Being Modern
Science and Culture in the Early 20th Century

22-24 April 2015
Institute of Historical Research, London
Conference programme

Institute of Historical Research
University of London
Senate House, Malet Street
London WC1E 7HU
“What proofs did Bloom adduce that his tendency was towards applied, rather than toward pure, science?” Joyce, Ulysses

About the conference

Engagement with science was commonly used as an emblem of “Being modern”, across culture in Britain and the western world in the years around the First World War. Electricity, the wireless and the aeroplane as well as new theories — not just of physics but also psychoanalysis — were associated in the public mind with exciting, and sometimes threatening, developments. The associations were not always positive, relativity and quantum theories put understanding of natural phenomena beyond common sense, while the wartime use of poison gas was, for many, an emblem of how scientific knowledge was outstripping the ethical and political apparatus needed to manage it well. This conference will be held on the exact centenary of the first use of poison gas on the Western Front.

Today, historical studies of literature, art, design, lifestyle and consumption as well as of the human sciences are exploring intensively, but frequently separately, on that talk of “science”. Historians of science are exploring the interpenetration of discourse in the public sphere and expert communities. This pioneering interdisciplinary conference is therefore planned to bring together people who do not normally meet in the same space. Scholars from a range of disciplines will explore how the complex interpretations of science affected the re-creation of what it was to be modern.
Wednesday 22 April

9.30-9.50am Registration and refreshments

9.50-10am Welcome from Professor Lawrence Goldman, Director, Institute of Historical Research

10-11am Modernity, Modernism and the Influences of Science – chaired by Judi Loach

Robert Bud, Science Museum
‘Modernity and the ambivalent significance of applied science: motors, wireless, telephones and poison gas’

Morag Shiach, QMUL
‘Woolf’s atom, Eliot’s catalyst and other linguistic metaphors’

11am-12pm Low Moderns: Literature and the History of Science – chaired by Frank James

Jonathan Cranfield, Liverpool John Moores University
‘Danger! Weapons, mass destruction and the First World War in the Strand magazine’

Peter J. Bowler, Queen’s University Belfast
‘Modernity in magazines: the vision of technical progress in interwar popular science magazines’

Charlotte Sleigh, University of Kent
‘Engineering fiction in the 1930s’

12-1.30pm Lunch

1.30-2.30pm Mathematics in Literature and Design – chaired by Tim Benton

Tim Armstrong, RHUL
‘A tranfinite syntax: modernism and mathematics’

Lewis Pyenson, Western Michigan University
‘Neo-idealistic style in modernity: interior design and mathematical models’

2.30-3.30pm Modernity in Different Media – chaired by Scott Anthony

Tim Boon, Science Museum
‘The sound and vision of industrial modernity’

Nina Engelhardt, University of Cologne
‘Modern by numbers: modern mathematics as model for literary modernism’

3.30-4pm Tea and coffee

4-4.30pm Disciplining Literature: Science, Study, and Practice – chaired by Craig Gordon

Kevin Brazil, Oxford University
‘Modernist literature as a modern discipline’

Alice Barnford, Cambridge University
‘Exactitude and epistemic grace: modernist literary criticism and the sciences’

4.30-5.30pm Science and the History of Science – chaired by Michael Whitworth

Jeff Hughes, University of Manchester
‘Interwar nuclear modernity’

Frank James, Royal Institution and UCL
‘A paradox of modernity: history of science before 1950’

5.30pm Close
Thursday 23 April

9.30-10am
Registration and refreshments

10-11am
The Modern Being – chaired by Ruth Oldenziel
Mitchell Ash, University of Vienna
‘Multiple modernisms in concert: the sciences, technology and culture in Vienna around 1900’
Rachel Bowby, Princeton University and UCL
‘The Psychological Moment: The Craze for Psychology in the Early Twentieth Century’

11am-12pm
Modernity and the Self – chaired by Mitchell Ash
Tracey Loughran, Cardiff University
‘Graham Greene, psychoanalysis and the “modern” in interwar Britain’
Caterina Albano, University of the Arts, London
‘Memory, modernity and the moving image’

12-1.30pm Lunch

1.30-2.30pm
The Modern World – chaired by Jeff Hughes
David Matless, University of Nottingham
‘Landscape and the modern’
Jonathan Woodham, University of Brighton
‘Design and science fiction’

2.30-3.30pm
War, Mathematics and Nature – chaired by Morag Shiach
Chika Tonooka, University of Cambridge
‘Science and the Edwardian cult of “efficiency”: the impact of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5)’
Jocelyn Rodal, University of California, Berkeley
‘The Mathematics of Modernism’
Michael Guida, University of Sussex
‘Nature cure: birdsong on the wireless during the Second World War’

3.30-4pm Tea and coffee

4-5pm
Evolutionary Imaginaries: Science and Ideology in Modern Culture – chaired by David Matless
Annebella Pollen, University of Brighton
‘“More modern than the moderns”: Performing cultural evolution in the Kibbo Kift Kindred’
Fay Brauer, University of East London
‘Imagining Dangerous Doubles: Degenerate and Regenerate Body Photography in Karl Pearson’s Modern Eugenics’
Donna Roberts, Independent Scholar

5-6pm
Thinking Modern – chaired by Lewis Pyenson
Michael Whitworth, Oxford University
‘The value of science in modernist poetry’
Craig Gordon, University of Ottawa
‘Organicism in the modern world: from Lawrence & Lewis to Bergson & Whitehead’

6pm Close
9.30-10am
Registration and refreshments

10-11am
Modernity and the built environment – chaired by Chris Breward
Judi Loach, University of Cardiff
‘Architecture, mathematics and purity’

Tim Benton, Open University
“I am attracted to the natural order of things”; Le Corbusier’s return to nature.

11am-12pm
Questioning in Modernity – chaired by Rachel Bowby
Javier Pérez Jara, University of Cambridge
‘From golden age to apocalypse: science chez Bertrand Russell before and after the Great War’

Andreas Killen, CUNY
‘Experimentalizing the self in Weimar Germany’

Hilary Hinds, Lancaster University
‘Science in the bedroom: twin beds and modern marriage’

12-1.30pm Lunch

1.30-2.30pm
Living Modern – chaired by Esther Leslie
Ruth Oldenziel, Technical University of Eindhoven
‘Whose modernism, whose speed? Designing mobility for the future, 1900 – 1945’

Chris Breward, Edinburgh School of Art
‘Fashion and modernity: suiting the present’

2.30-3.30pm
Remaking Nations in Modernity – chaired by Katy Price
Rajive Tiwari, Belmont Abbey College
‘Science, modernity and religion in colonial India’

Amparo Gómez Rodríguez, Universidad de la Laguna
‘Yearning for modernity: the Spanish social contract for science’

Marcus Brittain, University of Cambridge
‘Making peace with the past: archaeology and legitimacy in post-war Britain’

3.30-4pm Tea and coffee

4-5pm
Thinking Modern with Science – chaired by Jonathan Woodham
Esther Leslie, Birkbeck University
‘Liquid crystal lives in modernist Europe’

Katy Price, QMUL
‘Prophecy, heredity and the mise-en-abyme of modernity’

5-5.15pm
Concluding remarks by Paul Greenhalgh, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts

5.15pm Close
Ensemble BPM presents Three Tales, a video opera exploring three momentous scientific events from the twentieth century that examines our deepening relationship with technology; the crash of the Hindenburg zeppelin in 1937, nuclear bomb tests on Bikini Atoll in 1946–1958, and the cloning of Dolly the Sheep in 1996.

It features live orchestra and singers, sampled audio, re-processed historical film and interviews with prescient cultural thinkers to create an immersive piece of multimedia that examines technology’s growing dominance in society.

It was created by Grammy Award-winning composer Steve Reich – whose work has influenced countless artists and composers including John Adams, Brian Eno and Sufjan Stevens – and pioneering video artist Beryl Korot.
'A concentrated and vivid performance. A bold and impressive achievement indeed.' (The Stage on Ensemble BPM's production at Tête à Tête: The Opera Festival 2010)

The production is conducted by Artistic Director Nick Sutcliffe, directed by Matthew Eberhardt and produced by Amanda Carrick. It is supported by the Science Museum, Arts Council England and The Hinrichsen Foundation.

The work is presented in association with a conference at the Institute of Historical Research entitled Being Modern: Science and Culture in the Early Twentieth Century, led by Dr Robert Bud, Keeper of Science and Medicine at the Science Museum. Performances take place on 22 and 24 April 2015 – the former date marking the centenary of the first use of chemical weapons in warfare.

Credits
Music: Steve Reich & Video: Beryl Korot
Singers: Synergy Vocals
Artistic & Musical Director: Nick Sutcliffe
Stage Director: Matthew Eberhardt
Producer: Amanda Carrick
Designer: Gill Denny
Production Manager: Ben Hosford
Ensemble BPM

Founded in 2010, Ensemble BPM specialises in the creation of contemporary musical multimedia, embracing the inseparability of musical and theatrical thought. Collaborating with both emerging and established artists, we create vivid, accessible and immersive works of art that reflect the pace and flux of modern cultural life. Our work aims to illuminate the sights and sounds of an increasingly complex world. ensemblebpm.com

Ensemble BPM will be joined in performance by Synergy Vocals, the world-renowned vocal collective selected by Steve Reich to premiere the work in 2002, led by former Swingle Singer Micaela Haslam.

Ensemble BPM is only the second group to stage Three Tales since the work’s 2002 premiere. It’s showing at the Science Museum’s IMAX Theatre for two nights only and also features a Q&A. Details of the speakers are to follow.
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www.london.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/home/map.pdf