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Issues Published in 2004

Amst 49.1 (2004)

Neorealism—Between Innovation and Continuation

THOMAS CLAVIEZ and MARIA MOSS - Guest Editors

THOMAS CLAVIEZ

"Introduction: Neo-Realism and How to 'Make It New'"

ABSTRACT: The emergence of the literary phenomenon labeled "Neo-Realism" has initiated a debate that entails more than just a problem of labeling. Thus one faction of commentators holds that a realistic mode of representation has in fact never left us and is now taken up again by both authors and the market. The reason for this, so the argument goes, is that literary history has reached another stage of exhaustion, which the demise of experimental postmodernism attests to. Others, however, point out that the era of postmodernity has left indelible traces even upon those works which seem to return to realistic strategies of writing, and that a simple "return" to older forms is both inconceivable and reductionist. A closer look reveals that what is at stake in this controversy extends toward areas other than the purely aesthetic: the political, the epistemological, and the anthropological. Based upon the approaches of Winfried Fluck and Wolfgang Iser, I will attempt to unfold the different layers of the discussion and to place the contributions of this volume within a larger theoretical framework.

GÜNTER LEYPOLDT

"Recent Realist Fiction and the Idea of Writing 'After Postmodernism'"

ABSTRACT: The turn away from experimental postmodernism in favor of representational writing during the 1980s and 1990s is often explained, in recent literary historiography, with a narrative of cultural healing and conceptual progress. According to this narrative, the best recent fiction is a new realism "after" postmodernism which recovers the interest in "experience" and "social relevance" that postmodernists had lost, while retaining an awareness of postmodernism's epistemological lessons that "naïve realisms" had supposedly lacked. This essay argues that the complex and contradictory stylistics inherent in the various trends subsumed under the realist revival may be better explained with reference to developments in aesthetic perception, which may have occurred independently of the conceptual stances (modernist, postmodernist, post-postmodernist, etc.) with which they are often authorized. In order to refine the differences between various contemporary realisms and their relations to the postmodernist avant-garde,

this essay discusses the experimental use of representational rhetoric by authors such as Raymond Carver, Frederick Barthelme, and Bret Easton Ellis and contrasts them with 1970s Cooveresque fiction and the more recent representational writing of, among others, Philip Roth, Rick Moody, and Jeffrey Eugenides.

CHRISTOF DECKER

"Faces in the Mirror: Raymond Carver and the Intricacies of Looking"

ABSTRACT: It has repeatedly been pointed out that neo-realist texts are characterized by a particular visual quality, not only with regard to audiovisual devices featured thematically but also concerning their literary style, which at some point even came to be called "TV Fiction." This essay attempts to show that, in order to appreciate the visual quality of neo-realism, we should shift our attention from the predominance of the image to a more complex understanding of visuality. Drawing on the concept of the gaze, I suggest that we have to examine closely how the act of looking is introduced as the crucial way of interrelating image and subject, and, more specifically, how it contributes to the emergence of new forms of self-knowledge. My case in point will be Raymond Carver's minimal realism, which is characterized by a disjunction between voice and eye, speaking and looking. This disjunction has been linked with the notion of postmodern depthlessness, yet I would argue that it relates less to epistemological doubt than to the idea of a crisis of communication. Harking back to American modernism, the sensuousness of the material world is contrasted with the realm of speech in order to stress that visual and haptic forms of contact can compensate for the fundamental inadequacy of spoken language. Three different types of looking—the narcissistic, televisual, and cinematic gaze—will be discussed to elaborate questions of visualization in neo-realism.

PHILLIP E. WEGNER

"October 3, 1951 to September 11, 2001: Periodizing the Cold War in Don DeLillo's *Underworld*"

ABSTRACT: The narrative act of periodization is at the very heart of Don DeLillo's monumental historical overview of the Cold War and post-Cold War moment. In *Underworld* (1997), DeLillo revives and reworks one of the most significant of modern realist narrative forms, the historical novel, in order to map the emergent decentered and chaotic landscape of the post-Cold War world. Gilles Deleuze's analysis of Italian neo-realist film provides a way of thinking about the aims of the fragmented narrative structure of DeLillo's text. Another answer begins with the book's cover: an image that seems to foreshadow the September 11, 2001 destruction of New York City's World Trade Center. The twin towers reappear in the novel as a symbol of the binary distribution of political and economic power in the Cold War

period. A similar dual structure is evident in the opening section of the novel. Here DeLillo weaves together the stories of a number of fictional characters and historical personages who witness the New York Giants' pennant-winning home run against the Brooklyn Dodgers. However, the date on which this baseball game occurs, October 3, 1951, proves to be significant for another reason: on that date, the Soviet Union explode their second nuclear bomb. This second bomb test inaugurates the true beginning of the Cold War period, for, as Slavoj Zizek argues, only when an event happens the "second time" does it mark the beginning of something new.

MARTIN WEINREICH

"'Into the Void': The Hyperrealism of Simulation in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*"

ABSTRACT: Besides causing a major scandal after its publication in 1991, Bret Easton Ellis's third novel, *American Psycho*, irritated many of its readers. The first-person narrative of wall street yuppie and serial killer Patrick Bateman appears to be written in a realist manner, but the book resists a traditional realistic interpretation, as Ellis's narrative neither provides the reader with any reason for the atrocities committed by Bateman, nor with any psychological insight into Bateman's character to justify his actions. Without a close reading, the novel appears to be flat, nauseating the reader both with endless lists of brand-name consumer products and explicit descriptions of pornography and violence. However, I argue that *American Psycho* is deliberately conceived and written by Ellis to convey a cultural critique of the social conditions of postmodern consumer capitalism as outlined by Jean Baudrillard, whose concepts of hyperreality and simulation provide a suitable framework for interpreting form, content, and structure of *American Psycho*. The ensuing analysis investigates how Ellis uses hyperreal aesthetics and the logic of simulation as a basis for constructing his narrative.

MARIA MOSS

"The Search for Sanctuary: Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* and E. Annie Proulx's *The Shipping News*"

ABSTRACT: Based on the writings of the German philosopher Hans Blumenberg, this article establishes the longing for security and sanctuary as a central motif in neo-realist literature. The failure to achieve this goal—exemplified in Marilynne Robinson's novel *Housekeeping*—results in a feeling Martin Heidegger appropriately calls "Unheimlichkeit." While neo-realist protagonists are as lost as their postmodern counterparts, they nevertheless become aware of their situation and—more often than not—manage to change it by applying two basic anthropological distancing methods: attributing names to the numinous and telling stories about it. After postmodern efforts to deconstruct even the slightest search for rootedness, meaning,

and truth, the protagonists' awareness of fundamental human needs suggests a significant shift towards an appropriation of basic anthropological concerns in contemporary literary discourse.

SUSANNE ROHR

"The Tyranny of the Probable'-Crackpot Realism and Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections*"

ABSTRACT: On the level of epistemology, Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections*, a novel about a Midwestern family, is concerned with the question of lost order in a perplexing world and the challenge to try out and re-establish various systems of order. These epistemological concerns are closely related to those of modernism and post-modernism, yet this novel chooses a unique narrative strategy for staging them. It follows the narrative conventions of literary realism but metaphorically uses the symptoms of the father's Parkinson's disease—that is the patient's eroding capacity to meaningfully interpret reality—to develop a fictional world of collapsing order, general disorientation, insecurity and imbalance within the bounds of a seemingly known and familiar world. The essay explores how this narrative strategy serves a double goal: on the one hand it leads to what literary criticism has identified as the "new conventionalism" in literature. On the other hand, it adds a new form to the genre of the novel: the novel of globalization.

Amst 49.2 (2004)

RACHEL SAILOR

"Thomas Easterly's Big Mound Daguerreotypes: A Narrative of Community"

ABSTRACT: Thomas Easterly was a nineteenth-century daguerreotypist from St. Louis who took photographs that were largely local in their appeal. His images are remarkable not only for the intimate way they convey events and attitudes of his day locally, but also as they reflected larger national concerns. For example, progress, technology, Native cultures and Manifest Destiny are the inevitable subtexts in many of his images. This article looks at Easterly's group of daguerreotypes that depict the Big Mound structure of an ancient Mississippian culture. Specifically, the destruction of the mound and its link to the westering impulse of the nation suggests that a reconsideration of regional photography of the nineteenth century American West is a provocative and necessary step for critical understanding of frontier development.

PRISCILLA LEDER

"Kate Chopin's Letter to the World: 'Elizabeth Stock's One Story'"

ABSTRACT: "Elizabeth Stock's One Story," Kate Chopin's only depiction of a woman writer, tells the story of a village postmistress and aspiring scribbler who loses her job and her life through a mistaken attempt at kindness. In this story, Chopin evokes the conventions of New England local color to assess her own position as a woman writer by exploring the limits of the local color mode that had made her reputation. New England local color seems an appropriate arena for such an exploration because it often deals with women's creativity. In fact, "One Story" strongly recalls Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's "A Poetess." However, Chopin's protagonist, unlike Freeman's, attempts to assert herself in a professional world dominated by men. Furthermore, Chopin detaches herself from her protagonist by introducing her "story" with a brief, two paragraph framing narrative which evokes sympathy for her while appearing to dismiss her literary efforts. Freeman's "poetess" is indirectly silenced by male authority; Elizabeth Stock tells her story in her own voice, criticized but not suppressed by an androgynous narrator who presents her to the reader. Through her story, Chopin at once detaches herself from local color and pays it an elegiac farewell.

CHRISTA GREWE-VOLPP

"Memory attaches itself to sites': Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* and the Significance of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial"

ABSTRACT: The following article investigates the relevance of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM) for the ongoing creation of a national identity, based on the assumption that public commemoration is a form of history-making. It demonstrates how the memorial differs from other war memorials, how it generates and supports conflicting reactions and thus resists any definitive statement about the war. Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* joins the multivocal response to the VVM. The novel's young protagonist, Samantha Hughes, tries to find out what the Vietnam War was "really like," a subject everyone in her environment is conspicuously silent about. Her search for her father who was killed in action is on a symbolic level a search for a personal as well as a national identity, culminating in a visit to the VVM in Washington, DC. The essay explores the significance of a site of memory in the process of coming to terms with a traumatic past and of generating an historical consciousness. It discusses the functions of memory, the danger of nostalgia in the novel's emphasis on the memorial's healing capacities, and the plausibility of a clear political statement in the text.

CLAUDIA OLK

"Vision, Intermediality, and Spectatorship in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*"

ABSTRACT: This essay examines the relation between text and image in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours* with particular regard to the narrative presentation of visual perception. It investigates Virginia Woolf's criticism of the early cinema, photography and mechanized ways of perception, and reveals her highly ambivalent stance towards the visual, which ranges between the longing for immediacy, and the need for mediated vision. Woolf's reluctance to a positivist privileging of sight as the most noble and reliable of the senses finds its metaphorical expression in her use of windows, mirrors and frames, which provide a model for aesthetic vision and reception. As both an intertextual and intermedial project, *The Hours*, likewise, focuses on reception and spectatorship, in formally approaching filmic writing, and reflecting on contemporary habits of perception. In emphasizing the convergences and reciprocal interchanges between the novel and visual media, Michael Cunningham's novel to a certain extent prefigures its own filmic visualization in the construction of its opening sequence, its rendering of parallel worlds, and its prolific use of media references. Each novel's specific approach to the interaction of both sign systems involved, however, asserts that the question of visuality and the question of fictionality are closely intertwined.

SIMON
SCHLEUSENER

"Deleuze und die American Studies"

ABSTRACT: The following essay discusses the possible uses of the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze in the field of American Studies. While other poststructuralist thinkers such as Foucault or Derrida have been increasingly used as points of reference since the revisionist reorientation of the field in the last two decades, the Americanist reception of Deleuze—although he frequently deals with American writers in his texts—has been rather limited. Highlighting the differences between the theoretical framework of "New" American Studies and the constructivist philosophy of Deleuze, this essay will suggest a number of reasons for this situation. While some major differences undoubtedly set the work of Deleuze apart from New Americanist positions, there are also zones of compatibility between the two approaches. The concept of "Minor Literature" for example, which has been discussed by Deleuze and his co-author Félix Guattari in their book about Kafka, can be used in various ways to analyze "American" Literature in today's postcolonial present. Therefore, the essay invites New Americanist scholars "to make use" of Deleuze for the sake of American Studies despite existing differences—just as Deleuze has made use of American Literature for the sake of his own philosophy.

Amst 49.3 (2004)

Gewalt in den USA der 1960er und 1970er Jahre

JÜRGEN MARTSCHUKAT - Guest Editor

JÜRGEN
MARTSCHUKAT

"Gewalt in den USA der 1960er und 1970er Jahre: Eine
Einleitung"

NOBERT FINZSCH

"Die 'National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders'
und der Diskurs um Gewalt in den USA, 1968"

ABSTRACT: The years after 1965 witnessed a dramatic rise of riots and civil unrest that seemed to be driven by racism and social deprivation. This article investigates the impact of this wave of violence on discourses about violence in general and especially the actions taken by the Johnson administration, which culminated in the report submitted by the National Advisory Committee on Civil Disorders, chaired by Illinois governor Otto Kerner. The so-called *Kerner Report*, which appeared in 1968, signifies one of the first attempts to analyze the problems causing both societal and individual violence in the United States. A closer look at the members of the Committee and the strategies suggested by them reveals, however, that repression and control of future acts of violence was the primary aim of the administration. In contrast to debates about domestic violence and physical abuse, which emerged at the center of the discourses on violence in the 1980s and 1990s, violence as conceptualized in the 1960s and 1970s, was "collective urban black violence." Despite the fact that governmentality as self-regulation and self-government continued to play an important role in politics, a backlash in the form of increasing open repression, especially after 1968, is clearly visible.

BERND GREINER

"'The silent majority is beginning to speak and we beg
the officials to listen': Die amerikanische Debatte um
Kriegsverbrechen in Vietnam"

ABSTRACT: The essay discusses how American society debated war crimes committed during the bloodiest years of the Vietnam War. From the late 1960s to the mid-seventies, the United States lived through a remarkable period in its modern history. War-waging societies hardly ever confront the reasons and ramifications of their home-bred violence. However, after the My Lai massacre broke in the major media, a public debate noteworthy for both its intensity and duration dominated the scene. The article shows how this debate developed. More than anything else, it is concerned with the self-image and world-view of the contributors from all walks of life. Based on more than 900 letters written to the indicted war-criminal Lieutenant William Calley, the essay suggests a fresh perspective on civil-military relations in the United States and the "social prestige" of the military as an institution.

SABINE SIELKE

"The Politics of the Strong Trope: Rape and the Feminist Debate in the United States"

ABSTRACT: Taking off from the proliferation of feminist discourse on rape since 1970, this essay examines how American culture talks about sexual violence and explains why, in the latter twentieth century, rape achieved such significance as a trope of power relations. Tracing the evolution of a specifically American rhetoric of rape back to the late eighteenth century, I explore the cultural work that this rhetoric has performed and argue that the representation of rape has been a major force in the cultural construction of sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, class, and, indeed, national identity. Provoked in part by contemporary feminist criticism, my work also challenges feminist positions on sexual violence by interrogating them as part of the history in which rape has been a convenient and conventional albeit troubling trope for other concerns and conflicts.

JÜRGEN
MARTSCHUKAT

"'With Grace and Dignity': Gary Gilmore, Todesstrafe und Männlichkeit in den USA der 1970er Jahre"

ABSTRACT: This article deals with the abolition and reintroduction of capital punishment in the United States in the 1970s. The first part describes how, during the 1960s, a collective self-perception as a progressing and maturing society evolved in America. The accompanying debate posed numerous controversial questions and expressed a highly critical attitude of the public towards the role of violence and the death penalty which finally paved the way towards its temporary abolition until 1976. The second part analyzes the history of the death penalty's reintroduction and the first execution in January 1977. It focuses particularly on the public debate about violence that is used in the name of society, as well as on the perception of the condemned criminal, Gary Gilmore. The media's presentation of Gilmore reinvigorated the notion of violence as a socially appropriate means for trouble-shooting by relating it to the concept of a straightforward, positive masculinity that had been bemoaned as being in a state of "crisis" since the 1950s. Thus, the death penalty and its first execution after the temporary abolition contributed to the so-called "remasculinization of America," and they were part of the conservative backlash of the 1980s.

KLAUS J. MILICH

Forum: "'Oh, God': Secularization Theory in the Transatlantic Sphere"

ABSTRACT: The process of secularization has been one of the most distinct features in the transatlantic sphere. While its

trajectory in Europe has been assumed as linear, gradually ascending, and irreversible, this teleological paradigm of modernity has remained a contested ground in the United States ever since. In contrast to Europe, where appeals to divine authority and supernatural explanations of the universe have gradually lost their credibility, US-American culture and politics have always moved between two poles, that is, between religious fundamentalism and enlightened secularism. The dichotomy has evoked a debate among sociologists, political scientists, historians, and theologians about the validity of secularization theory that has been raging for more than twenty years. What is at stake in this debate is not simply the empirical evidence about the degree of religiosity, but the very categories that delineate the phenomenon. The article relates the repercussions of the discussion to the epistemology of American Studies and calls attention to the religious-secular matrix as a long-neglected paradigm of literary and cultural studies.

Amst 49.4 (2004)

BARBARA KRAH

"Tracking Frado: The Challenge of Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig* to Nineteenth-Century Conventions of Writing Womanhood"

ABSTRACT: This essay explores the complex relationship between white-defined nineteenth-century notions of femininity, on the one hand, and black female experience on the other hand in Harriet E. Wilson's 1851 novel *Our Nig*. Wilson's reworking of white concepts of identity—with regard to herself and her predominantly white environment—will be analyzed in terms of concepts that characterized other women's writing of the period: maternity, domesticity, and power. This essay argues that Wilson's version of black female identity differs significantly from those of her contemporaries, white and black, as references to Harriet A. Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* shall demonstrate. As a close reading of *Our Nig* reveals, Wilson's novel rejects the potential of familiar female roles, and raises the question of how much room there was for her to present a new black and female identity in opposition to dominant discourses of femininity.

MARTIN JAPTOK

"'The Gospel of Whiteness': Whiteness in African American Literature"

ABSTRACT: The article discusses the critical (and audience) neglect of so-called "white-life" novels, which have often gone out of print and are rarely included in current critical discussions and not at all in anthologies of African American literature. The essay explores both "external" reasons (white audience attitudes

and a larger culture still tinged with notions of white supremacy) and "internal" reasons (African American audience expectations that African American authors address, more or less exclusively, African American subject matter) for that neglect. It argues for the inclusion of African American works exploring "whiteness" into the canon of African American literature by showing how they are linked, both through themes and their rhetorical delineation of "whiteness," to other African American works, specifically in their conceptualization of "race." The essay discusses selected passages from a number of African American works to make its case and illustrates that, in a number of "white life" texts, whiteness is configured as a kind of religion: a worship of materialism. This conceptualization of whiteness is complementary to the conceptualization of blackness in many African American canonical works, especially in passing novels, which associate blackness with metaphysical and spiritual values.

JAN
KUCCHARZEWSKI

"'There is no "there" there': Gertrude Stein and Quantum Physics!"

ABSTRACT: This essay is a heuristic attempt to explore the correlation between the modernist aesthetics emerging from Gertrude Stein's writings and quantum mechanical models of reality. It applies certain concepts taken from early 20th century quantum physics (e.g. Wave-Particle Duality and the Copenhagen Interpretation) to Stein's work in order to examine possible isomorphisms. In this way I develop a new and distinctive set of metaphors for discussing Stein's texts. A common ground between Gertrude Stein's art of fiction and Niels Bohr's interpretation of the quantum phenomena is established by tracing both visions back to William James's *Principles of Psychology*. After briefly summarizing the basic concepts of quantum theory, I demonstrate how Stein's creative use of language, which manifests itself in her ideas of the 'continuous present,' 'insistence,' and 'resemantization,' shows striking similarities to the way quantum physics has reinterpreted physical reality.

ANTJE KLEY

"'keeping pace with the visual revolution': Intermediary Reference in Gertrude Stein's Prose Poems *Tender Buttons* and Wyndham Lewis' Novel *Tarr*"

ABSTRACT: This essay is concerned with intermediality, especially in the form of intermediary reference, as a flexible creative adaptation of media-specific aesthetic concepts, structures or possibilities— here from the visual arts and cubism in particular—into a new media context—here the modernist text. Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* and Wyndham Lewis' *Tarr*, two much neglected modernist texts, are studied for their thematization, evocation or reproduction of a Cubist visual aesthetics in order to evaluate form and function of these

adaptations for the texts' poetic respectively novelistic processes of meaning production. In very different innovative ways, both texts deal with the artifice of surfaces in order to conceptualize the discontinuities of experience. Stein's and Lewis' work is thus shown to present unique attempts to 'keep pace with the visual revolution' at the beginning of the 20th century.

MATTHIAS REISS

"Icons of Insults: German and Italian Prisoners of War in African American Letters during World War II"

ABSTRACT: More than 371,000 German and 51,000 Italian prisoners of war were interned in the United States between 1942 and 1946. African American soldiers claimed that these men enjoyed better treatment and more rights than they did. This assertion has become a staple of publications on the American home front and is widely accepted to the present day. The article examines the letters of black men and women, most of them soldiers, in order to reveal the origin of this assertion, discuss its validity, and place it into the context of the emerging Civil Rights Movement of the time. The article shows how the German prisoners of war, in particular, became icons of the insults which African Americans had to endure in the racially segregated army as well as on the home front during World War II.

KARSTEN WERTH

"A Surrogate for War—The U.S. Space Program in the 1960s"

ABSTRACT: Soviet successes in rocketry and space, beginning with *Sputnik 1* in 1957, were perceived as a serious threat to U.S. national security; they were technological breakthroughs, disturbing a delicate global balance of power. Space firsts were also highly effective propaganda symbols of superiority as ever-growing nuclear arsenals assured mutual destruction in the event of all-out war. After Yuri Gagarin's flight in 1961, the United States was in dire need of a convincing space victory. It mobilized for the biggest peacetime technological project in its history: the Apollo program. A U.S. flag on the moon was to demonstrate to the world the superiority of the American way of life. This essay focuses on contemporary public discourse on space from the mid-1950s to the end of Project Apollo in 1972. It presents important U.S. perceptions of the struggle for space supremacy and discusses their changes during this period. The voices of policymakers, defense strategists, space experts and visionaries, mass media, and NASA personnel reveal how early space exploration is a prime example of the blurring lines between military and civilian activities in the Cold War. It lifted Soviet-American conflict out of the military sphere into peaceful competition, with astronauts fighting a symbolic battle, an alternative to nuclear war.

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Impressum

Email: webmaster@amerikastudien.com

Letzte Aktualisierung: 05.05.2005