modes of communication and representation, epitomized in the new medium of cinema, immediately started to compete with literature's longstanding status as *the* accepted cultural leit-medium. While rivaling literature, film also exerted an unprecedented influence on all other cultural fields by testing its supremacy within the arts, communication, education, and science, to mention just a few.

A similar landslide of innovation in the field of communication and representation occurred in the last two decades of the twentieth century when new computerized media penetrated all traditional fields of aesthetics as well as material culture. This recent digital turn is still to realize its full potential and invites the wide range of current investigations in which images, film, and literary texts are undergoing a massive re-examination under the auspices of digitalization. It seems, therefore, worthwhile to re-evaluate modernism as a paradigmatic moment of media transformation and treat it as an historical case study for the general shifts which large-scale media changes inevitably entail.

Whenever new media replace more traditional ones, central concerns of philosophy and aesthetics surface and have to be renegotiated. Questions concerning what constitutes an "original" and a "representation," or basic distinctions between what counts as "art" and what belongs to the realm of "nature" lie at the heart of negotiations in the wake of media transformations.

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Triggered by this landslide change in media practice through the digital turn, recent literary debates have gravitated around the status of what constitutes an original work of art and the status of imitation. We are all aware of Helene Hegemann's 2010 novel *Axolotle Roadkill* which, in a casual manner, uses digital data from the internet in order to copy-paste them into the text of her acclaimed novel. Hegemann justifies her copying with reference to the cultural practices of our age, namely, "that the production process [of her novel] is connected with this decade and the procedures of this decade, in other words, with the substitution of this excessive right of authorship by a right to copy and transform."[1] These contemporary phenomena might have their counterparts in the modernist collages of Pablo Picasso, the ready-mades of Marcel Duchamp, or the intertextuality of T.S. Eliot. Authors and artists in periods of media transition test the boundaries of original and copy, of artifact and imitation. In our field, we must continually come to terms with these questions, specifically with respect to what constitutes original research. Sometimes, as for example, in recent cases à la Hegemann in our discipline, it is quite simple to reach an answer and it does not require a philosopher to judge and reach a verdict. In other cases, as in some of the modernist examples mentioned before, it might need an entire conference and an accompanying volume only to touch upon or scratch the surface of these questions.

This SPELL volume on "The Visual Culture of Modernism" is the outcome of a conference jointly organized by the Swiss Association for North American Studies and the Austrian Association for American Studies at the University of Innsbruck, 12-14 November 2010. This format of bilateral collaboration has a longstanding and fruitful tradition. For more than two decades the two associations have been holding conferences together, both in Switzerland and in Austria. So when two years ago we considered the possibility of organizing the annual conference at Innsbruck together, we immediately jumped at the opportunity. The choice of the conference theme was also partly shaped by the research traditions of both American Studies Associations. Switzerland has produced a large number of scholars in the field of American modernism and visual culture. A great deal of this interest in the visual in Swiss American Studies is indebted to our dear colleague, friend and mentor, the late Max Nänny who, as Professor in Zurich, was a founding figure of Word and Image Studies in our academic discipline.

On the Austrian side, the topic of visuality also seemed a natural choice for the annual conference theme. A very promising group of young scholars have embarked on research projects in this particular

[1] Hegemann, "Der Ruhm gebührt den Haaren"; my translation.

field in American Studies departments in Austria. A great deal of this recent "young" interest in the visual aspect of American culture in Austria goes back more than thirty years when the American Studies Department at the University of Innsbruck started the tradition of employing film and film studies, both in teaching and scholarly research. In the intervening years the departmental film archive has grown to more than 20,000 titles. The department also hosts the three-year research project "Framing Modernism" funded by the Austrian Science Fund, investigating the periphery of fiction and film in the modernist period. This research includes frontispieces and dust jackets of novels, as well as posters, trailers, and opening or end credits of films. In the vicinity of this research platform about half a dozen young Americanists in Innsbruck have been working on their doctoral and postdoctoral projects, thus making Innsbruck the ideal venue for this conference theme.

The large response to our call for papers makes clear that the topic was not only able to reach numerous Americanists within and beyond our two associations but also to cross different levels of academic hierarchies. We have graduate students sharing their ongoing research for their MA theses, doctoral students publishing the results of their dissertations, and we have post-docs and full professors contributing to the conference theme. Reaching these diverse target groups and thus documenting the state of the research in this field from multiple vantage points was our intention. The present collection of essays assembles a small sample of the over forty papers originally presented at the conference in Innsbruck.

Indirections: Cinema and Visuality

The keynote address by Thomas Elsaesser, "Modernity: The Troubled Trope," functions as an overall introduction to the volume by claiming the stakes of this kind of historical inquiry into the visual. In a succinct and simultaneously provocative manner the doyen of European film studies takes us on a grand tour through the intricate repercussions of the visual in modernist aesthetics, film theory, and its legacy in postmodern theorizing. This erudite synopsis of the theoretical essence of the recent visual turn against the background of the modernist situation in the first half of the twentieth century follows two major lines of argumentation: on the one hand, it provides a perspectival bird's-eye view of modernist visuality in the light of later theorizing; on the other, in an almost programmatic stance, which is reminiscent of modernist manifestos, Elsaesser challenges the entire project of the conference and its proceedings. He questions the validity of confronting

modernism's preoccupation with the visual in a direct manner. In his conclusion Elsaesser argues for an indirect approach to the topic, treating the phenomenon of the visual as an emerging entity from a variety of discourses which should, at first sight, not directly connect to the visual as such. In other words, the best way to explore modernism's visuality is via a detour through other fields of inquiry in order to arrive eventually at a better understanding of the visual. Elsaesser's plea for indirection echoes key patterns of postmodern theorizing which privilege representations or imitations of entities over the alleged real thing. Baudrillardean "simulation," Derridean "différance," or the "representationalism" of New Historicism find a common denominator in stylizing reflections over the seemingly unmediated object. Most essays in this volume, consciously or unconsciously, follow Elsaesser's advice of indirection.

Scott Curtis' "The Efficiency of Images: Educational Effectiveness and the Modernity of Motion Pictures" deliberately puts Elsaesser's program into practice. As a specialist of early science films, Curtis approaches early filmic iconography via scientific and economic discourses of the 1910s and 1920s, thereby emphasizing the heuristic quality of the filmic medium in laboratory-like settings. Curtis' reading shows how the visual language of early scientific films mirrors the overall discourse of efficiency in the modernist period at large, including economics, medicine, ergonomics, and philosophy.

In a similar vein, Vinzenz Hediger's "Body Rebuilding: Tracing the Body at the Dawn of the 'Cybernetic Age'" uses the concept of the human body in post-industrial production processes in order to delineate an age of obsolescence. This effacing of the body manifests itself in medical and anatomical discourses, as well as in modernist filmmaking, including Frank Bunker Gilbreth's industrial workflow films. Hediger's analysis of superfluous physicality pays specific attention to on-screen embodiments, which oscillate between the corporeality of the body builder, the body of obese, and the physicality of the cyborg.

Elisabeth Bronfen's "Hitler goes Pop: Totalitarianism, Avant-garde Aesthetics and Hollywood Entertainment" starts with Adolf Hitler's speeches on art in order to isolate kernels of a fascist aesthetics. This aesthetics is, not surprisingly, at work in the propaganda films of the Third Reich director Leni Riefenstahl. However, what comes as a surprise in Bronfen's close readings of selected *American* films of the World War II period, including Busby Berkeley's *Dames* and Walt Disney's *Bambi*, is the indebtedness of these films to an aesthetics of fascism which is structurally analogous to Riefenstahl's transformations or adaptations of Hitler's reflections on art.

Adaptations: Word and Image

Early narrative film, however, is also very much indebted to even more straight-forward concepts of adaptation. Early experiments in filmic narration try to transcend the pure aesthetics of "attraction" by associating themselves with literary texts. This can mean that a fictional text serves as the basis for a filmic adaptation or that a literary text follows a filmic narrative. The two essays in this section explore these two modes of adaptation from two very distinct but narratologically imbued vantage points.

Johannes Mahlknecht's "Promotion vs. Suppression: Intermedial Relationships between Early Narrative Film and its Fan Magazine Fictionalizations" investigates one aspect of the interdependence between literature and early film. Rather than tracing the mutual interconnectedness of the two media on a structural level, Mahlknecht analyzes the specific historical phenomenon of fan magazine fictionalization, in which film and fiction try to represent the same story line in a parallel way. Fan magazine fictionalization is an early instance in which film as an emerging new medium relies on literature as an older narrative medium in order to compensate for the shortcomings of early film in plot continuity and in order to contribute to the status of film as an accepted new art form. The close readings of two one-reelers and their respective fictionalizations allow Mahlknecht to anatomize key dimensions of the transitional period from the early "cinema of attractions" to the "Hollywood narrative film" from an unconventional word and image vantage point.

Christian Quendler's "*I Am a Camera*: The Development of Christopher Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin* across Stage, Screen and Time" approaches modernist media adaptations through the trope of the "camera eye." Using Isherwood's novel *I Am a Camera* together with its stage adaptation and film version, Quendler is able to trace the popular concept of the "camera eye" both in literary and filmic texts. His comparison dissects one of the key visual metaphors in early twentieth-century narratology, which fascinated commentators on both literature and film.

Sister Arts: Literature and Painting

The mutual exchange between literature and visual arts has a longstanding history in aesthetics, going back to classical and early modern dimensions of the *paragone* or the concept of the *sister arts*. In the modernist period, however, this mutual exchange between literature and painting as the two leitmedia of western cultural history enters a new and

unprecedented phase of mutual interconnectedness. The two essays in this section approach the sister arts phenomenon in a twofold manner by painting an overall picture of this exchange in modernist movements and by zooming in on one concrete example of this interart indebtedness.

Viorica Patea's "The Poetics of the Avant-Garde: Modernist Poetry and Visual Arts" provides a cursory survey of the interdependence between modernist literary poetics and its repercussions in the visual arts. She examines a large array of key concepts in the oeuvre of the most influential literary modernists by connecting them to the major trends in the visual arts of the period, including Cubism, Dada, Expressionism, and Surrealism.

Kangqin Li's "Presenting the Real: Hopperesque Updike in 'In Football Season' (1962)" addresses the traditional concept of the sister arts of literature and painting in a structural close reading of selected texts by John Updike and paintings by Edward Hopper. Her analyses elicit a particular modernist aesthetic, which is indebted to realism while at the same time overtly subverting some of realism's key concepts in an original and idiosyncratic way. Li specifically traces subtle defamiliarizations of the Euclidean central perspective in Hopper's visual oeuvre and their idiosyncratic adaptations in Updike's fiction. This parallel reading of painting and fiction with respect to two canonical figures in twentieth-century American art and literature provides a very focused yet at the same time conceptual explanation of a particular modernist aesthetics in which the two leitmedia of literature and painting subscribe to an interdependent deep-structure.

Framings: Grammars of the Photograph

Intricately interwoven with the development of modernist painting in particular and modernist art in general is, of course, photography. The photographic image stands at the beginning of a number of technical innovations in the nineteenth century, all of which are considered to have brought about a revolution in representational thinking. Although no longer a new medium at the end of the nineteenth century, photography underwent radical transformations throughout the modernist period with respect to pre-cinematic scientific experiments, mechanical mass reproducibility, and journalistic applicability. This new status of photography asked for a new mode of imbuing the photographic image with meaning, in the sense that the period had to develop a new grammar of the photograph, which in turn proliferated into other media, including film and literature.

Heike Schäfer's "The Cinema and Modernist Innovation: Serial Representation and Cinematic Immediacy Effects in Gertrude Stein's Early Portraits" uses precursors to film technology, such as Eadweard Muybridge's and Etienne-Jules Marey's photographic experiments with capturing movement, in order to read Gertrude Stein's early literary portraits. In a number of close readings of Steinean texts as well as on the basis of Stein's personal comments on the filmic deep-structure of some of her literary pieces, Schäfer offers a stunningly persuasive lever for undoing some of the intricacies of Steinean prose from an intermedial perspective which goes beyond the traditional cubism trajectory in Stein criticism.

In his essay "Picturing the Depression: Ambivalent Politics of Representation in FSA Photography" Michael Röösli looks at photography at the moment of its widespread mechanical reproducibility in print media. Using Farm Security Administration photography and its pragmatic instruction discourses for photographers under contract provides an incisive analysis of this watershed in media history. From his example Röösli elicits a dominant visual grammar for the new medium of journalism photography, and yet at the same time he teases out how practitioners of the new medium subvert and undermine the new code for their idiosyncratic purposes.

Carola Moresche's "Haptic Close-ups: Montage and Surrealist Desire in Erich von Stroheim's *Greed* and Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou*" focuses on frame and montage as the photographic building blocks of cinema. Her essay establishes a connection between Surrealist self-definitions and modernist reflections on montage techniques in film. On that basis Moresche juxtaposes Buñuel's paradigmatic Surrealist film *Un Chien Andalou* with Stroheim's epic film *Greed.* What comes as a surprise is that Stroheim's close-up montage sequences share structural features with a Surrealist aesthetics. What is even more surprising is that both *Greed* and *Un Chien Andalou* rely on a predominantly haptic dimension in their close-up montage sequences, which in turn converges with Surrealist self-conceptions.

Imitations: Film and Television

Modes of mutual imitation are, however, not restricted to modernist phenomena or the historical period of modernism per se. Literary modernism produced a number of model discourses which resurface in a seemingly novel and innovative manner around the turn of the millennium in mainstream film and television. The essays in this section deal with these imitations of the predominant narratological features of

early twentieth-century literature in a number of contemporary filmic formats.

Cornelia Klecker's "Time- and Space-Montage in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*" focuses on montage as a specifically modernist aesthetic principle, both in literature and film. Starting with Stephen Daldry's 2002 film, Klecker reads modernist stream-of-consciousness techniques in parallel with filmic time- and space-montage. Going back to Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway* as the literary model for Michael Cunningham's novel and its film adaptation, Klecker shows how modernist narratological innovations enter contemporary mainstream film in a belated manner. Thereby, she is able to account for some of the historical sources of the fascination for complex or "mind tricking" narratives in recent cinema.

Julia Straub's "Pathetic Copycats: Female Victimhood and Visuality in Melodramatic Films" enters visuality via the melodramatic by extrapolating an essentially visual quality in melodrama per se. Straub exemplifies this privileging of the visual with respect to the melodramatic heroines in Alfred Hitchcock's film *Vertigo* and David Lynch's TV series *Twin Peaks*. In both cases the reduplication of a female character in the sense of a copycat-like imitation lies at the heart of the melodramatic. By deliberately choosing figures that are imitations without originals, Straub's filmic case studies of fetish-driven nostalgic visuality provide a fresh and innovative approach to traditional discussions of the logic of the male gaze in cinema.

Kimberly Frohreich's "Making the 'Monstrous' Visible? Reading 'Difference' in Contemporary Fantastic Film and Television" selects the highly charged modernist trope of "passing," which we find at work in Nella Larsen's novel *Passing* (1928) or in John M. Stahl's film *Imitation of Life* (1934), and applies its structural features to contemporary television series. The concept of African Americans passing for white as rendered in modernist fiction and melodrama finds its continuation in homosexual passing, which in turn has recently undergone a transformation in twenty-first-century fantastic television series about vampires and other non-humans. Frohreich pinpoints the mechanism of passing for non-humans in these popular culture media and compares them to structurally analogous concepts in older race and gender discourses.

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The main focus of this volume is to address the concept of visuality in the modernist period as a paradigmatic historical case of media

transition. In doing so, it was possible to isolate some samples of these constants of media shifts in general and to trace some modernist legacies in recent media developments. The essays in this collection approach this topic from a variety of vantage points which, in many cases, do justice to a methodological mode of indirection as pointed out in Thomas Elsaesser's opening piece. Starting from a variety of discourses outside the traditional dimensions of the visual, they nevertheless focus on media pertinent to visuality, including film, photography, painting, television, or literature. In their attempt to highlight how these media mutually interconnect and sustain each other, the essays contribute to an emergent concept of the visual in the modernist period, which in turn documents the paradigmatic dimensions of media transitions in general.

Mario Klarer, Innsbruck

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