

Global Humanities Campus of the Thematic Network

Principles of Cultural Dynamics

Workshop

Circular and Vectorial Trends in Cultural Developments

(July 29-30, 2014)

Tuesday, July 29, 2014

10.00-11.30 Susanne Zepp (Freie Universität Berlin)

COMPETING INTERPRETATIONS OF TEMPORALITY IN EARLY MODERN
LITERATURE: ON JOÃO PINTO DELGADO'S BIBLICAL POETRY (1627)

The Lecture cum seminar will focus on different concepts of history in Early Modern European culture. The textual basis for the analysis is a volume of Spanish poems by the Portuguese writer João Pinto Delgado published at Rouen in 1627. These poems are highly remarkable, not only because Delgado dedicated his volume to Cardinal Richelieu. Delgado's poems present an interpretation of Jewish history in the form of a poetic paraphrase of the Bible, inscribing Jewish interpretation into Christian typological Biblical interpretation. Delgado's literary Bible adaptations are an interpretation of *Scripture* in the sense of a paradigmatic experience, whose truth prevails in recurring historical situations until the present – and beyond. On an abstract level, Delgado's text thus conceives a basic figure of modernity: the figure of competing interpretations of temporality.

11.45-1.15 Ofer Ashkenazi (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

INTERTEXTUALITY AS MANIPULATION: THE (MIS)APPLICATION OF "FASCIST"
AESTHETICS IN HELMAR LERSKI'S ZIONIST FILMS

Helmar Lerski was a renowned German-Jewish cinematographer who participated in several groundbreaking productions of Weimar cinema. In the

early 1930s he immigrated to Palestine and became one of the most prominent artists of the Zionist movement. Perhaps his greatest Zionist achievement was the 1935 film *Avodah (Work)*. Ever since the film was first screened in 1935, many critics have heralded *Avodah's* powerful imagery and described it as "the triumph of Zionist aesthetics"; others, however, noted the similarities it shared with the contemporary Fascist aesthetics of the early Nazi years. The talk will analyze the ways Lerski constituted a new film aesthetics through multiple quotes and misquotes from various (mostly German) films of the time. This montage of intertextual references enabled him, I will argue, to undermine the premises and impact of "Fascist" cinematic aesthetics and enabled him to offer a new vision for Zionism. Envisioned through a carefully crafted mosaic of images from Weimar and Nazi cinemas, Lerski's film stages Zionism as an alternative "solution" for the crisis of Weimar democracy.

3.00-4.30 Song Hwee Lim (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

WALKING IN THE CITY, SLOWLY: SPECTACULAR TEMPORAL PRACTICES IN TSAI
MING-LIANG'S *SLOW WALK, LONG MARCH* SERIES

This paper aims to complicate extant scholarship on the theme of walking in the city by exploring the temporal aspect of this everyday practice. It will be argued that, by staging slow walking as a spectacle in the cityscapes, Tsai Ming-liang's "Slow Walk, Long March" series, itself a form of late cinema in the history of the filmmaker's career as much as in the history of the film medium, returns to the origin of early cinema as a kind of actuality film that blurs the boundaries between film and documentary, fiction and reality, spectacle and spectatorship to open up a rethinking of the relationship between visuality and mediality, as well as the ethics and politics of temporality.

4.45-6.30 Jean-Marie Schaeffer (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales)

COLD SOCIETIES AND HOT SOCIETIES: CULTURAL EVOLUTION AND THE IDEA OF PROGRESS

Claude Levi-Strauss, in his famous opposition between ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ societies, noted that ‘cold societies’ produce extremely little disorder, which physicists call ‘entropy’, and that they ‘tend to preserve themselves in their initial state’. Incidentally, this explains why they appear as societies without history or without progress in our view. The Bronze Age, Classical Antiquity and Industrial Modernity are all, in various degrees, societies steeped in history and progress: they do not ‘tend to preserve themselves in their initial state’. Cold societies, steeped in mythology are, following this thesis, designed in such a way as to neutralize any novelty by integrating it in a timeless mythical reality; but do ‘traditional’ societies studied by ethnographers really ‘produce little disorder’? Are they really not evolving? Is evolving the same as progressing? And do they really live outside history? Or is mythology perhaps a form of history?

Wednesday, July 30, 2014

10.00-11.30 Dimitrios Yatromanolakis (The Johns Hopkins University)

CULTURAL DYNAMICS OF RUINS, ETHNOGRAPHY, AND THE EUROPEAN AVANT-GARDE

The lecture explores aspects of the dynamics of discourses about ruins and sociocultural ruination in Europe during the interwar period. It further focuses on the fragmentariness of historical time exemplified by ruins; and on the complex impact of early twentieth-century ethnographic investigations on the European avant-garde.

11.45-1.15 Barbara Ventarola (Freie Universität Berlin)

JORGE LUIS BORGES - VARIATIONS ON NIETZSCHE'S THEORY OF ETERNAL RECURRENCE

In his scarcely analyzed anthologies, the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges reveals himself as a subtle theorist of global and comparative cultural history who combines circularity and multi-vectoriality in many different and (until now) undisclosed ways. For this purpose, he enters into dialogue with several traditions of historical thinking—rearranging, merging and deeply transforming them. One focus of his critical interest is Nietzsche’s theory of eternal recurrence, which emphasizes repetition and circularity. Though continuing in this vein, Borges makes significant modifications to it by adding different figures of multi-vectorial dynamics, taken from other philosophical traditions. In my lecture, I will retrace some of these variations on Nietzsche’s theory of eternal return, which will allow for showing how fruitful Borges’ reflections can be even for current attempts at developing more complex concepts of cultural change.

3.00-4.30 Jacqueline Lo (Australian National University)

TRANSNATIONAL AND TRANSRACIAL CONNECTIONS: JOHN YOUNG AND DIETRICH BONHOEFFER IN HARLEM

Starting with Pheng Cheah’s distinction between globe-making and world-making, Jacqueline Lo’s talk uses the diasporic investments of an Australian artist of Chinese descent, John Young, to suggest how transnational forms of art can engage triangular models of relationality. In particular, it examines Young’s exhibition ‘Bonhoeffer in Harlem’ to suggest how the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s involvement with U.S. racial politics in the early 1930s created an early opportunity for transnational and transracial connections of the kind that were to become theoretically influential and culturally widespread later in the 20th century.