

CALL FOR PAPERS

Machine Modernisms

Third annual conference of the Bamberg Graduate School of Literature, Culture, and Media

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Organizational Team

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Summary

This two-day interdisciplinary conference calls for a renewed exploration of Modernist discourses to reflect on the plural iterations of the **machine** – as a myth, cult, and mechanical product – within the context of Modernism and modernity.

The machine was a central material and aesthetic category of Modernism, closely related to others such as progress, mobility, flight, speed, and mechanical beauty. Yet scholarly approaches to the machine worlds of modernity have oddly oscillated between mainly aesthetic approaches, emphasizing the sensorium of the machine and its utopian promise (or complicity with fascist artmaking), on the one hand, and political critiques of machine-driven capitalism on the other, without bringing these two strands together in any consistent way.

Our conference *Machine Modernisms* does both by looking at the plural responses engendered by mechanization: both *mechanophilia* and *mechanophobia* in reflections of modernity. Our focus is on literature, arts, and media, as well as on the central manifestos that distilled the fertile climates of Modernism, from Futurism and Dadaism to Surrealism and Vorticism.

We invite a variety of topics and approaches, ranging from the **aesthetic**, including the iconicity and symbolism of the machine in the visual arts, as well as the emerging excess of mechanical stimuli in mass society and urban spaces; to **political** critiques of how the Machine Age affected labor, social relations, and the human psyche itself; to the **transnational**, such as the cultural transfers between Europe and America in the midst of mass migration and two World Wars.

Keywords: modernism, technology, machine aesthetics, industrialization, innovation, automation, speed, mobility, time and temporality, labor, sensorium, stimuli

Potential topics include, but are not limited to:

1. **Automation and Labor:** How does the mechanization of labor inform Modernist discourses?
 - Technological reshaping of labor conditions
 - Fordism and the assembly line
 - Rise of the automata: labor commodification and disposability of the workforce
 - Reconfiguration of time and space under industrial capitalism
 - Automation and the rise of mass culture
 - Modernist technological revolution as a prelude to digitalization

2. **Machine Tenderness:** Why were Futurists so enamored with the metallic smoothness and prosthetic potential of machines?
 - Futurism and machine fetishism
 - Futurist machine poetics vs. Taylorist labor realism
 - Modernist machine cult vs. machine angst
 - A-political and utopian strands of machine Modernism
 - The blending of man and machine
 - Futurism and fascism
 - The mechanization of warfare (automatic weapons, air war)

3. **Holy Motors:** How do motorized vehicles – as social agents and emblems of mass technology – feature in Modernist narratives?
 - Impact of large petroleum deposits discovered in early 1900s
 - Car culture and the experience of speed, also through related technologies like motorcycles and airplanes
 - The shift from pre-modern fuels (coal, wood) to the crude oil needed for combustion engines
 - Carbon euphoria and ecological ignorance of a toxic petroculture
 - The emergence of new contact zones across divides of race, class, and geography enabled by machines (subway, motorways)
 - The figuring of the female form in this ‘classically’ masculine emblem

4. **The cinema as machine:** How did cinema as an optical apparatus emerge as the means of expression *à la mode* after photography?
- The experience of time/space (also in the movie theater itself)
 - The richness of stimuli in the mechanical film experience (sight, sound, smell) vs. other media like photography and radio
 - *Motion* pictures and their emphasis on speed, fleeting moments
 - A reinvestment in the 'spectacular of the everyday'
 - Performativity on screen vs. in real life; *projections* of modern society
 - The machinery that enabled cinema's enormous popularity (as a mass-produced, re-produced object)
 - Meditations on the Machine Age within film movements such as the avant-garde

Prospective Keynote Presenters

- Caroline Pollentier, Sorbonne Nouvelle (confirmed) – On Virginia Woolf and the Automobile
- Alex Goody, Oxford-Brookes University (confirmed) – Gender, Technology, and American Modernism
- Joshua Lam, Michigan State University (confirmed) – Race, Automation, and US Modernism (remote lecture via Zoom)

Submissions

We invite graduates and young scholars to submit abstracts of around 300–500 words in English or German along with a brief bio statement (in one file) either in English or in German to machine-modernism.bagralcm@uni-bamberg.de, no later than **October 31, 2022**.