

Hugo Münsterberg

Filmtheorie und Psychotechnik

Diskurse, Kontexte, Rezeption

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ABSTRACTS

(in alphabetical order)



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Mireille Berton

Dr. phil., University of Lausanne

Hugo Münsterberg and the Cinema at the Service of Mental Health

This lecture seeks to embed Hugo Münsterberg's theories about cinema within a larger discursive frame dominated by a certain degree of distrust towards luminous projections because of their supposed ability to trigger or aggravate nervous disorders. However, while part of the cultured elite feared the allegedly harmful effects of cinema on the psychic apparatus, some scholars, such as Münsterberg, emphasized its educational, psychological and physiological benefits. Ophthalmologists, doctors, psychologists and philosophers elaborated theories highlighting the invigorating or relaxing effects of the filmic image on depressive as well as overexcited organisms. By doing a comparative analysis of a set of diverse sources that seek to advocate the use of film as it relates to mental health, I aim to shed light on Münsterberg's ideas, especially regarding their place within the context of discussions between scientists with diverging views, all of whom were trying to identify the specific character of a leisure activity that epitomized technological and social modernity. I shall strive in particular to show that, accordingly, the famous analogy between film and mental processes advanced by Münsterberg contributed fully to the building of the hypothesis of cinema as an agent of mental hygiene.

Ulrich Johannes Beil

PD Dr., Universität Zürich, NCCR Mediality

Eine «revolutionäre und vergessene Theorie». Münsterbergs *Photoplay* in Friedrich A. Kittlers Schriften

Die Rezeption Hugo Münsterbergs, insbesondere seiner Schrift *The Photoplay* von 1916, zieht sich durch zahlreiche Arbeiten Friedrich Kittlers, von den frühen *Aufschreibesystemen* (1985) bis hin zu der Vorlesung *Optische Medien* von 1999. Eine Besonderheit stellt das Buch *Grammophon Film Typewriter* (1986) dar, in dem wichtige Kategorien Münsterbergs am Beispiel des *Golem*-Romans von Gustav Meyrink entwickelt werden. Münsterbergs Filmtheorie erscheint in Kittlers Schriften als bedeutsame Variante jener Psychotechnik, wie wir sie von Helmholtz, Exner, Bölsche und Kussmaul kennen, als eine Variante, die Freud ergänzt, da und dort übertrifft und in ihrem technischen Vokabular auf Lacan vorausweist.



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Scott Curtis

Prof. Dr., Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois

Depth and Movement: Hugo Münsterberg and Psychological Aesthetics

In an opening footnote to his chapter on “Depth and Movement” in *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*, Münsterberg excuses the non-specialist: “Readers who have no technical interest in physiological psychology may omit Chapter 3 and turn directly to Chapter 4 on Attention.” Indeed, readers may have glossed over this section; even specialized readers have placed its concerns with the perception of depth and movement in the long tradition of linking motion pictures with investigations of illusion and perceptual psychology. But if we place this chapter alongside late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century discussions of aesthetics in the German- and English-language literature, we find a striking similarity not just in topic, but approach. Psychological aesthetics of the day (or in Germany, the aesthetics of *Einfühlung*) were specifically, perhaps primarily concerned with questions of depth and movement, and how our encounter with elements of art that used such devices or techniques challenged or limited our understanding of art’s purpose and effect. Adolf Hildebrand, in *The Problem of Form in the Fine Arts* (*Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst* [1893]), as well as August Schmarsow’s *The Essence of Architectural Creation* (*Das Wesen der architektonischen Schöpfung* [1894]), started a conversation about the role of depth and space in our encounter with art and architecture, while Theodor Lipps and others explored the role of movement in the process of aesthetic contemplation. These concerns spread through the literature on aesthetics in Germany and England in the 1900s and 1910s, with which Münsterberg was surely familiar (recall his previous foray into aesthetics: *The Principles of Art Education* [1905]). So this paper will argue that Münsterberg’s concern with depth and movement was not simply a nod to cinema’s “reality effect” or the illusion of motion, but an attempt to engage the current literature on aesthetics in such a way that film could be incorporated into the discussion.

Andreas Killen

Prof. Dr., City College of New York and the CUNY Graduate Center

Hugo Münsterberg and German Propaganda Discourse

This paper looks at the reception of Münsterberg’s writings on film within the German discourse about film propaganda in the latter stages of World War I. Pointing to evidence of Münsterberg’s influence on German officials, who cited the findings of experimental psychology in support of their arguments for new strategies of mobilizing «mass emotions», the paper explores this emerging discourse from the perspective of scholarship on the history of emotions.



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Kristina Köhler

Dr. des., Universität Zürich, Seminar für Filmwissenschaft

«The Delighted Eye»: Hugo Münsterberg, Early Film Culture and the Aesthetics of Visual Pleasure

Following Münsterberg's own anecdotic account, it was Annette Kellerman, the Australian swimmer and movie star, who «converted» him to cinema. If the Harvard professor's enthusiasm for popular cinema resembles a (self-ironic) rhetoric of «guilty pleasure», his statement also reveals and accentuates a number of tensions that were inherent in the cinema culture of the 1910s in general and in Münsterberg's film theory in particular. These tensions concern cinema's obscure status between high and popular culture, but also the ambivalent pleasures offered by the films themselves oscillating between narrative economy and visual excess.

My re-reading of *The Photoplay* focuses on Münsterberg's interest in «pleasure» [Genuss] as an aesthetic category negotiating between the spectator and the film. If Münsterberg's notion of «pleasure» can be situated within the larger aesthetical debates around 1900 (from contemplation to distraction, from «Schauen» to «Schaulust»), I wish to show how it also resonates with the films of the time, their aesthetic preferences and principles. NEPTUNE'S DAUGHTER (USA 1914), starring Annette Kellerman, constitutes an exciting example to relate Münsterberg's theory of cinematic «pleasure» to aspects of visual composition, expressive bodies, moving textures and to problematize their ambiguous gratifications.

Jelena Rakin

PhD candidate, Universität Zürich, Seminar für Filmwissenschaft

Aestheticizing Color at the Intersection of Art, Science and Industry: Historical Contexts of Hugo Münsterberg's Examination of Color

Hugo Münsterberg's writing on *Grundzüge der Psychotechnik* (1914), *Business Psychology* (1915), and *The Photoplay. A Psychological Study* (1916) all contain passages that deal with the sensory qualities or the specific employment of color. This broad spectrum of subjects explored by Münsterberg offers an unlikely example of how diverse aspects of color that incited the debates of the epoch are dealt with in the work of a single author. The conflation of the traditional aesthetics with the realities of the technical mass production at the turn of the century discloses the range of the discourses that addressed color – as a commodity and marketing strategy, perception phenomenon and as an aesthetic category. This paper examines some historical discourses on color in art, science and industry while contextualizing Münsterberg's own dealing with the topic.



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Jörg Schweinitz

Prof. Dr., Universität Zürich, Seminar für Filmwissenschaft

«Aufhebung» of Reality: Münsterberg's Concept of Film Art, Philosophical Aesthetics, and Hollywood Narration

In *The Photoplay. A Psychological Study* (1916) Münsterberg's ideas for an «aesthetics of the Photoplay» (film art) are based on the aesthetic theory that he developed in his philosophical magnum opus *Philosophie der Werte. Grundzüge einer Weltanschauung* (1908), published in English as *The Eternal Values* (1909). In the *Philosophie der Werte* the idea of «Die Aufhebung der Wirklichkeit» plays a decisive role. However, the term «Aufhebung» disappears completely in his writings in English, but stays effective indirectly. For this reason even scholars have solely placed Münsterberg's aesthetics within the framework of Neo-Kantianism and did not realize the influence of the Hegelian dialectic. But if we place his ideas in the dialectical tradition of the aesthetics of «Aufhebung» rather than in the concept of an «aesthetic of isolation», we find an approach to many of his dialectical organized antinomies such as the perception of surface and depth, filmic pre-constructiveness of the reception and the activity of the viewer, «reality» and «unreality» in cinematic experience etc. This paper will argue that Münsterberg's idea of «Aufhebung» is a hidden basic assumption of his film aesthetics seeking to incorporate the current Hollywood cinema.

Rüdiger Steinmetz

Prof. Dr. phil. habil., Universität Leipzig, Lehrstuhl Medienwissenschaft und Medienkultur

From Film Experience to Theory and Back: What Films Influenced Münsterberg's Film Theory, and in Which Ways (1914-1916)?

The paper will show how and to what extent personal film viewing experiences influenced the views of the new medium. Theatre and film critic Kurt Pinthus (*Das Kinobuch*, Leipzig: Wolff 1914), for example, saw the first Italian monumental epic film *QUO VADIS* (Enrico Guazzoni, I, 1913) and asked in one of the first ambitious film reviews ever published in a German newspaper: «Quo Vadis – Kino?» (*Leipziger Tageblatt*, 25 April, 1913).

Hugo Münsterberg was influenced – among others – by Herbert Brenon's *NEPTUNE'S DAUGHTER* (USA 1914), Barry O'Neill's *THE THIRD DEGREE* (USA, 1913), Stellan Rye's/Paul Wegener's *DER STUDENT VON PRAG* (D, 1913) and Griffith's *THE BIRTH OF A NATION* (USA, 1915) – and from these resumed as the first theorist “modern” basic principles of film storytelling and camera theory in *The Photoplay – a psychological Study* (1916).

This paper intends to draw lines from the analysis of the films Münsterberg saw (or might have seen) to his theoretical approach. It will put Münstersberg's writings in the context of not only film history but also history of film criticism, and theory. It will show specific fragments of the films he saw and show the way these were reflected in his writings. And it argues that the short time Münsterberg needed for his theory was only possible because of his «psychotechnical» experiments since the late 90s of the 19th century.



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Klaas de Zwaan

PhD candidate (film history), University of Utrecht, Netherlands

The battle for meaning: A cross-national film reception analysis of THE BATTLE CRY OF PEACE in Switzerland and the Netherlands during the First World War

*We leave the sphere of valuable art entirely when a unified action is ruined by mixing it with declamation, and propaganda which is not organically interwoven with the action itself. It may be still fresh in memory what an esthetically intolerable helter-skelter performance was offered to the public in THE BATTLE CRY OF PEACE (Hugo Münsterberg in *The Photoplay*).*

This presentation offers a cross-national analysis of the historical reception of the American war film THE BATTLE CRY OF PEACE (U.S., J. Stuart Blackton and Wilfred North/Vitagraph, 1915) in the neutral countries of the Netherlands and Switzerland during the First World War. Treating propaganda as a mode of reception, I'll argue how a fiction film that was originally intended as preparedness propaganda picked up very diverse and often conflicting meanings in cinema cultures outside the United States. Moreover, I would like to stress the role of cinema as an important agent in the public debate about the war outside the warring countries.



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