

The Non-Medium Specificity of ‘Graphicality’

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Writing in the 1840s, the celebrated American Gothic author Edgar Allan Poe coined the term ‘graphicality’ to describe the manner in which his short stories could ‘paint’ striking, or even startling, images in the minds of his readers. It is equally known that the ‘graphicality’ of Poe’s essays and tales inspired a number of 19th-century European modernists, including Charles Baudelaire, Edouard Manet, and Paul Gauguin, to name only a few.

Given the importance of Poe’s theory to the field of American literature, as well as to the development of French modern literature and painting, this panel seeks to expand the legacy of ‘graphicality’ as a non-medium specific principle across European modernism, especially in the literary, visual, and performing arts.

Speakers and Abstracts

Nordic Symbolist & Art Nouveau Artists and the Synthetic Inter-mediality

Birte Bruchmüller (University of Gothenburg)

‘As music is the poetry of sound, so is painting the poetry of sight’. These words of James McNeill Whistler demonstrate a holistic and synergistic understanding of art forms, similar to the notion of the total work of art, which was highly prevalent in modernist, European art scenes at the turn of the 20th century. Artistic phenomena, such as the French 19th-century illustrated novel, the revival of the bookcraft, and the pictorial rendering of literary sources, are some examples to be mentioned here that either combine different art media, or connect media-specific elements to other conventionally distinct mediums.

Edgar Allan Poe’s term ‘graphicality’ emanates from such a transgression, as well as from a synaesthetic effect of different art forms and media. As a precursor of the modernist-symbolist movement, he had a great impact on the development of Charles Baudelaire’s aesthetic programme and his writing was, beside Baudelaire’s, a crucial literary point of origin for some cosmopolitan Nordic authors and visual artists, including Tyra Kleen.

This paper aims to explore the thematical, formal and cognitive amalgamations of illustrated novels, poem illustrations, frontispieces, etc. of Parisian- and Rome-based Nordic artists, such as Kleen, Ellen Thesleff and Magnus Enckell. This paper considers the following questions: In which ways do the lettering, pictorial and typographical elements relate to one another? To what extent are illustrative, pictorial qualities evoked in these artists’ inter-medial artworks?

Graphicality and the Objective Correlative: The audience’s role in Expressionist theatre

Kathryn Keck (University of Glasgow)

This paper will examine the audience reception of Expressionist theatre through the concepts of ‘graphicality’, as posited by Edgar Allen Poe, and TS Eliot’s ‘objective correlative’. Expressionist drama evokes Poe’s concept of graphicality in that it intends for the audience to impose their own opinions and experiences on the minimalist skeleton of the play’s sensory elements, in order to produce a narrative whole.

In the Expressionistic theatre movements of Germany and the United States, in-depth characterisation and narrative details are subjugated in favour of illustrating difficult socio-political concepts through vague but suggestive dramatic tableaux, featuring archetypical caricatures. In many cases, these plays served to provoke some sense of the unease of the modern world; in Germany, this often took shape in the modernist struggle against past and patrimony, while in the United States, the plays often also carried a racial narrative.

In the structure of the play itself, Expressionist theatre defies TS Eliot's 'objective correlative': the concept that emotion should exist in logical proportion to, and be prompted by, a clear set of objects or chain of events that is familiar to the viewer. The lack of logical progression in Expressionist drama does not obey this concept. However, the intent of Expressionist plays is to invoke specific emotions in the audience, which aligns with the objective correlative. Both concepts position audience reception as vital to the interpretation of the work, a perspective relatively uncommon in the study of the arts, which tends to prioritise the artist's intent.

Getting Inside Letters: Graphicality as engine of abstraction in Poe, Peirce, and Veuhoff

Jonathan Elmer (Indiana University)

In Poe's review of Margaret Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes*, vividness of picture painting (what we might normally think of as 'graphic') is actually only a first step in the incorporation of the reader in a vague but emotionally intense atmosphere. Fuller's graphicality 'springs from her subjectiveness, which leads her to paint a scene less by its features than by its effects'. This view of the graphic accords with Anne Hollander's argument that the graphic is a technique for moving viewers from the outside, in which perspicuousness of image arrests attention, to the inside, in which we are immersed in powerful but vague emotional response.

This paper will explore this dynamic of abstraction not through graphic images or illustration (see Redon, for example) or effective word painting, but rather by attention to the graphicality of the medium of writing itself, the written, drawn, or published letters that we often 'look through', but that Poe made perspicuous in various ways. I will consider Poe's typographic *jeu d'esprit*, 'X-ing a Paragrab', and then look at two later engagements with Poe's work, a series of transcriptions of 'The Raven' produced by philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce in the 1890s, and an artist's book by Heinz Veuhoff of 1963.

A Journey that Wasn't: Pierre Huyghe's Graphic Film

Megan Hines (Stony Brook University)

This paper explores the influence of Edgar Allan Poe's novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838) on Pierre Huyghe's intermedia spectacle *A Journey that Wasn't* (2005). Huyghe has expressly stated his interest in Poe's unusual novel, one of science fiction's forbearers. Both use a mix of fact and fiction to tell the tale of a harrowing trip to the Antarctic. Yet Pym did more than just provide a narrative arc for Huyghe's 'documentary' about the impact of climate change on the South Pole. Poe's only novel offered a conceptual foundation from which Huyghe's project built its critical stance. Seen through the lens of Poe's concept of graphicality, *A Journey that Wasn't* is more than a postmodern take on film's post-medium condition. By combining film and performance in an immersive exhibition, it affirms the necessity of 'seeing' climate change, while undermining science's exclusive claim on truth.

As a filmic documentary, *A Journey that Wasn't* presents itself in the guise of a scientific expedition. Yet, as in Poe's novel, narrative slippages unsettle the viewer's trust in film's ability to construct a rational sequence of events. Huyghe is not out to discredit the science of climate change. On the contrary, he feels keenly the need for compelling images of its global impact. Building on Bruno Latour's call for a renewed look at agency in the Anthropocene, I argue that *A Journey That Wasn't* insists we see through worldviews not our own, a task unimaginable without Poe's graphicality.