

Refractions of Mass Culture:

Modernist Print Media and the Logic of Multiplication



Two-day symposium of the American Studies division
at Leibniz University of Hannover
Conti-Highrise, Rooms 609-615
September 29-30, 2022

Conference Website:

<https://tinyurl.com/refractions-of-mass-culture>

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Welcome

Modernist print media tended to insist on being different from mass-oriented publications that surrounded them in the public sphere, even where they drew on them. Yet, as much recent scholarship has shown, avant-garde publications and mass-cultural expressions were entangled on so many levels that it is impossible to effectively pry them apart. This is most urgently conveyed within the collage experimentations of the early avant-garde movements, which delighted in recombinations of quotidian sensations: think of Kurt Schwitters' *Merz*-poetry and Hannah Höch's scrapbook. Even without explicit montages of mass-cultural material, however, modernity's mass cultures remained in the picture of the avant-gardes: as dialogic actors for the publicization of modernist/avant-garde aesthetics and ideology, as a hegemonic foil for countercultural politics, or simply as the omnipresent cultural backdrop of modernist network activities. The routine gestures of disassociation by canonical modernists and middlebrow interlocutors, who did not want to be associated with the masses, can thus be considered mostly performative.

Yet despite this pervasive mode of cross-pollination, there is nevertheless a perceptive distance which characterizes modernist print media as opposed to mass culture. It is a distance which operates through aesthetics, sensations, and which can manifest in various ways: Through the reframing of texts and images, experiments in lyrical expressivity, or editorial/discursive power relations. In the processes of modernist appropriation, mass culture does not become alien yet appears different, as if seen through a prism. As one result of this refraction, the horizons of popular consciousness are re-negotiated. This is especially true for normative horizons, which shift palpably in these environments: What is read as 'normal' in mass culture and its publications becomes 'different' in its rearrangement – made strange, new, or queer. To capture this logic of refraction requires a heightened attention to form, language, and page design. We argue that in modernist print media, challenges towards the established social categories of difference (sexual, racial, gendered, regional and many more) went hand-in-hand with an observational mode of differentiation. Together, readers and writers of modernism not only navigated modern forms of life, but also imagined differences – in the mode of possibilities, alternatives, choices. Modernist print experiments performatively exhibit a multiplication of social options.

Our two-day symposium "Refractions of Mass Culture" invites contributions on contemporary medium-, small- and no-circulation media (from the glossy society magazine to the private scrapbook), which repurpose mass-cultural imagery and material, dialogize with mass-oriented publications, or emulate mass culture's modes of production or distribution. Focusing on the period between 1910 to 1930, this event invites talks that appraise modernity's complex relationship with the masses.

The symposium is part of the DFG-funded research project "Multiplication: Modernity, Mass Culture, Gender in the United States, 1910-1933" directed by Ruth Mayer.

WED, SEPTEMBER 28

19:00 Conference Warming

THU, SEPTEMBER 29

Modernist Refractions

08:30-9:00 **Registration**

09:00-9:30 **Welcome**

Ruth Mayer, Lilean Buhl, Sabrina Czelustek

09:30-10:30 **Presentation #1**

Lilean Buhl (Leibniz Universität Hannover): "Little Magazine Dialogism"

10:30-11:00 Coffee Break

11:00-12:00 **Presentation #2**

Melissa Johnson (Illinois State University): "'A mosaic would be its image': Visual Pleasure and Critique in the Scrapbook of Hannah Höch"

12:00-13:15 Lunch

13:15-14:15 **Presentation #3**

Sabrina Czelustek (Leibniz Universität Hannover): "Make it Queer: Strange Things in George Platt Lynes's Scrapbooks"

14:15-14:45 Coffee Break

14:45-15:45 **Presentation #4** (remote)

Barbara Green (Notre Dame University): "Recycling Feminist Fashion Writing in the *Woman's Outlook*"

16:00-17:30 Guided Tour at Sprengel Museum Hannover and Archives

19:00 Dinner

FRI, SEPTEMBER 30

Refractory Undercurrents

09:00

Running Start

09:30-10:30

Presentation #5

Ruth Mayer (Leibniz Universität Hannover): “Backwards Modernity: *The Crisis*, Miscellaneity, and the Legacy of Slavery”

10:30-10:45

Coffee Break

10:45-11:45

Presentation #6

Christoph Ribbat (Universität Paderborn): “The Modernist Photographer Will Kiss You Now (And Then He Will Capture the Moment Forever): Art and Heroics in Edward Weston's Daybooks”

11:45-13:15

Lunch

13:15-14:15

Presentation #7

Catherine Keyser (University of South Carolina): “Citrus and Surfaces: Print Media and the Appetite for the Other”

14:30

Closing Remarks