

Coding and Representation

6.20 pm – 9 pm, Friday 20 January 2017, Guildhall Art Gallery
Guildhall Yard, London EC2V 5AE (with registration from 18.00)

10.45 am – 6.45 pm, Saturday 21 January 2017 (with registration from 10.00)
Kenneth Clark Lecture Theatre, The Courtauld Institute of Art

DAY 1 – Friday 20 January

KEYNOTE LECTURE

Mary Ann Doane (The University of California-Berkeley)

The Face In Early Cinema And The Discourse Of The Universal

This paper is an analysis of the way in which the face has been viewed as a medium that erases itself as medium, producing a universal legibility. The idea of a 'universal language' has been associated with the cinema as a whole, particularly the silent cinema, but the close-up of the face has been exceptionally privileged as transparent and accessible, easily and naturally readable. Here, we are dealing with a global scale—the idea of a universal language buttressed the claims of American cinema to be democratic, global, accessible to all. The concept has a very long history but took a quite specific form in the early years of the 20th century. I will argue that through its alliance with 19th-century and earlier discourses of physiology, phrenology and colonialism it was inextricably linked to the confrontation with otherness and difference. Works of physiognomy, physiology and phrenology (Lavater, Camper, Galton, Duchenne and others) supported the notion that the facial expressions of actors in the silent cinema were universally readable. At the moment when the world emerged as a globe and colonialism forced a confrontation with unfamiliar differences, physiognomy presented itself as a hermeneutic system that could allay fear of the unknown. Furthermore, it is not accidental that a privileging of the face (or the advocacy of a universal language that often accompanies it) is coincident with a claim of transparency, a denial of mediation. Face-to-face contact as immediacy, presence and transparency represents the lost utopia, the fantasy of pure community before the 'Babel-like' fall into the accelerated mediation of new technologies of representation and communication.

Mary Ann Doane is Class of 1937 Professor of Film and Media at The University of California-Berkeley. She is the author of *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (2002), *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (1991), and *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (1987). In 2007, she edited a special issue of *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 'Indexicality: Trace and Sign'. In addition, she has published a wide range of articles on feminist film theory, sound in the cinema, psychoanalytic theory, television, and sexual and racial difference in film. She is currently completing a book on the use of the close-up in film practice and theory, and the way in which screen size and its corresponding scale have figured in the negotiation of the human body's relation to space in modernity.

Chair: Clare Pettitt (King's College London)

Clare Pettitt is Professor of Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture in the English Department at King's College London. She is one of the Research Directors of a four-year AHRC-funded project, 'Scrambled Messages: The Telegraphic Imaginary 1857-1900', which is focused on the laying of the Atlantic Cable. Clare's research interests include the history of print culture and ideas of authorship, media and technology, and Victorian ideas of multiple pasts. She has long been interested in the intersections of what we call 'technology' and what we call 'culture.' She published *Patent Inventions: Intellectual Property and the Victorian Novel* in 2004, and *Dr. Livingstone, I Presume: Missionaries, Journalists, Explorers, and Empire* (2007). Her work on the Livingstone book got her interested in the transnational and she wrote the chapter on 'The New Transatlanticism' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel* (2012), and two recent pieces, 'Time Lag and Elizabeth Gaskell's Transatlantic Imagination' in *Victorian Studies*, and 'Henry James Tethered and Stretched: The Materiality of Metaphor' in the *Henry James Review*, both draw on her current research into the impact on literature of networked transatlantic communications after about 1850. Clare is currently finishing two books; one called *Distant Contemporaries: Revolution, Time Lag and Form in the Early Nineteenth Century* and a second linked volume tentatively called *The Digital Switch: Literature and Transmission 1850-1920*.

DAY 2 – Saturday 21 January

SESSION 1

Kate Flint (Art History, University of Southern California)

Space, scale, and imagination: Robert Dudley's paintings of the Atlantic Cable

The laying of the transatlantic cable was an effort to 'establish a new material link between the Old World and the New' – to quote journalist W. H. Russell in *The Atlantic Telegraph* (1865). This paper is concerned with a different form of material challenge from that involved in transporting and sinking the thick ropes of gutta percha and wire, however. How could visual representation do justice to the labor and the immense geographic scope involved, and also capture the conceptual excitement of telegraphic transmission? The artist Robert Charles Dudley was on the 1865 *Great Eastern* cable expedition, and made a series of over 60 watercolours commemorating this ultimately unsuccessful attempt (six oil paintings from 1866 show the final, successful landing and the recovery of the earlier snapped cable). 24 of the watercolors were turned into lithographs illustrating *The Atlantic Telegraph*. Whilst the Cable itself is the heroic centre of Russell's account, Dudley's images emphasize human agency and spectatorship. They are full of figures. Sometimes their occupation demands significant musculature – coiling the cable onto reels and loading it into tanks; sometimes they are resting; sometimes – diminished in size by cliffs or the sea – they are tiny scraps of humanity against a large-scale, potentially erratic or dangerous natural setting. The paper considers the productive tension between Russell's verbal narrative, which emphasizes technological developments and challenges, and the use of space and scale in Dudley's images. These point both to human engagement with bridging distance and time, and to the imaginative potential inherent within the enterprise.

Kate Flint is Provost Professor of Art History and English at the University of Southern California, in Los Angeles. She has published *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (1993), *The Victorians and The Visual Imagination* (2000), and *The Transatlantic Indian 1776-1930* (2008), edited the *Cambridge History of Victorian Literature* (2012), and has published widely on Victorian and modernist fiction; Victorian and early 20th century painting and photography, and cultural history. She has recently completed *Flash! Photography, Writing, and Surprising Illumination* (to be published by OUP early in 2018), and is working on ordinariness and the overlooked in C19th culture, and on the internationalism of C19th British art.

Duncan Bell (Political Thought, Cambridge University)

Cyborg Imperium, c.1900

This paper will explore how new communications technologies – and in particular the electrical telegraph – figured in fin de siècle visions of the British settler empire at the close of the nineteenth century. In particular, it focuses on two main interlocking themes. First, on the ways in which the rapid spread of telegraph networks across the Atlantic and Pacific was seen to dissolve traditional conceptions of time and space, meaning that it was possible (and maybe even necessary) to imagine the settler empire as a single political community, at once global and local. And second, on how the telegraph provided a material substratum for an organic vision of the imperial body politic, a vision which conceived of the settler empire as a human-machine hybrid, bound together by wires and electrical currents. This was a cyborg vision of empire.

Duncan Bell is Reader in Political Thought and International Relations at the University of Cambridge, and a Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge. He is the author of *The Idea of Greater Britain: empire and the future of World Order, 1860-1900* (Princeton, 2007) and *Reordering the World: essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton, 2016). He is now working on a book about race, empire and utopia at the turn of the twentieth century.

Chair: David Edgerton (History of Science, King's College London)

David Edgerton graduated from St John's College Oxford and Imperial College London. After teaching at the University of Manchester he became the founding director of the Centre for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine at Imperial College London (1993-2003) where he was also Hans Rausing Professor. He joined the History department with the Centre on its transfer to King's in August 2013. He is the author of, among other works, the *Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History since 1900* (Profile Books, 2007).

SESSION 2

Grace Brockington (Art History, Bristol University)

Art and Esperanto: universal visual languages in the age of the telegraph

The telegraph collapsed experiences of space and time, by making it possible to communicate across vast distances in a matter of seconds. The speed of transmission brought countries closer together, but it also drew attention to the residual problems of international communication. It is no coincidence that the age of the telegraph was also the age of invented languages: of Esperanto most famously, but also of rivals such as Cosmoglossa, Universalglot and Volapük. Morse code, the language of telegraphy, was itself a universal language. Alexander Graham Bell's invention of the telephone was inspired by the work of his father, a speech therapist who developed the international phonetic language known as Visible Speech.

Such projects set a challenge to visual artists. In 1904, Kandinsky set out to create a 'new international language', which he termed *Malerei*, explicitly distinguishing it from Esperanto. A decade later, the painter Joseph Southall affirmed that art 'imparts its message to all continents and peoples' more effectively than Esperanto. Theirs was not necessarily a message that could be decoded, or translated into speech, but the claim that art is a universal language points to a theory of powerful transmission through the visual, which this paper will explore.

Grace Brockington is Senior Lecturer in History of Art at the University of Bristol, and co-convenor of the ICE research network ('Internationalism and Cultural Exchange, 1870-1920'). Her publications in the field of cultural internationalism include *Above the Battlefield: Modernism and the Peace Movement in Britain, 1900-1918* (2010), and the edited collection *Internationalism and the Arts in Britain and Europe at the Fin de Siècle* (2009). As a specialist in British art of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, she has recently co-authored (with Claudia Tobin) an online Tate *In Focus* project on Vanessa Bell's *Abstract Painting*.

Sarah Wilkes (Institute of Making)

Touching Emotions: Materials as Media for Communication.

Awaiting abstract

Sarah Wilkes is Research Fellow at the Institute of Making. Her Wellcome Trust fellowship project, *Material Anxieties*, develops a novel combination of methods (ethnography, design research and psychophysics) to examine how materials used in healthcare applications mediate clinician and patient experiences in positive and negative ways. Sarah has previously been post-doc researcher on a variety of collaborative, interdisciplinary projects including *Hands of X* (EPSRC), *PhysFeel* (UCL Grand Challenges) and *Light.Touch.Matters* (EUFP7). Sarah has a PhD in Anthropology from UCL, completed with industrial partners the IOM3. This work looked at ethical practices in the UK materials and engineering industries, focussing on the relationship between the physical properties of materials and their social perception as 'sustainable'. She also has an MA in Material Culture from UCL and a BA in Archaeology and Anthropology from the University of Oxford

Chair: Elizabeth Edwards (De Montfort University, Leicester)

Elizabeth Edwards is a visual and historical anthropologist working extensively on the relationships between photography, history and anthropology. She is Professor Emerita of Photographic History at De Montfort University, Honorary Professor in the Anthropology Department at UCL and will soon join the V&A Research Institute as Andrew W. Mellon Visiting Professor. She was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2015. Her current book projects are on photography and the emergence concepts of the collective ownership of ancient monuments, and on photography and the apparatus and practice of history.

SESSION 3

Richard Taws (Art History, University College London)

Paris in Code: Information and Impedance in Nineteenth-Century France

The development of an optical telegraph network in France in the early 1790s transformed the ways in which information could be transmitted across space and time. This semaphoric system, devised by Claude Chappe, was an important means of state and military communication until the 1850s, and the telegraph became a ubiquitous sight across much of France in the first half of the nineteenth century. Often cast as a forerunner to the electromagnetic systems developed later in the nineteenth century, the more rudimentary mechanisms of optical telegraphy in fact overlapped with these networks, undercutting straightforward narratives of technological progress. By the end of the nineteenth century optical telegraphy was still regularly invoked as a means of comprehending the complexity of the political and technological past, as well as the present, and as a way of coming to terms with the relationship between local or national space and a more global perspective. Departing from an analysis of a small painting by Swebach-Desfontaines, *Vue prise de la place de l'école, Paris* (c.1815), a work that ostensibly conflates various forms of flow—of money, water, people, and information—this paper will consider the ways in which telegraphic communication operated as a cipher for disruption, interference, and breakdown, as well as transparent communication.

Richard Taws is Reader in the History of Art at University College London. He is the author of *The Politics of the Provisional: Art and Ephemera in Revolutionary France* (Penn State University Press, 2013) and co-editor, with Genevieve Warwick, of *Art and Technology in Early Modern Europe* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2016). His recent work on the visual culture of telegraphy has been published in *Art History*, *Oxford Art Journal*, *Cabinet*, and *Nonsite*, and he is completing a book titled *Time Machines: Art, History, and Technology in Post-Revolutionary France*.

Matthew Kerr (English Literature, Southampton University)

Seas, Signals, Novels, and Noise in the Nineteenth Century

In *La Mer* (1868), Jules Michelet hailed the unifying power of the telegraph, which for the first time made it possible for individuals on either side of the Atlantic to think ‘one thought’ simultaneously. When contemplating the Atlantic itself, however, Michelet was divided in thought about what it meant to know the sea and to be inspired by it: ‘There is I know not what of electric inspiration, of all-absorbing passion for the Sea, in all who truly know it.’ Truly knowing the sea, it appears, begins with an admission of the limits of one’s knowledge. Michelet’s unknown-to-be-truly-known sea reflects a larger interest in the sea as a place of epistemological impedance in the nineteenth century: failing to register a distinction is precisely the point. It is a commonplace of literary criticism that, in the century preceding modernism, prose fiction about the sea was unthinking and uninteresting—indentured to outworn generic codes, clichés of national identity, or slipshod sublimity, and evoking some or all of them. Victorian sea writing was vague, in other words, about what it wanted the sea to signify or signal. This paper argues for the value of such vagueness, considering moments where the sea impedes clarity, and where that impedance (or noise) is important: moments where the difficulty of knowing, rather than the clarity of the message, comes to the forefront by way of marine language or motifs.

Dr Matt Kerr joined the University of Southampton in 2015, having previously taught at the University of Oxford, where he completed his DPhil and Master’s degrees. He has recently published articles in *Essays in Criticism*, *Review of English Studies*, and the *Dickens Studies Annual*, and is currently preparing his first monograph, provisionally titled *Boundless: The Language of the Sea and the Nineteenth-Century Novel*. Matt’s next project focuses on discourses of contentment (being satisfied, if not ecstatic) in Victorian literature, art, popular culture, and politics.

Chair: Tilly Blyth (Head of Collections, Science Museum, London)

Dr Tilly Blyth is Head of Collections and Principal Curator at the Science Museum, London, where she cares for the UK’s scientific, technological and medical heritage. Tilly leads the curatorial, research, library and archive teams at the museum, with a mission to inspire, engage and motivate the widest audience about the development of the modern world and its relevance to the future. Tilly was Lead Curator on the *Information Age* gallery, which tells the story of 200 years of information and communication technologies through six networks of people, places and ideas.

Tilly’s academic background is in the Sociology of Science and Technology. She has a degree in Physics and a MSc in Science Policy from Manchester University, before becoming enthralled by the digital world and completing her PhD with BT Labs on the history of interactive TV and internet trials.

In 2004 Tilly joined the Science Museum as Curator of Computing, looking after the national computing collection. Whilst at the museum she has authored the report for NESTA on the Legacy of the BBC Microcomputer, edited a special volume of *Information and Culture: A Journal of History*, and edited the book *Information Age: six networks that changed the world*. Tilly is member of BAFTA and a trustee of the Raspberry Pi Foundation.

KEYNOTE LECTURE

Gail Day & Steve Edwards

Differential time and aesthetic form: uneven and combined capitalism in the work of Allan Sekula

Fredric Jameson has argued that modernism might best be understood as ‘a mode in which [the] transitional economic structure of incomplete capitalism can be registered and identified as such,’ implying that our current period is progressively converging as ‘completed’ capitalism. Challenging this perspective, we explore how the spatial and temporal complexities of modern capitalism—grasped in terms of its contradictions, combinations and unevennesses—are manifested aesthetically as cultural form. Drawing on recent Marxist debates, we consider Allan Sekula’s work. From the 1990s, until his untimely death in 2013, Sekula attained prominence for a series of artworks – exhibitions, books, video and films – that took as their subject the sea; or, more precisely, the question of the labour process in the maritime economy. He photographed or filmed: shipbuilding and repair; the arduous work of seafarers and of dock labourers; fishing industries and fish markets; employees dealing with a chemical leakage and volunteers clearing a major oil spill. It is not just Sekula’s thematic content that is important for our account; he applied his critical intelligence equally to the problem of form. Our hypothesis is that Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the ‘chronotope’ offers a useful way to understand this socio-aesthetic relationship.

Gail Day (Cultural Studies, Leeds University)

Gail Day's *Dialectical Passions: Negation in Postwar Art Theory* (Columbia University Press) was shortlisted for the Isaac and Tamara Deutscher Memorial Prize. She is Senior Lecturer in History of Art in the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds, where she is co-founder of the centre for Critical Materialist Studies. Gail is a convenor of the research seminar Marxism in Culture (at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London) and initiated the project 'Aesthetic Form & Uneven Modernities' with colleagues from Universidade de São Paulo and Birkbeck.

Steve Edwards (History and Theory of Photography, Birkbeck, University of London)

Steve Edwards is Professor of History & Theory of Photography at Birkbeck, University of London. His publications include: *The Making of English Photography, Allegories* (2006); *Photography: A Very Short Introduction* (2006); and *Martha Rosler the Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems* (2012). He is a member of the editorial boards for *Oxford Art Journal*; *Historical Materialism: Research in Critical Marxism*; and the *Historical Materialism book series* as well as a convenor for the long-running University of London research seminar Marxism in Culture.

Chair: Caroline Arscott (The Courtauld Institute of Art)

Caroline Arscott is Professor of Art History at The Courtauld. She is lead curator of the exhibition 'Victorians Decoded: Art and Telegraphy', Guildhall Art Gallery 2016-17 and the co-editor of the catalogue for the exhibition (London: The Courtauld and KCL, 2016). She directs the 2013-17 research project 'Scrambled Messages: The Telegraphic Imagination, 1857-1900'. She has published on many aspects of Victorian art and science. Her book linking fine art and ornament, Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris: *Interlacings* (New Haven: 2008), showed the cultural effects of technologies associated with military and sporting activities.