

Biennial conference of the
Swiss Association for North American Studies (SANAS)

AMERICAN AESTHETICS

10-11 November 2006
University of Geneva, Switzerland

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

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Thursday 9 November :

16h-18h: **early registration** and **aperitif** *first floor*, Uni-Bastions, 5 rue de Candolle

Friday 10 November

08h: **Registration** *first floor*, Uni-Bastions, 5 rue de Candolle

Panels: Café des Philosophes, 5 rue Prévost-Martin, conference room, 1st floor

08.20 **Welcome**

08.30 **PANEL 1: Aesthetics, the Gothic, and Death**

1. "Et in Arcadia Ego: The Aesthetics of Suburbia in Jeffrey Eugenides' Virgin Suicides"

Martin Heusser, University of Zurich

2. "Ghost Dances: The Gothic Aesthetics in Gerald Vizenor's Chancers"

Iping Liang, National Taiwan Normal University

3. "The Novel as Turbulent Flow: William Gaddis's Carpenter's Gothic"

Simone Pellerin, Université Paul-Valéry – Montpellier III

10h **Coffee**

10.30h **PANEL 2: Modern(ist) Aesthetics**

1. "American Decadence"

Jerusha Hull McCormack, Emeritus Professor, University College Dublin

2. "Gender, Poe, and Modernist Aesthetics"

Agnieszka Soltysik, University of Lausanne

3. "Urban Aesthetics: Movement as Performative Utterance"

Christina Lungberg, University of Zurich

12h **LUNCH**

14h **PANEL 3:** Henry David Thoreau Between Science and Aesthetics

1. "The Aesthetics of Thoreau's Journals"

Francois Specq, University of Lyon 2

2. "Aesthetics of Immanence and Transcendence in Thoreau's 'A Winter Walk' "

Henrik Otterberg, University of Gottenberg

3. "Rousseau, Thoreau and the Aesthetics of Romantic Taxonomy"

Patrick Vincent, University of Neuchatel

15.30 **Coffee**

16h **PANEL 4:** Aesthetics and Trauma

1. "The Aesthetics of Illness: Narratives as Empowerment"

Franziska Gygax, University of Basel

2. "The Death-Hymn of the Perfect Tree: Some Observations on Post-Apocalyptic Presence in Ralph Waldo Emerson's Early Poetry"

Claude Ziltener, University of Basel

3. "Aesthetics of Violence / Violence of Aesthetics: Some Remarks on the Cultural Work of Aestheticization in Late Twentieth-Century American Civilization"

Hartwig Isernhagen, Emeritus Professor, University of Basel

17.30 **Break**

18h **KEYNOTE ADDRESS** room B106 (first floor, Uni-Bastions)

Professor Gerald Vizenor, University of New Mexico,
"Genocide Tribunals: Native Rights and Survivance"

20h **CONFERENCE DINNER**

Saturday 11 November

Panels: room B106 (first floor, Uni-Bastions)

8.30 **PANEL 5:** Literary/Philosophical Approaches to Aesthetics

1. "The Aesthetics of Difference: American Dissent and Anti-Humanism"

Sami Ludwig, University of Haute-Alsace

2. "Aesthetics and Pragmatism"

Robert Chodat, Boston University

3. "The Lies of Fiction: Early American Novels and the Return of Aesthetics"

Philipp Schweighauser, University of Bern

10h **Coffee**

10.30h **"BRAINSTORMING" FORUM**

Michael Rössli, University of Geneva

Nida Surber, University of Fribourg

James Mackay, University of Glasgow

12h **LUNCH**

Panels: Bâtiment des Philosophes, 22 boulevard des Philosophes, room 111 (1st floor)

14h **PANEL 6:** Re-Orienting American Aesthetics

1. "Chinese Narratives and American Narrative Aesthetics"

Jay Blair, Emeritus Professor University of Geneva

2. Sensations: The Hypertrophy of the Aesthetic in Philip Roth's Everyman

Thomas Austenfeld, University of Fribourg

3. "Making America: The Narrative Structure of the Early Italian American Novel"

Francesca de Lucia, St. Hugh's College, Oxford

15.30 **SANAS AGM**

All items for the AGM agenda should reach Professor Deborah Madsen

Deborah.Madsen@lettres.unige.ch by Friday 10 November, please.

ABSTRACTS

KEYNOTE LECTURE:

"Genocide Tribunals: Native Rights and Survivance"

Gerald Vizenor, University of New Mexico;
Emeritus Professor, University of California Berkeley

Genocide Tribunals advocates for criminal tribunals in California, Minnesota, South Dakota, and many other states in the United States of America. The formal tribunals, based on international criminal law and sponsored by state universities, would hear testimony and consider documents and various sources of evidence in absentia about incitement and crimes against humanity, and the genocide of Native American Indians. The evidence, documents, and testimony presented at these tribunals would expose the deniers of genocide, and create a reliable historical narrative of survivance of Native American Indians.

PANEL 1: Aesthetics, the Gothic, and Death

"Et in Arcadia Ego: The Aesthetics of Suburbia in Jeffrey Eugenides' Virgin Suicides"
Martin Heusser, University of Zurich

Eugenides' *Virgin Suicides*, I will be arguing, is essentially a pastoral – suburbia being Arcadia and the memory of the deceased girls the yearning for the Golden Age. As in the paintings by Guercino and Poussin "Et in Arcadia ego" refers to the intrusion of death into the unreal idyllic bourgeois life of postwar American suburbia. The Latin motto, and with this Eugenides' social critique, is both *memento mori* and elegiac meditation. It describes, in other words, a society whose only "real" contact with reality is death, a society which is unable to face basic ontological questions and which is forever stalled in the meditation of an irretrievably lost beautiful past. Characteristically, escape seems the only way to deal with life for the overwhelming majority of the characters in the novel: for the five Lisbon girls who flee into death, for their parents who move away, and for the we-narrator(s) with their obsessive concern with the (re-)construction of the truth about the Lisbon sisters – in the teeth of the realization that they will "never find the pieces to put them back together".

"Ghost Dances: The Gothic Aesthetics in Gerald Vizenor's Chancers"
Iping Liang, National Taiwan Normal University

NO ABSTRACT RECEIVED

"The Novel as Turbulent Flow: William Gaddis's Carpenter's Gothic"
Simone Pellerin, Université Paul-Valéry – Montpellier III

In this paper, my purpose is to examine the specific aesthetics of an "exterior monologue" in the novel, as the outcome of a deliberate, even if at times elusive, figuration of lack of control, loss of vigor, and confusion. First, through a close study of the images of water, flow—and stopped flow—, of incontinence, I will consider in what way those images are linked both to the overall structure of the novel with its refractions at the level of sentence building, and to a network of other recurrent tropes. Secondly, I plan to examine how those very pointed literary choices, as types of representational strategies, are related to the political stance the novel takes about contemporary American society, hence are ultimately linked to the literary tradition of the country.

PANEL 2: Modern(ist) Aesthetics

"American Decadence"

Jerusha Hull McCormack, Emeritus Professor, University College Dublin

"It is true that we are in the last years of a definite period, on that decline that precedes the opening of a new epoch." Ralph A. Cram

Over the last thirty years, a great deal of attention has been paid to the English 1890s as a decade during which artists branded as "decadent" revolted against the values of late Victorianism to usher in the new aesthetics of modernism. Yet little or no attention has been paid to a cognate development in America – ironic since the great modernists, such as Pound and Eliot, Hart Crane and Wallace Stevens – were literally grounded in the American 1890s. In America this was expressed less as a coherent movement than as an aesthetic shift that in many ways resembled the syndrome of English "decadence." Oscar Wilde's visit to America in 1881 provided a rallying point for the incipient aesthetic movement, particularly in East Coast America. After his return to America, Wilde took on much of the resident American painter J. M. Whistler's aestheticism and turned it, by a kind of psychic ju-jitsu, into a public weapon with which to satirize the middle class. Meanwhile in New England – that home of the Puritan – Ralph Ellis Cram (1863 – 1942) initiated new aesthetic standards in the architecture of Gothic revivalist churches such as St. Thomas on Fifth Avenue in New York. Identified as part of "Boston Bohemia," Cram became the centre of an artistic circle which included the poets Richard Hovey, Bliss Cameron and Louise Guiney, the book designer Bernard Goodhue, and the photographer Fred Holland Day who discovered, in turn, Khalil Gibran. Given its wide range of influence and espousal of "decadent" values as a way of asserting aristocratic style against a rising tide of vulgarity, Cram's circle offers a useful focus for analyzing the new aesthetic values of the American 1890s which were instrumental in ushering in artistic modernity.

"Gender, Poe, and Modernist Aesthetics"

Agnieszka Soltysik, University of Lausanne

This paper will explore some of the ways unexamined assumptions about gender can inform criticism and aesthetic judgment. My focus will be on Edgar Allan Poe and the way in which hostility or suspicion about the value of his work is often couched in the language of psychosexual normativity. For example, Eliot describes his writing as "puerile" and "slipshod," James describes Poe as lacking in seriousness and fit for people at a "primitive" stage of reflection, and Aldous Huxley describes Poe's poetry as the textual equivalent of "wearing rings on every finger." My point of departure then is the observation that these male modernists appear to be reacting to what they perceive as a failed performance of masculinity, defined implicitly as maturity, dignity, and above all, self-mastery. I will use the example of Poe as a point of entry into the question of modernist aesthetics in general and the gender politics that inform them in the context of American literature. A corollary concern will be the New Critics and its reconfiguration of German and French modern aesthetic theory into the cultural context of early twentieth century America (the period in which negative critical reception of Poe peaked).

"Making America: The Narrative Structure of the Early Italian American Novel"

Francesca de Lucia, St. Hugh's College, Oxford

This paper investigates the development of the Italian American novel in the 1930s, illustrating how novelists of Italian descent combined in their works elements of their ancestral culture with those of the mainstream environment. I intend to use two key authors as case studies: Pietro di Donato and John Fante. Both display the traits of early twentieth-century tradition of the immigrant novel as well as specifically Italian American motifs and the influence of the wider literary trends of the time. While Di Donato's *Christ in Concrete* and Fante's *Wait Until Spring, Bandini!* are different in terms of style and narrative tone, they also present a certain number of similarities, since they both focus on the growth of the second generation individual and offer a detailed psychological and social portrayal of the Southern Italian immigrant family. From this point of view, these texts bear the influence of what Michael Denning has defined as the "ghetto pastoral", that is, an insider's perspective of the immigrant milieu that became a widespread literary form in the 1920s and 1930s. In this context, they can also be considered as developments of the genre of the Depression-era proletarian novel, exemplified by Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. More specifically, *Christ in Concrete* and *Wait Until Spring, Bandini!* express the central Italian American founding myth, which sees the Italian immigrant contemporarily

as a divine fabricator of the New World and as a Christ-like martyr. These two contrasting aspects derive, as suggested by Robert Viscusi, respectively from the legendary part played by Italian explorers such as Columbus and Vespucci and by the situation of oppression and marginalization endured by Italian immigrants in the United States. The study of these different narrative strands allows the observation of the development of the Italian American novel as a hybrid cultural product, encompassing disparate literary trends.

PANEL 3: Henry David Thoreau Between Science and Aesthetics

"The Aesthetics of Thoreau's Journals"

Francois Specq, University of Lyon 2

Henry David Thoreau kept a singular sort of journal. Far from keeping an intimate diary devoted to analyzing the twists and turns of individual personality, the author of *Walden* considered it his sole purpose, it seems, to explore the nature of the area surrounding Concord, Massachusetts. Maintained with admirable energy and steadfastness during 25 years of adult life—from 1837 to 1861—, his *Journal* actually possesses an uncommon dimension far exceeding its geographical and thematic limits. The interrogation of the same place patiently undertaken day after day, the resulting density, the methodical mining of reality, clearly prove that Thoreau's object is not the knowledge of nature as such, but an ontological and existential confrontation with the world.

"Aesthetics of Immanence and Transcendence in Thoreau's 'A Winter Walk' "

Henrik Otterberg, University of Gottenberg

While several studies to date have tracked Thoreau's influences from scientists professional and amateur - Goethe, Humboldt, Agassiz among them - and above all related them to his 'mature' writings of the 1850's and on, I wish to discuss some relevant aspects of his early nature essay "A Winter Walk" (1843). Consensus would have it that Thoreau here evinces little more than an Emersonian and hence transcendentalist frame of mind, rejecting formal science - what Thoreau elsewhere called "the Baconian" - outright. Close reading of Thoreau's early essay, however, arguably reveals a fledgling openness to formal, positivist inquiry - and more fundamentally to an interest in nature's primarily presenting an immanent order, regardless the idealist philosophy brought to bear upon it.

"Rousseau, Thoreau and the Aesthetics of Romantic Taxonomy"

Patrick Vincent, University of Neuchatel

Wordsworth's "We murder to dissect" has become shorthand for the Romantic opposition to science, in particular to Linnaeus' "artificial" or downward system of taxonomy. At the same time, many writers in this period, most notably Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Henry David Thoreau, were fervent botanists and adepts of the Linnaean system. Their writings on botany come at the very beginning and at the end of an intense century of taxonomic activity bracketed by Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* (1758) and Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859). Seeking to map out diversity in order to discover a natural order of creation, botanists ran into similar epistemological issues as in philosophy and in aesthetics. This paper will focus on the tension between essentialism and nominalism in Rousseau's late writings and Thoreau's journal entries of the early 1850s, reading Thoreau via Rousseau and asking what each writer both found useful and rejected in Linnaean taxonomy.

PANEL 4: Aesthetics and Trauma

"The Aesthetics of Illness: Narratives as Empowerment"

Franziska Gyax, University of Basel

In the recent past a great number of autobiographical accounts on life-threatening illnesses such as cancer or AIDS have appeared. These so-called autopathographies frequently deal with the autobiographer's attempt at creating some sense of time and/or sequence, and, if possible, with the search for a new order, reason, and sense of life. Stories about illness in particular demonstrate the way we create meaning through narrative because the experience of such a life-threatening illness calls for a (re)construction of our vulnerable self. In my paper I would like to explore some challenging ways in which autobiographical texts about the experience of cancer and AIDS can be called intriguing

aesthetic projects because they often use highly unconventional narrative structures to express the suffering, pain, and anxiety. I will focus on Audre Lorde's well-known *Cancer Journals*, Nikki Giovanni's short text "A Deer in Headlights," and on Paul Monette's *Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir*. The paper will discuss the aesthetics of the personal narrative and relate it to the cultural and social implications of illness.

"The Death-Hymn of the Perfect Tree: Some Observations on Post-Apocalyptic Presence in Ralph Waldo Emerson's Early Poetry"

Claude Ziltener, University of Basel

In his essay "Experience" Emerson observes that "[w]e live amid surfaces," and that "the true art of life is to skate well on them." The realization that often we cannot penetrate the physical appearances of things in order to reach a metaphysical realm of ideas was deeply unsettling for Emerson whose ambition it was to interpret the visible changes of the present as the apocalyptic sign of an invisible future order. Emerson identifies this gap between the mind and the world with the fall from paradise which can only be overcome by the intellectual revelations of the genius-poet. In this paper I will argue that the motif of the fall is a rhetorical device which helps to solve the tensions between the apocalyptic depths of the intellect and the post-apocalyptic aesthetics of surfaces. According to an apocalyptic interpretation the fall promises a return to the eternal presence of nature which, however, is rendered problematic by the discrepancy between imagination and expression. In contrast, a post-apocalyptic reading interprets the fall as the moment when the imaginative union between narrator and reader is disrupted by the experience of narrative discontinuity. What remains open to debate is the question whether or not this moment of narrative crisis increases our faith in the transhuman spirit which, Emerson tells us, "communicates without speech." My discussion of the motif of the fall is embedded in a larger discourse on aesthetics opened up by Kant's interpretation of the sublime as the apocalypse of the mind in the *Third Critique* on the one hand, and de Man's interpretation of the Kantian sublime as a post-apocalyptic, linguistic event on the other.

"Aesthetics of Violence / Violence of Aesthetics: Some Remarks on the Cultural Work of Aestheticization in Late Twentieth-Century American Civilization"

Hartwig Isernhagen, Emeritus Professor, University of Basel

The generalizing statement that 'American culture is violent' recurs in everyday and not-so-everyday discourse in the US. Its scope is broad: from Schumpeterian reflections on *creative destruction* to comments on the widening gap between rich and poor to legitimations of imperialist habits of mind and action. It is only to be expected that in this climate of self-reflection the theorization of power that was central to so much thinking in the last third of the twentieth century would take on characteristic shapes that deserve comment. One such shape is the aestheticization of 'American violence.' This essay will briefly sketch the historical background of associations between the American and power-as-violence that comprises items as diverse as the postulate of a specifically American sublime and allusions to an imperial classicism that are pervasive in United States architecture. It will focus on the recurrence, in dominant forms of late twentieth-century American literary and cultural criticism, of a mental gesture or *habitus* that culturalizes, verbalizes, and finally aestheticizes power. It will, in this manner, find in them an 'aesthetics of violence' that goes far beyond what is normally discussed under that heading. This is to say, too, that it will not accept the frequently promulgated reading of the period in question as being characterized by a 'sociological approach' that constitutes a 'loss of aesthetics.' (If we do currently have a 'recovery of the aesthetic,' we have it in a different, very restricted sense.) This essay will also argue that such aestheticization is in itself an instance of social and cultural violence—epistemologically, in so far as it elides crucial ontological borders, such as (notably) that between material and non-material violence, and thus also sociologically, ideologically, and politically (ultimately, perhaps, morally), in so far as it obscures the kinds, loci and pathways of specific forms of power and thereby creates what we would formerly have called *false consciousness*.

PANEL 5: Literary/Philosophical Approaches to Aesthetics

"The Aesthetics of Difference: American Dissent and Anti-Humanism" Sami Ludwig, University of Haute-Alsace

In this paper I would like to discuss American gestures of oppositionalism and negation as they have manifested themselves throughout history, tracing a line from Puritan "dissent" and "non-conformity" to the disobedience and sentimentalist reforms of the American Renaissance and the discourse of poststructuralist "alterity" of the 20th century. Whereas the American Enlightenment was from the beginning infused with Protestant ideas (such as the notion of "LIBERTY") that paralleled a political emancipation with a spiritual one, the Enlightened discourse of the Young Republic lost much of its influence after the Second Great Awakening and in the fight against slavery, when abolitionist noticed major shortcomings of the US Constitution, which condoned slavery. It is first of all important to take note of some of these anti-rational, anti-humanist and anti-Enlightenment arguments in the early nineteenth century. Once we are aware of this, it may be interesting to connect this to the overwhelming success in the US of the Frankfurt School and its association of the Enlightenment with the development of Fascism. My point is that a European school of thought that discredited the Enlightenment was easily accepted in the US because it simply reconfirmed reservations about the Enlightenment that Americans had had before already. Thus there may be a line of development from early religious oppositionalism via different stations all the way to poststructuralist theorizing efforts to create conceptual negativity, alterity, and and other systems that are rooted in some proto-metaphysical conceptualist rhetoric. There is a long tradition of Enlightenment-bashing in the US. Sources: Katherine Hayles, Satya Mohanty, Kenneth Burke,

"Aesthetics and Pragmatism" Robert Chodat, Boston University

What is the role of aesthetics in American Pragmatism? This question has garnered renewed attention in recent years, thanks to literary and philosophical figures such as Poirier, Fish, Schusterman, and Rorty. In this paper, I explore the place of aesthetics in one of the most prominent contemporary pragmatists, Hilary Putnam. Putnam's interest in aesthetics arises from his rejection of logical positivism. For A.J. Ayer and others, artworks were "nonsense": i.e., their truth values could be verified neither by observation nor by meaning alone. Over the last quarter-century, Putnam has described aesthetic judgments as a species of practical reasoning, in the manner of Aristotle or Dewey. In undermining the positivist distinction between facts and values, Putnam nowhere suggests that science is "invented." But he does suggest that, if our judgments about literary and other aesthetic texts are never "right" or "wrong," they can nevertheless be "better" and "worse"—just as, *pace* Ayer, ethical problems can be coped with in "better" and "worse" ways. My paper will argue that Putnam's critique of positivism is persuasive, but it will also pose some critical questions about his account of artworks. In particular, I shall ask what pragmatist philosophers—with their characteristically moderate tone, confidence in democracy, and praise of what "works"—could say about the fragmented, experimental texts of modernism and postmodernism. What does a pragmatist say about Faulkner's grotesques, Pynchon's apocalypses, or DeLillo's mordant cultural critiques? Do these writers recognize aspects of American culture that pragmatism needs to ignore, and which its theories of art cannot accommodate?

"Modern/Premodern Tensions in the Early American Novel: A Systems-Theoretic Account" Philipp Schweighauser, University of Bern

This paper seeks to account for the strangely double nature of the early American novel. For twenty-first-century readers, novels such as Hugh Henry Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry*, Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* or Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* seem firmly embedded in a premodern culture that subordinates the rights of art under those of religion, morality, and education. In their persistent didacticism, their claims to truthfulness and social utility, and their long authorial digressions, these texts perform those kinds of heteronomous functions Romantic theorizing and literary practice of the early nineteenth century would seek to reject in their quest for literary autonomy. Yet a closer look at early American novels also reveals elements of modern artistic practice that exist side by side with premodern residues. Brackenridge, for instance, repeatedly insists that his work is but an exercise in style devoid of ideas, praises originality and the figure of the genius, consistently privileges form over subject matter, and ridicules the excessive didacticism of his contemporaries. In

such passages, we can see a modern consciousness at work. Tensions between these modern impulses and a premodern sensibility pervade both early novels and aesthetics, another invention of the eighteenth century. This paper discusses those tensions from a systems-theoretic perspective.

PANEL 6: Re-Orienting American Aesthetics

"Chinese Narratives and American Narrative Aesthetics"

Jay Blair, Emeritus Professor, University of Geneva

Aesthetics are rarely what they purport to be. Rather, they are not just about art or the arts but function as expressions of cultures or, on a larger level, civilizations. In the West we have a classic locus of narrative conceptions in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Broadly speaking we expect narratives to have a beginning, a middle and an end. If not, a story may easily seem "pointless" or, little better, "disorganized" and "incoherent." In the 20th century, however, a variety of narrative experiments emerged in American writing (and indeed elsewhere as well). These are typically grouped by literary historians under such labels as "Modernism" and then "Post-Modernism." My goal in this talk is to test the implications of such narratives, roughly from Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) to the fragment-fictions of Robert Coover of the late 20th century. My thesis is that these remain covertly Aristotelian; that is, part of the larger Western tradition despite their search for radical innovation. My test for the outer boundaries of the category "Western" is the Chinese narrative tradition. In the Chinese tradition, narratives work in a fairly consistent way. Here is a mini-example: the story of Old Sai Who Lost His Horse. One day Old Sai's horse ran off without any reason. The neighbors gathered to offer their sympathy. But then a few days later the horse returned, accompanied by a small troupe of wild horses. The neighbors gathered to express their envy. But then Old Sai's son, trying to ride one of the wilder horses, fell off and broke his leg. The neighbors gathered to express their sympathy. But soon thereafter, when a war had broken out, the emperor's recruiters came through taking all the able-bodied young men away for military service. Old Sai's son Was useless for soldering so he was left at home. The neighbor's gathered to marvel at Old Sai's luck. This is a condensed version of a story was published a bit more than 2000 years ago in *Huainanzi*, a classic Chinese text. Later Chinese narratives were sometimes longer, as in the so-called "novels" that emerged as of the Ming Dynasty, but they are not more structured in narrative terms. Works like *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* or *The Water Margin* or *A Dream of Red Mansions* are likely to strike Western readers as *episodic* or *picaresque*. in the extreme. Another characterization, that comes readily to mind, especially for a short anecdote like the Old Sai story is "shaggy-dog story." Such stories in the West are understood as part of an originally oral tradition, as in tall tales or stage performances like Mark Twain's "lectures." Does "modernist" American narrative differ from this Chinese tradition? Yes, fundamentally, despite apparent surface characteristics. First-time readers of Faulkner may be baffled by the Benjy section of *The Sound and the Fury* but they soon learn how to make sense of it: by reassembling a chronology that is distinct from the order of presentation. Of course many other writers from Conrad on worked in a similar vein; these practices became typical of *modernist* writing. What keeps the Benjy section "Western" is that there is a fundamental (chronological) ordering disguised behind the apparently disorder. Something similar applies in more daringly "deconstructed" fictions that may be exemplified by Marc Saporta's *Composition Numero Un* (1961). The pages are unnumbered and unbound, but any reader who goes through it more than once will find ways to reconstruct a narrative reflecting not so much a sequence of events as an identification of powerful experiences that dominate a character's personality and worldview. I also propose to comment on one of Robert Coover's explicitly fragmentary fictions as a more recent test case. How is the Chinese narrative different? The story of Old Sai offers some superficial continuity: Old Sai, his household, and his neighbors reappear regularly. But the story demonstrates narratively that "reality" is fundamentally unpredictable. What is good luck and what is bad cannot be determined in advance by anyone. Similar incidents could be added *ad infinitum* without changing anything important. There is "no point" in such a narrative, no beginning, no middle, no end. Similarly, in Chinese cosmology there is no concern for cosmogony, no beginning, no Creator, no Heaven, no Hell, no Apocalypse, no Big Bang. Instead the Chinese focus on the present as the only means of assuring a future. *Immortality* in the Chinese tradition refers to the ability of a family to prolong itself generation after generation with no end in sight. No wonder the Old Sai story offers an inconclusive narrative: his culture offers no context in which to assess "meaning" in a Western sense. The American Post-Modern writers, despite their rejection of the Enlightenment and its traditions, work within a Western paradigm.

"Sensations: The Hypertrophy of the Aesthetic in Philip Roth's Everyman"
Thomas Austenfeld, University of Fribourg

Conventional American understandings of aesthetics are put to the test in Philip Roth's short 2006 novel Everyman. As Roth describes the process of ageing, he increasingly depersonalizes—and correspondingly universalizes—his subject matter, ultimately suggesting that aesthetics has to do less with the value judgments of beauty and more with the life-affirming sensory perception of the world in general. Roth's literary predecessors, the great medieval drama Everyman and the early modernist Jedermann by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, are allegories of faith which preach the ultimate rejection of the earthly life of the senses in exchange for receiving the unearned grace and goodness of the Christian God *in extremis*. Roth's novel, by contrast, is the story of a secularized Jew who declares religion "a lie" (51). The text must necessarily derive its elegiac force not from the Christian hope for the afterlife but instead from an insistent celebration of the aesthetic and a constant awareness of its fleeting nature. Roth's unnamed Everyman dwells in the world knowing that only aesthetic perception may assign meaning to the individual human being. The life of Roth's Everyman becomes co-extensive with his ability to employ his senses. Following an epigraph that pays homage to that great celebrator of aesthetic indulgence, John Keats, the novel dwells at length on the protagonist's childhood fear of anesthesia (lit.: an-aesthesia, the absence of sense perception). It logically concludes as the character's sense perceptions end. Roth's Everyman thus develops the hypertrophy of the aesthetic, raising questions about the limitations of literature in attempting to transcend the merely aesthetic realm. The text's insistent descriptions of various illnesses—hernia, appendicitis, migraine, occluded arteries, enlarged prostates, etc.—make readers question both the ultimate validity of sense perceptions and the limits of universalizing human fates. Everyman is an advertising executive, an amateur painter, a swimmer, a serial monogamist, a man afraid of death for his entire life. Roth examines these roles within a framework of allusions to American literary history, ultimately forcing us to reexamine the reliability and endurance of our senses.

"Urban Aesthetics: Movement as Performative Utterance"
Christina Ljungberg, University of Zurich

How can we begin to understand what a city is and means? First and foremost, in terms of its dynamism, vitality, thus its movement, its activity. As Michel de Certeau points out, a city *is* the irrepressible movement and gestures of innumerable actors caught up in potentially intersecting dramas. This movement and these gestures allow us to see streets and other urban sites not as the abstract forms mapped by urban planners but as facilitators of movement, involvement, interaction, and participation – in a word, *space* in its most pregnant sense. A city is not an abstract place, but a human space – not a map of purely formal possibilities, but an ongoing remapping of reconfigured actualizations. This is what I will attempt to explore, with the help of Certeau's notion of cities as a set of practices and (in particular) the act of walking as having the status of utterances, actualizations and implications of the "pedestrian speech act", to see how this is manifested in Paul Auster's *The Invention of Solitude* and *City of Glass*.

BIOGRAPHIES

Thomas Austenfeld is the recently appointed Professor of American Literature at the University of Fribourg. He came to Switzerland from North Georgia College & State University, where he was Professor of English. He was educated at the University of Munster and University of Virginia. He is the author of *American Women Writers and the Nazis: Ethics and Politics in Boyle, Porter, Stafford, and Hellman* (2001).

John J. Blair is Emeritus Professor of American Literature and Civilization, University of Geneva. His Many publications include *The Poetic Art of W. H. Auden* (1965), *The Confidence Man in Modern Fiction* (1979), and *Modular America: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on the Emergence of an American Way* (1988) which was awarded the Ralph Henry Gabriel Prize by the American Studies Association. Since retiring, he has devoted a great deal of time and energy to teaching in China, at Beijing Foreign Studies University, and has co-authored with Jerusha McCormack the monumental work, *Western Civilization with Chinese Comparisons* (2006).

Robert Chodat is Assistant Professor of English at Boston University. He completed his PhD at Stanford University and is currently finishing a book manuscript, entitled *The Patterns of Persons: Ideas of Agency from Stein to DeLillo*, based on his doctoral work. He is the recipient of a Humboldt Research Fellowship, to be served at Technische Universität Berlin, 2006-07.

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