

# *Frazzled and Dazzled*

## Scrambled Messages symposium

**Friday 29 April 2016 11.00 – 19.00** (registration from 10.30)

Room S.012, King's College London, Strand Campus

Room F44 (New Wing), The Courtauld Institute of Art, Somerset House, Strand

## ABSTRACTS

**Dr Gabe Moshenka (Lecturer in Public Archaeology, UCL Institute of Archaeology)**

Beating the Bounds 1: *Bloomsbury's Proton Pipe*

A trench is being excavated through Bloomsbury, ending at the cavernous pit on Tottenham Court Road for the new Proton Beam Therapy centre for cancer patients. The trench is for the pipe that brings the protons. Eighty years ago a little way east at the Russell Square traffic lights Leo Szilard famously dreamed of protons multiplying in a chain reaction – the birthplace of nuclear power beneath T.S. Eliot's office window. These protons offer a counter-flow, a positive contrast to the negativity of the electrons flowing in practically ever other wire in the area. Sometimes it spoils our bad moods. Deep underground, early tests of the huge electromagnets inside the hospital's new MRI machine bent the tracks of the Northern Line. Meanwhile the BT Tower across the road bombards us with microwaves. With all this energy in the air it's hard not to feel a bit frazzled.

**Dr Cassie Newland (Scrambled Messages Postdoctoral Fellow, KCL Dept of English)**

Beating the Bounds 2: *Bloomsbury Fields*

The Long Fields of Bloomsbury were notorious, from the 1680s to the late 1700s they were the scenes of robbery, murder, and every species of depravity and wickedness of which the heart can think. They... remained waste and useless... the resort of depraved wretches, whose amusements consisted chiefly in fighting pitched battles, and other disorderly sports.

(E. F. Rimbault, *Notes and Queries*, 14, 2 Feb 1850, p. 217)

Tamed, paved and swiftly overtaken in the irresistible expansion of the West End, the fields were replaced by townhouses for the gentry. But we know a field is infinite. Its strength may diminish over time and space yet - almost homeopathically - it is never quite gone. Bloomsbury's fields are haunted by naked bathers, kite-cutting crones, duelling brothers and miracles on the very ground. The Long Fields ripple on in legends and stories and names.

Today the fields of Bloomsbury are an overlapping venn-space of radio frequency fields. Bodies move promiscuously in and out of these bought-and-paid-for energies. Wireless is given away free with coffee. Data is stolen. Persons project themselves, their fictions, their vices and their miracles through geolocated media, such as Grindr, Tindr, Findhr. A walk through Bloomsbury therefore means moving between old and new fields; old and new stories. We will walk the gradients, overlapping, boundaryless (and quite possibly a little bit lost).

**Dr Simone Natale (Lecturer in Communication and Media Studies, Loughborough University)**

Images, Media, Circulation 1: *Photography and Media Imaginaries in Nineteenth-Century United States*  
Despite a striking coincidence of dates – the first public demonstration of telegraphy was in 1838, just one year before Daguerre's invention; the first telegraphic line in the United States was officially opened in 1844 – correlations between the early history of photography and the telegraph have been little explored. This talk addresses this lacuna by examining how photography was inserted within a wider cultural imaginary in nineteenth-century United States, which pointed to communication media's capacity of overcoming boundaries of time and space. Photography, telegraphy, as well as other media and technologies such as the railway and postal services, contributed to the construction of a cultural discourse celebrating the reach of communications and the myth of the machine. This was regarded not only as a means for mechanical objectivity, but also as a quasi-magical force that shaped social, economic and cultural change. Examining aspects of the reception of photography in nineteenth-century America, the talk argues that this was related to improvements in communication and transportation technologies. Photography was conceived as a medium that put images in movement, allowing pictures taken from reality to be carried, marketed and transported. Its ease of circulation was one of the factors that facilitated its commercial and cultural success and is a key to interpreting Oliver Wendell Holmes's famous comparison between a photograph and a banknote. In this regard, a history of media that includes fully and programmatically photography into its field of interest can make a substantial contribution to discussions about the history of this technology.

**Natalie Hume (Scrambled Messages Project Student, PhD Candidate, The Courtauld Institute of Art)**

Images, Media, Circulation 2: *Pictures from the Front: The Modoc War and the Illustrated London News, 1873.*

William Simpson, the most established of the *Illustrated London News* special artists, arrived in San Francisco in spring of 1873. What had been planned as a leisurely trip reporting on the tourist sights of the United States turned into a race to catch a scoop: the news of General Canby's surprise killing had just broken. Simpson diverted his course to the Lava Beds of Oregon, where the Modocs had made an effective military stronghold out of the unusual terrain. Simpson's arduous journey to the front took several weeks. He spent just over a week at the US encampment, sketching the landscape, Native Americans on both sides of the war and Modoc artefacts. Soon after Simpson left, two photographers arrived: press correspondent Louis B. Heller and Eadweard Muybridge, who was working for the US military.

Meanwhile, Simpson sent his sketches back to London with detailed and descriptive letters, and the *ILN* began to run a series of prominent, strikingly illustrated features based on his coverage. Even as the *ILN* confidently took ownership of the story, with a strong editorial line and celebration of its exclusive access to the first on-the-spot visual reports, the coverage itself gives a much more troubled and confusing impression not only in terms of content but also in relation to the act of reporting.

The illustrations themselves form three distinct categories: the land survey, the modern history picture and the witness sketch. The ambitious design and accompanying texts attempt to bridge these discrete and sometimes contradictory genres, but instead introduce further confusion, with Simpson's errors carefully transcribed by the engravers and the editors' limited knowledge of the conflict showing itself in misunderstandings of the raw material. Tensions and anxieties emerge around issues of authority, authenticity, objectivity and artistic presence. Throughout, there is a timely preoccupation with medium as well as message (Ruskin's lectures on engraving, full of anxiety about its decline, were published in 1872), with hidden media – notably telegraphy and photography – hovering as a ghostly presence behind and through the nuances of the coverage.

**Anne Chapman (Scrambled Messages Project Student, PhD Candidate, KCL Dept of English)**

Interruption 1: *'Perhaps I interrupt you': visiting, repetition and Conan Doyle's professionals.*

Visits entangle the public and the private; as a narrative device they facilitate explorations of an impulse to predictability. The proliferation and popularity of etiquette books and their desire to regulate visiting suggests an anxiety about the unruliness of social interactions as the nineteenth century drew to a close. As a particularly singular professional, Sherlock Holmes reads his visitors expertly; through this

trait he refuses the interruption of the unexpected. In the context of the muddled sites of late nineteenth-century professional encounters depicted by Arthur Conan Doyle, this paper concerns the problems of expectation and interpretation in professional encounters. Doyle presents Holmes as a professional to be consumed; however he depicts the boundaries and rules of this consuming interaction as blurred. This paper explores the visits paid to and by Holmes, visits where he represents the professional who makes himself publicly available in conventionally private spaces. When calling on Holmes, visitors' bodies unwittingly become entirely legible texts for this particular expert professional. They do not expect such a reading, and in so doing Holmes fractures their privacy. This paper proposes that Doyle thus suggests an interrupting force in the consumption of professional services. Turning to Doyle's depictions of other consumable professionals, this paper considers the problem of blurred professional spaces in the stories of medical practitioners, three of which appeared in *The Idler*. Doyle wrote them as he prepared to terminate the repetitions of his Holmes genre and kill off his detective. This brief series both resists repetitive generic encoding and explicitly explores expectation in its visit narratives. Examining this series alongside Holmes moves this paper to argue that visits enable Doyle to address the problems attendant on the predictability of repetition demanded in his own professional life.

**Dr Will Abberley (Lecturer in Victorian literature, University of Sussex)**

*Interruption 2: Naturalist, Interrupted: Repetition, Mimicry and Misapprehension in the Victorian Naturalist's Memoir*

When writing up their memoirs of travel and scientific exploration, a number of Victorian naturalists faced the challenge of representing and demonstrating a new and problematic biological concept: protective mimicry. Building on Charles Darwin's arguments for evolution by natural selection, naturalists such as Henry Walter Bates and Alfred Russel Wallace claimed that many organisms had evolved to resemble other species or to blend into their environments, thus deceiving predators and prey. However, the theory was uniquely difficult to prove, depending on the supposed appearances and perceptions of various species in the wild. Unable to access such animal subjectivity directly, Bates, Wallace and others offered their personal experiences of being deceived by such natural trickery in the field. The naturalist dazzled and disorientated by protective mimicry thus became a familiar narrative trope in memoirs of scientific travel towards the end of the century, which advocates of protective mimicry collected and quoted as evidence of the phenomena. The paper will explore how this interaction between scientific theory and literary form resonated with a growing awareness at the time of the contingencies of perception. Psychologists such as Alexander Bain and Herbert Spencer were abstractly discussing the mechanics of how sense-impressions translated into an apparently stable phenomenal world, highlighting the roles of temporality, repetition and mental association in this process. Anecdotes of dazzled naturalists not only exemplified these uncertainties of perception, but also suggested that they had influenced the development of life as organisms evolved to trick each other's perceptions. Such anecdotes interrupted both the formal flow of the naturalist's memoir and its epistemological coordinates, undermining the scientific ideal of detached, objective vision.