

AVANT-GARDES NOW! SYMPOSIUM

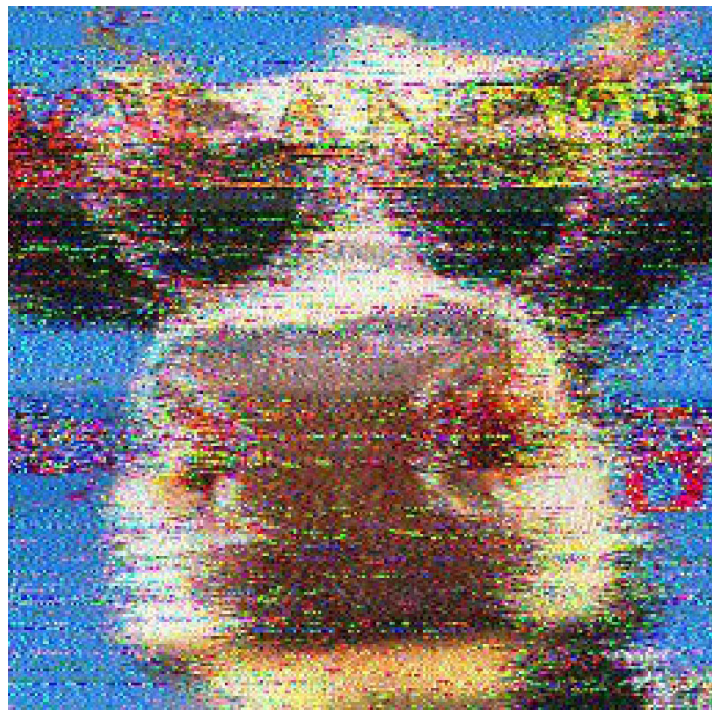
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An Interdisciplinary Symposium on Avant-Garde Studies and Practice

- Friday 1 May 2015
- JHB204, Headington Campus
- 1pm - 7pm

This event is free to attend, but registration is essential.

To register your place, e-mail
Dr Eric White (ewhite@brookes.ac.uk)
no later than Thursday 2 April.



Keynote speaker:

- Professor Adam Piette, University of Sheffield), 'Breton & Soupault's Les Champs Magnétiques and the First World War'

Oxford Brookes respondents:

- Professor Nathalie Aubert
- Dr Alex Goody
- Professor Paul Whitty

Featured poetry reading followed by refreshments:

- Peter Manson

Speakers:

- Professor David Cottington, Kingston University, 'The avant-garde's alternative professionalism'
- Professor Martin Iddon, University of Leeds, 'Outsourcing Progress: on conceptual music'
- Dr Julia Jordan, University College London, 'Accidental Narratives: Remaking the 60s Avant-Garde'
- Dr Sam Ladkin, University of Sheffield, 'Avant-gardes against value'
- Dr Nikolai Lübecker, University of Oxford, 'Into the Dead End: Korine's Trash Humpers'
- Dr Claire Warden, University of Lincoln, 'Can the avant-garde be performed?'

**Programme, Abstracts, and Biographies for Avant-Gardes Now! Symposium
Friday 1 May 2015, 1-7pm, Oxford Brookes University**

PROGRAMME

12-1pm: Registration, outside JHB204

1-2pm: Introduction and Keynote, JHB204

Introduction and Welcome – Dr Eric White (Oxford Brookes University)

Keynote address – Professor Adam Piette (University of Sheffield):
‘Breton & Soupault’s *Les Champs Magnétiques* and the First World War’

2-2.30pm: Tea, coffee, light refreshments, JHB204

2.30-4pm: Panel 1, JHB204

Chair – **Dr Niall Munro** (Oxford Brookes University)

Panellists:

Professor David Cottington (Kingston University)

Dr Julia Jordan (University College London)

Dr Claire Warden (University of Lincoln)

Respondent – **Professor Alex Goody** (Oxford Brookes University)

4-4.30pm: Tea and coffee, outside JHB204

4.30-6pm: Panel 2, JHB204

Chair – **Professor Nathalie Aubert** (Oxford Brookes University)

Panellists:

Professor Martin Iddon (University of Leeds)

Dr Nikolaj Lübecker (St. John’s College, University of Oxford)

Dr Sam Ladkin (University of Sheffield)

Respondent – **Professor Paul Whitty** (Oxford Brookes University)

6.15-7pm: A poetry reading by Peter Manson and Wine Reception, Union Hall/Gallery

7.30pm: Dinner for speakers, respondents, and organisers, The Lounge

BIOGRAPHIES and ABSTRACTS

Professor Adam Piette

Adam Piette is a Professor of Modern Literature at the University of Sheffield. He is the author of *Remembering and the Sound of Words: Mallarmé, Proust, Joyce, Beckett* (OUP 1996), *Imagination at War: British Fiction and Poetry, 1939-1945* (Macmillan, 1995), and *The Literary Cold War, 1945 to Vietnam* (EUP, 2009). He co-edited *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-century British and American War Literature* (EUP, 2012) and is co-editor of the poetry journal *Blackbox Manifold*.

Professor David Cottington

'The avant-garde's alternative professionalism'

For a field of scholarly research that has experienced unprecedented expansion and development in the last decade, avant-garde studies is bedevilled by a surprising amount of confusion. After a hundred years of its increasingly ubiquitous currency, uncertainty over the definition even of its key term remains, at the most basic level. Thus, for instance, a slippage between the use of 'avant-garde' as a noun (the socio-cultural formation) and as an adjective (the qualities that define its common practices and characterise their products) that can be found in most discussions of it, with the result that the fundamental distinction between them is ignored. Moreover scholars of the avant-gardes have tended either towards the history of the formation or the theory of its ideology—when what is needed is an understanding which holds both in view at once. This paper is a resume of such an approach, which situates both in relation to the professionalisation of western societies over the last century and a half, but also grounds them in a concept of a professionalism alternative and oppositional to that of mainstream cultural practices.

David Cottington is Professor of Art History at Kingston University London. The study of early 20th century Parisian modernism has until recently been his particular research interest, and his publications include *Cubism in the Shadow of War: The Avant-Garde and Politics in Paris 1905-1914* (Yale University Press, 1998) and *Cubism and its Histories* (Manchester University Press, 2004). The objects of his current research are the avant-garde formations of Europe before the First World War (he is presently writing another book for Yale on those of London and Paris in this period), and the recent and contemporary growth of the 'creative industries'. His *The Avant-Garde: A Very Short Introduction* was published by Oxford University Press in 2013.

Dr Julia Jordan

'Accidental Narratives: Remaking the 60s Avant-Garde'

'Chance ... is at the heart of biology, of life. Memory is unique, random and fragile, like life, and like life dies forever.' Christine Brooke-Rose, *Remake*

'Each choice is a tiny pang.' Marc Saporta, *Composition No. 1*

This paper will explore some aspects of the British avant garde of the nineteen-sixties. The generation of experimentalists during the sixties in Britain are grouped together in various constellations, but tend to include a combination of J.G. Ballard, John Berger, Christine Brooke-Rose, Brigid Brophy, Antony Burgess, Alan Burns, Eva Figes, Giles Gordon, Rayner Heppenstall, B.S. Johnson, Alexander Trocchi and Ann Quin, among others. I want to think about the notions of collage, the aleatory narrative, and the accidental text, and how some of the writers of the period (Alan Burns, Christine Brooke-Rose, B.S. Johnson, Alexander Trocchi) were in part responding to influences from innovative writers and artists from the

US and the continent (Saporta, Sporerri, Burroughs, Cortazar), but have also been shaped by the shifts in critical fashion which have followed. The paper will attempt to demonstrate the ways in which the 60s avant garde has been made and remade, and how its preoccupation with possibility and the accidental was central to both its challenge to realism and its attempts to remake it.

Julia Jordan is a lecturer in post-1945 English literature at UCL. Her first monograph was *Chance and the Modern British Novel* (2010), and she is the co-editor of a recent anthology of B.S. Johnson's writing called *Well Done God!* (Picador, 2013), and of *B.S. Johnson and Post-war Literature* (Palgrave, 2014). She has also published essays in a variety of collections and in journals – including *Textual Practice*, *Modern Language Review* and *Critique* – on various aspects of postwar literature, and in particular the experimental fiction of the 1960s and '70s. She is currently writing a book about the accidental in post-1945 literature.

Dr Claire Warden

'Can the avant-garde be performed?'

Modernist avant-garde performance was diverse, disorderly and dangerous: the challenging provocations of the futurists, the effervescent imaginings of the symbolists, the chaotic happenings of dada, the horrific screaming of the expressionists. Live performance in all its various guises seemed to provide a perfect medium for early twentieth-century artists to explore aesthetic ideas and respond to the socio-political atmosphere. In a recent book Mike Sell even suggests that 'to be avant-garde is to perform'.

However the connection is not so straightforward. While modernist avant-garde artists embraced live performance's potential, they simultaneously struggled with its practical application. What sort of performances should be created?

This paper examines the avant-garde's fraught relationship with performance, analysing its distrust of the actor, its uneasiness about spoken dialogue and its troublesome relationship with an audience. I claim that, while modernist avant-garde practitioners utilised and celebrated the medium of live performance, they often retained particular (and perhaps unsolvable) apprehensions.

I conclude by suggesting that this ambivalent relationship between the avant-garde and performance may well haunt our twenty-first-century scholarship too.

Claire Warden is a Senior Lecturer in Drama at the University of Lincoln. She is the author of *British Avant-garde Theatre* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) and *Modernist and Avant-Garde Performance: an introduction* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), and is currently working on a new book on British and Russian theatre (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). She is an Associate Editor of the *Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Modernist Literature* (2018) and winner of the 2014 Anthony Denning Award from the Society for Theatre Research.

Professor Martin Iddon

'Outsourcing Progress: on conceptual music'

Conceptual music perhaps ought, upon first impression, to be either a contradiction in terms or too obvious to need mention. The relative semantic 'weakness' of music—its difficulty in depicting specific 'things' in ways which are generally communicable without commentary which goes beyond the musical—ought either to mean that it signifies nothing specific enough to be considered a concept or that, by the same token, music (especially in its more abstract, non-texted forms) deals with nothing but the deployment of ideas and concepts. Yet, in recent years, the New Conceptualism has become a major recognisable trend in New Music. One might suspect that the element 'new' in a strictly musical version of conceptualism represents a desire for a (nostalgic) return to conceptual art that, as it were, really meant something, whether in the hands of Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, and Joseph Beuys, or Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst. Indeed, substituting 'music' for 'art' in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy's* description of conceptual art yields a recognisable description:

While some people find conceptual music very refreshing and relevant, many others consider it shocking, distasteful, and conspicuously lacking in craftsmanship. Some even simply deny that it is music at all. [...] Most conceptual music actively sets out to be controversial in so far as it seeks to challenge and probe us about what we tend to take as given in the domain of music.

Johannes Kreidler's *Fremdarbeit [Outsourcing]* (2009) may be seen as paradigmatic of the trend, not least since the compositional work 'proper' was, according to the detail of the score, largely outsourced to a Chinese composer and an Indian programmer. An examination of the piece proposes that, according to one reading, it merely *repeats* the exploitation it might otherwise be held progressively to reveal or that, according to another, it creates a fictionalised surface which trivialises the lived realities of outsourcing. Far from repeating, even if long *après la lettre*, the progressive politics of conceptual art, the musical repetition of such ideas imply a reactionary politics even where couched in progressivist terms.

Martin Iddon was born in Manchester in 1975. He studied composition and musicology at the Universities of Cambridge and Durham and studied composition privately with Steve Martland, Chaya Czernowin, and Steven Kazuo Takasugi. Martin was appointed Lecturer in Music at University College Cork in 2005, moving to Lancaster University in 2006, and the University of Leeds in 2009, where he is Head of the School of Music and Professor of Music and Aesthetics. His books *New Music at Darmstadt* and *John Cage and David Tudor* are both published by Cambridge University Press, while his CD, *pneuma*, was released in 2014.

Dr Nikolaj Lübecker

'Into the Dead End: Korine's *Trash Humpers* (2009)'

With its many transgressive actions — scatological, sexual and violent — Harmony Korine's *Trash Humpers* (2009) invites comparisons with works by well-known avant-garde figures such as Georges Bataille, the Viennese Actionists and Ed Kienholz. However, if these 20th century avant-garde artists generally linked their transgressions to either political or existential liberation, Korine's film seems to offer a more disenchanting view of transgression: *Trash Humpers* prevents the violence of the actions depicted from being recycled as emancipatory optimism. Via a critical discussion of research into non-redemptive art and non-cathartic emotions, I will discuss what Korine's explorations suggest about the status of transgressive art today.

Nikolaj Lübecker is Associate Professor in French at the University of Oxford. His research interests include European and American art cinema, French literature and avant-garde culture, as well as contemporary critical theory. His first book was a monograph on the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé, the second explored the notion of community in texts by Breton, Bataille, Sartre and Barthes; a third book is forthcoming with Edinburgh University Press: *The Feel-Bad Film* (May, 2015).

Dr Sam Ladkin

'Avant-gardes against value'

Against Value does not argue that the arts have no value: quite the opposite. It argues instead that value judgments can behave insidiously, and incorporate aesthetic, ethical or ideological values fundamentally opposed to the 'value' they purportedly name and describe. It argues that even the most ostensibly virtuous of values can become oppressive when disseminated bureaucratically, and as a set of official renderings or statements of artistic accounts. Against Value proposes that it is often the staunchest defenders of the art who do it the most harm, by suppressing or mollifying its dissenting voice, by neutralizing its painful truths, and by instrumentalizing its potentiality, so that rather than expanding the autonomy of thought and feeling of the artist and the audience, it makes art self-satisfied, or otherwise an echo-chamber for the limited and limiting self-description of people's desires.

The Avant-Garde tends to be the most vociferous, and most vociferously critical element of the arts, and arguably the least recuperable by audit. The avant-garde seeks to antagonize questions about who gets to ascribe value, and how, and to interpret those ascriptions ideologically. This paper offers some brief speculations on the notions of transgression, critique, and worries that such negations become all too easily new dogmas of value.

Sam Ladkin is a senior lecturer in the School of English at the University of Sheffield, where he also directs the Centre for Poetry and Poetics. He was previously a lecturer at

University College Cork. His research is multidisciplinary, frequently developing methodologies for the comparative reading of poetry and the visual arts. He is writing books on Clark Coolidge, Frank O'Hara, and a third project entitled *Against Value in the Arts*. His articles have been published in *Textual Practice*, *Journal for Modern Language Studies*, *World Picture*, *Blackbox Manifold*, *Edinburgh Review*, *Chicago Review* and *Glossator*. With Robin Purves he has co-edited three collections of essays and poetry, *Complicities: British Poetry 1945-2007* (Litteraria Pragensia), the 'British Poetry Issue' of *Chicago Review* (2007) and the 'American Poetry Issue' of *Edinburgh Review* (2005).

Peter Manson

A poetry reading

Peter Manson lives in Glasgow. His books include *English in Mallarmé* (Blart Books), *Poems of Frank Rupture* (Sancho Panza Press), *Adjunct: an Undigest* and *For the Good of Liars* (both from Barque Press) and *Between Cup and Lip* (Miami University Press, Ohio). Miami also publish his book of translations, *Stéphane Mallarmé: The Poems in Verse*. See <http://petermanson.wordpress.com/> for more information.