



# Aesthetic Attention

Theories, Models, Perspectives

22-23 November 2013

University of Mainz, Germany

Alte Mensa, Linke Aula

## PROGRAMME

### FRIDAY, 22 NOVEMBER

9:30 WELCOME

9:45 WELCOME BY MECHTHILD DREYER (VICE PRESIDENT OF MAINZ UNIVERSITY)

10:00 KEYNOTE LECTURE: Nancy Easterlin (New Orleans): *Novelty and Aesthetic Attention: The Human Wayfinder's Guide to Literary Value*

11:00 Coffee break

11:30 SECTION 1: *ATTENDING TO LITERATURE*

(chair: Anja Müller-Wood)

1. Winfried Menninghaus (Frankfurt): *Five Preliminary Hypotheses Regarding Attention to Rhetorical and Poetic Language Use*
2. Ralph Müller (Fribourg): *'She lisped and he said firmly': Strategies of Directing Attention in Narrated Speech Acts*
3. Catherine Emmott (Glasgow): *Investigating Attention Empirically: Aesthetic and Psychological Perspectives*

13:30 Lunch break

15:00 SECTION 2: *ATTENDING TO IMAGES*

(chair: Kerstin Thomas)

1. Raphael Rosenberg (Vienna): *Eye Movements and the Attention on Paintings: Subjective Impressions and Objective Measurements*
2. Carl Plantinga (Grand Rapids): *Sympathy and Threat: The Represented Face in Narrative Film*
3. Paul Frosh (Jerusalem): *The Aesthetics of Inattention: Thinking Beyond the Discrete Image*

17:00 Coffee break

17:30 KEYNOTE LECTURE: Ed Tan (Amsterdam): *Attention as the Basis of Aesthetic Experience: A Cross Media Perspective*

## SATURDAY, 23 NOVEMBER

10:00 KEYNOTE LECTURE: Christopher Mole (Vancouver): *Foundations of Aesthetic Attention*

11:00 Coffee break

11:30 SECTION 3: *ATTENDING TO LANGUAGE*

(chair: Julia Kind)

1. Vyv Evans (Bangor): *Towards a Grammar of Linguistic Attention*
2. Matthias Schlesewsky (Mainz): *Towards a Unified Neurobiological Model of Audition and Language*
3. Andrea Martin (Edinburgh): *Some Consequences of a Limited Focus of Attention and Content-Addressable Memory for Language Processing*

13:30 Lunch break

15:00 SECTION 4: *ATTENDING TO JOURNALISTIC MULTI-MODAL MEDIA*

(chair: Pascal Nicklas)

1. Hans-Jürgen Bucher (Trier): *Attention and Selectivity: What Eye Tracking Reveals about the Reception of Multimodal Media Discourse*
2. Karl N. Renner (Mainz): *Knowledge or Illusions of Knowledge. Remarks on Appealing TV News Pieces*
3. Melanie Magin / Birgit Stark (Mainz): *Attention, Please! Tabloidization Trends in German and Austrian Newspapers*

17:00 Coffee break

17:30 FINAL DISCUSSION AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

WITH THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF

RESEARCH UNIT MEDIA CONVERGENCE  
JOHANNES GUTENBERG-UNIVERSITY



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UNIVERSITÄT MAINZ



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## ABSTRACTS

### Keynote Lectures

NANCY EASTERLIN

Department of English, University of New Orleans

Novelty and Aesthetic Attention: The Human Wayfinder's Guide to Literary Value

Aestheticians have long suggested that originality is a key feature of artworks that attain enduring value. This presentation maintains that the preference for the new and rare in art emerges from an evolved predisposition to attend to novelty in the environment. Although all sensate organisms must be attuned to the unfamiliar, human beings, over the course of their evolution, were particularly apt to confront unusual, rare, and unfamiliar features in their environments. Most species thrive in physically limited habitats, and for that reason their confrontations with unfamiliar flora, fauna, weather, and the like are also limited. By contrast, humans evolved as wayfinders—that is, to find their way through varied geographical domains by interpreting their surround, which, because it was and still is ever-changing, predictably includes the experience of novelty. Focusing particularly on literary originality, Easterlin posits that a reader's cognitive process of textual construction-interpretation follows the wayfinder's real-world epistemic protocols. In the meaning-making process, the reader especially attends to and favors novel features of the literary text rather than those aspects to which s/he is habituated. The acceleration of cultural change since the eighteenth century, furthermore, augments the predisposition to attend to and value the new, and examples of Wordsworth's 1798 ballads will illuminate the biocultural propensity to value novelty in literary works.

ED TAN

Amsterdam School of Communications Research, University of Amsterdam

Attention as the Basis of Aesthetic Experience: A Cross-Media Perspective

Attention can be regarded the mind's searchlight helping persons to identify what in the dark surroundings of their life environment matters to see, to do and to investigate. When we adopt the psychological notion that responses to works of art and culture may be seen as special cases of perception and action in the real world, the search light metaphor can be used in exploring aesthetic experience. In this lecture we consider how the searchlight is controlled. On the one hand it may be drawn to certain details of the art work, and on the other something outside the work may direct or supervise it. We will see that the details or the director may turn the searchlight to the work itself, to its meaning or to the recipient's self. Focused lighting is the basis for the interpretation in the theatre of consciousness ultimately performed by the recipient for the recipient.

CHRISTOPHER MOLE

Department of Philosophy, University of British Columbia

Foundations of Aesthetic Attention

The purpose of this talk will be to consider possible aesthetic implications of the conception of attention that has emerged from psychology and philosophy in the last fifteen years. I'll explain that conception, and survey the evidence for it, while comparing it to the conceptions of attention that underpinned previous attempts -- in the early and middle parts of the twentieth century -- to explain the relationship between attention and aesthetics. I conclude with some remarks about the prospect of using attention as a basis from which to explain the value of aesthetic experience, with particular reference to the value of literature.

## Section 1: *Attending to Literature*

WINFRIED MENNINGHAUS

Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics, Frankfurt am Main

Five Preliminary Hypotheses Regarding Attention to Rhetorical and Poetic Language Use

The talk starts out with outlining a model of rhetorical and poetic language use. Based on the distinctions of this model and referring to an empirical study on lyrical poetry, the talk offers five perspectives on the attentional processes responding to poetic language uses.

RALPH MÜLLER

German Literary Studies, University of Fribourg

"She lisped and he said firmly": Strategies of Directing Attention in Narrated Speech Acts

In a recent empirical study of narrated wedding proposals in a corpus of German fiction from period of 1750 until 1901 we observed a growing tendency towards "affect dialogues" which combine "verba dicendi" (verbs of speaking) with elaborate descriptions of the speaker's voice, attitude, and/or movements (cf. Klimek & Mueller, in preparation). Such additional information about the characters' ways of expressing their words offers important clues to their intentions and feelings, it and may influence the reader's emotional responses. However, while most of the examples we had found belong to what is sometimes considered as 'Trivilliteratur' ('popular literature') due to their taste for stereotypic plots and protagonists, some of our most remarkable examples of wedding proposals with affect dialogues have been written by venerated authors such as Theodor Fontane and Thomas Mann. As these authors are considered to write in a self-reflective (sometimes ironic) mode that is conscious of its own style, I will ask the question how Fontane and Mann managed to narrate stereotypical situations without impairing their reputation. The main hypothesis is that some authors participate in the discourse of popular literature while making at the same time use of strategies that allow drawing some readers' attention away from the protagonists' affective state to a more sober evaluation of the characters' behaviour or the author's style.

Methodologically, this study makes use of corpus-stylistics. Corpus-stylistic techniques allow reconstructing recurring formulations in contrast to salient and innovative textual features.

More specifically, this approach presupposes that corpora can be used to demonstrate what readers could (and can) typically expect when reading particular genres, and that this data can be used to corroborate assumptions about cognitive effects of foregrounding which are relevant for the textual strategies of directing the readers' attention (cf. Mueller 2012).

### References:

Klimek, S./Mueller R. (in preparation). *Von der Inquit-Formel zur differenzierten Rede-Einleitung: Eine historische Studie des erzählten Heiratsantrags*.

Mueller, R. (2012) *Die Metapher: Kognition, Korpusstilistik und Kreativität*. Paderborn.

CATHERINE EMMOTT

English Language, University of Glasgow

Investigating Attention Empirically: Aesthetic and Psychological Perspectives

This presentation provides a survey of research investigating attention in relation to stylistic devices used in narrative texts. I draw on experimental data from the University of Glasgow STACS Project (Stylistics, Text Analysis and Cognitive Science), run jointly by the English Language and Psychology Departments. I utilise aesthetic ideas such as foregrounding (e.g. Mukařovský, 1964) and psychological notions such as depth of processing (e.g. Sanford & Sturt, 2002). Our research involves initial stylistic and narratological analysis to identify features of stories that seem to function as foregrounding devices (e.g. Emmott & Alexander, in press). Having identified devices that appear to be "attention-capturing", I work with a team of psychologists to investigate the effect of these devices on readers, using an empirical methodology developed at the University of Glasgow which studies how attentive readers are to small changes in the text when different stylistic features are presented. Overall, the talk will refer to a substantial body of empirical evidence showing the effects of attention-capturing and attention-burying devices which are commonly used for literary purposes and other rhetorical reasons (e.g. Emmott et al., 2006; Sanford et al., 2006; Sanford & Emmott, 2012).

### References

Emmott, C., & Alexander, M. (in press). Foregrounding, burying, and plot construction. In Stockwell, P. & Whiteley, S. (eds.) *The Handbook of Stylistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Emmott, C., Sanford, A. J., & Morrow, L. I. (2006). Capturing the attention of readers? Stylistic and psychological perspectives on the use and effect of text fragments in narratives. *Journal of Literary Semantics*, 35(1), 1-30.

Mukařovský, J. (1964). Standard language and poetic language. In P. L. Garvin (ed.) *A Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure and Style* (pp. 17-30). Georgetown, DC: Georgetown University Press. (First published in Czech in 1932.)

Sanford, A.J., & Emmott, C. (2012). *Mind, Brain and Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sanford, A. J., & Sturt, P. (2002). Depth of processing in language comprehension: Not noticing the evidence. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 6(9), 382-386.

Sanford, A. J. S., Sanford, A. J., Molle, J., & Emmott, C. (2006). Shallow processing and attention capture in written and spoken discourse. *Discourse Processes*, 42(2), 109-130.

## Section 2: *Attending to Images*

RAPHAEL ROSENBERG

Art History, University of Vienna

Eye Movements and the Attention on Paintings: Subjective Impressions and Objective Measurements

The connection between eye movement and aesthetic attention has already been described in antiquity. Since the fifteenth century an extensive body of literature describes the aesthetic properties of eye movements and this discourse continues in academic art history. The paper traces this literary tradition and confronts it with the results of eye tracking data registered and evaluated at my Laboratory for Cognitive Research in Art History in Vienna.

CARL PLANTINGA

Film and Media, Calvin College, Michigan

Sympathy and Threat: The Represented Face in Narrative Film

The representation of the face in moving photographic images is one key to the emotional power of narrative film. My earlier work in this regard concentrated on the human face in what I called the "scene of empathy," in which the pace of the narrative slows in order to rest on the close-up of a favored character's face in the throes of strongly-felt emotion. This talk will provide a brief overview of research on the face in film, then goes on to examine the represented face to signify threat in narrative film. Throughout the paper *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) will be used as the central example.

PAUL FROSH

The Smart Family Institute of Communications, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

The Aesthetics of Inattention: Thinking Beyond the Discrete Image

An unresolved paradox haunts the exploration of contemporary images: the contradiction between the corporeal dynamics of everyday visual inattention on the one hand, and the continued valorization of the discrete image on the other. Notwithstanding the widespread thesis that modern media-saturated societies are cultures of sensory distraction, overload, and indifference, much work in visual culture and media studies remains firmly focused on the discrete image as an isolable object of experience and analysis. This paper aims to move beyond the aesthetics of attention to the discrete image, exploring key questions along two separate but inter-related axes. The first - *the aesthetics of aggregation* - explores the implications of low-intensity, inattentive encounters with images across genres, media platforms and everyday reception contexts, particularly in the cases of photography and television. It examines how these encounters coalesce into composite figures and ensembles over extended periods of time, understanding individual images as fragments of dynamic image-assemblages rather than as self-sufficient unities. The second axis - *the aesthetics of operation* - investigates how the visual and haptic routines (mouse moving, cursor clicking, screen swiping etc.) of digital interfaces destabilize the possibilities for attentive encounters with discrete images, as viewers 'click through' or 'stroke through' digital images to other media objects.

## Section 3: *Attending to Language*

VYV EVANS

Linguistics, Bangor University

Towards a Grammar of Linguistic Attention

In this paper I consider the various strategies that language affords to direct the hearer/reader's attention. I begin by examining perceptual mechanisms for attention and perspective, and linguistic reflexes for these. I then consider the conventional resources a language's grammar provides to facilitate attention and perspective. I also consider the way language draws upon these resources in producing linguistically-mediated meaning construction. And finally, I consider implications of the findings for an aesthetics of attention with particular reference to Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*.

MATTHIAS SCHLESEWSKY

General Linguistics, Department of English and Linguistics, University of Mainz

Towards a Unified Neurobiological Model of Audition and Language

Can animal models inform the neurobiology of human language? While the animal model-derived notion of dual auditory streams is widely accepted, several influential language models dispute a unified functional-anatomical characterization of the two streams across species. In my talk, I will present a new approach that bridges the cross-species gap: information processing in the dorsal stream is defined in a unified manner for audition in monkeys and human language processing up to the sentence/discourse and text level

ANDREA E. MARTIN

School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences, University of Edinburgh

Some Consequences of a Limited Focus of Attention and Content-Addressable Memory for Language Processing

Language comprehension and production involve linking linguistic representations through time, via a noisy and fallible human information processing system. I will examine the relationship between measures of processing difficulty (reaction time, 'processing speed', and speed-accuracy tradeoff functions) and hypotheses about the architecture of human memory and attention for language comprehension. I will draw on examples from linguistic phenomena such as pronoun resolution, subject-verb dependencies, ellipsis, and "garden-path" main-verb/reduced-relative ambiguities. I will argue that evidence from the speed-accuracy tradeoff method support a particular structure for linguistic memory representations, and a cue-dependent "pointer"-like retrieval mechanism that is vulnerable to factors known to affect general memory performance.

## Section 4: Attending to Journalistic Multi-Modal Media

HANS-JÜRGEN BUCHER

Media Studies, University of Trier

Attention and Selectivity: What Eye Tracking Reveals about the Reception of Multimodal Media Discourse

Since the social semiotics' slogan "all texts are multimodal" has been applied to media discourses, audience research is confronted with some new questions. The first question arises from the complexity of multimodal orchestration of media discourse: how do recipients integrate different, often simultaneously presented, modes such as spoken and written language, pictures, movies, sounds, graphics, music, design into a coherent process of meaning-making? The second question refers to the cognitive overload multimodality could provoke: how do recipients reduce the complexity of multimodal discourse by selecting those semiotic symbols from the multimodal orchestration which are relevant for the meaning-making process? Both questions, the media-related and the recipient-related one, refer to the overall question of attention: how do recipients organize their attention in the process of meaning making? Within a multimodal approach to media the concepts of multimodality, selectivity and attention are therefore interdependent. To answer the mentioned questions the presentation will refer to results from empirical studies applying eye tracking and some other methods of audience research from different media genres such as web sites, videos, and newspapers.

KARL NIKOLAUS RENNER

Journalism, University of Mainz

Knowledge or Illusions of Knowledge? How to Create Appealing TV News

Back in the 1970s, the German communication researcher Bernward Wember was able to prove that numerous TV news do not impart knowledge, but illusions of knowledge. He focused on superficial production procedures that emphasize an appealing style to attract viewers' attention. Although he denounced this journalistic approach as eye-titillation ("Augenkitzel"), today these procedures are more popular than ever. As all TV journalists know, eye-catching pictures are needed to attract viewers' attention and to achieve the expected ratings. One of the key questions TV journalism is confronted with, therefore, is how journalists can avoid illusions of knowledge when using attractive pictures. One possible answer has been offered by communication research: Gavriel Salomon has demonstrated that positive learning effects depend on the mental effort that viewers are prepared to invest in the reception of TV news. By providing an example from the field of science journalism, the presentation explores the ways in which attractive pictures in TV news can be used to motivate viewers to increase their mental effort and to prevent the generation of illusions of knowledge.

MELANIE MAGIN / BIRGIT STARK

Media Studies / Communication Sciences, University of Mainz

Attention, Please! Tabloidization Trends in German and Austrian Newspapers

In times of growing commercialization and digitalization, it is often assumed that traditional mass media react to increasing economic pressure by providing more entertaining, more trivial, more visual, and oversimplified content. This supposed development – also known as tabloidization – aims to capture the audience's attention. However, our studies show that the tabloidization of German and Austrian quality newspapers over the last six decades (1949-2009) has not increased very strongly and only in some respects. Where trends of tabloidization can be found, they are temporally related to the introduction of commercial TV in Germany and to the rapid growth of tabloids in Austria. Moreover, there seem to be nationally different concepts of tabloid newspapers, maybe explained by different journalistic cultures and different economic concepts: Measured by topic, focus, visual style, and verbal style, the German tabloid *Bild* is quite strongly tabloidized, while the Austrian tabloid *Krone* is – surprisingly – somewhat less tabloidized than the quality papers *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Der Standard*, presumably due to its 'peoples' newspaper strategy'.