

# Call for Papers: „Bilderrätsel des gesprungenen Bewußtseins“ / Modernism and the Beginnings of Visual Culture (1890-1938)

An international conference

Organised by the Institute of Germanic & Romance Studies in collaboration with the DFG-research group 593 "Anfänge (in) der Moderne", Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich

Venue: Institute of Germanic & Romance Studies, University of London, UK  
17 - 18 May 2012

Deadline for Submissions: 15 September 2011

## Keynote Speakers:

Erica Carter (King's College London); Whitney Davis (UC Berkeley); Sabine Hake (University of Texas, Austin); Susanne Hauser (Universität der Künste Berlin)

Looking back in 1935 Ernst Bloch describes Modernism as "Bilderrätsel des gesprungenen Bewußtseins", or "rebus/enigma of a split consciousness". His dictum connects the material and social with the psychic side of modernization; it connects its elusiveness with its visibility. Béla Balázs's influential book *Der sichtbare Mensch* (*Visible Man*, 1924) made it finally clear that Modernism begins to define and describe itself as a profoundly visual culture. This conference sets out to trace the material and social preconditions of this particular visual self-perception and -definition and aims to reconstruct its genesis. It will also focus on emerging theoretical framework of this self-perception.

The theme will be explored in four main strands:

1. "Rebuses" of Modernism
2. Rise of the visible, disappearance of the evident, discourses on things never before seen
3. Grotesque bodies, "split consciousness"
4. Early theories of visual culture

1. Here the conference pursues the enigmas culture discussed in order to arrive at a self-definition. Examples for such "rebuses" include: the emerging Modernism in the fine arts and the sciences, or reforms in the theatre and in town planning; but also popular culture with the emergence of film on the basis of photographic processes and the training of physiological and psychological perception, as well as the popularity of New Dance and a new exhibition culture. Attention and distraction were above all provoked by the fraught excitement of acceleration and the heady mixture of everything from old to new, high to low.

2. Besides the phenomenological survey, the rise of the visible should be explored through examples of selected practices, works and oeuvres. We aim to trace the interplay of the appearance of what had always been invisible with the disappearance of what had always been evident as well as the emergence of discussions of things never seen before. An archaeology of 'Modernism' as a visual culture is hence also interested in how cultural practice interacts with its discursive perception and eloquent commentary, how the 'seeable' interacts with the 'sayable'.

3. Bloch's dictum draws attention to how this visual culture is favoured, prescribed and produced by shifts in the concepts of the human being as moving and grotesquely distorted body with a "split consciousness", in which art and criticism, science and literature cross over and merge.

4. Modern society tentatively produces diverse approaches in order to solve the complexity of the multiple "pictorial enigmas". Since the 1920s these have become increasingly elaborate and merged in a theory of visual (film) culture (Balázs), in a comprehensive archive of images and gestures as emotional formulas (Warburg), in early theories of image media (Arnheim, Benjamin), or initial reflections of iconology (Panofsky).

[The conference also includes a post-graduate workshop which will offer students the opportunity to discuss their projects with the keynote speakers.]

Please send abstracts (max. 200 words) for papers of 30 minutes in English or German no later than 15 September 2011 to [Gustav.Frank@lmu.de](mailto:Gustav.Frank@lmu.de)