

Keynote speaker abstracts

Ahuvia Kahane (Royal Holloway, University of London)
History and Hospitality

Time has sometimes been described as ‘the element of invisibility itself’. History, as a narrative of time or a sensible articulation of the enquiry into the passage of time, may be described as an image of invisibility. The lapse of time is ‘something irrecuperable, refractory to the simultaneity of the present, something unrepresentable, immemorial, and prehistorical.’ Yet in itself the narrative of the lapse of time is not at all irrecuperable; there seems to be nothing ‘refractory’ about the narrative ‘So-and-so was born, lived, and died.’ It is a simple articulation, a ‘history’ of a history, a ‘life’ that tells the story of a life—an image of life. The apparent isomorphism between the object of representation and the representation itself, between the language of ‘articulation’ and the language of images, between image as copy and image as representation, reveals or betrays the aspiration of history and its paradox, its failure or its success.

This state of affairs can be described as a relationship between ‘bound strangers’ (*xenoi*). The present plays host to the past, inasmuch as it gives presence to something which ‘has been’ and thus ‘no longer exists’. The opposite also obtains, inasmuch as every present action takes place in the context of a desire for the past and cannot be seen except through the images of the past—the past that plays host to the present. Significantly the Greek word *xenos* means both guest and host. In contemporary sociological terms, I suggest that history holds an important position in relation to the present in between radical asymmetry and the radically symmetrical.

Looking to sensible ‘objects’, we can trace this position in examples that are seemingly far removed from each other in time, nature, and context. The identity between an object in ‘present life’ and an object of ‘past myth’ might suggest a collapse of the notion of change-over-time and thus of history. However, I argue that it is precisely in the collapse of object-boundaries that these possibilities reside: the hope of an exchange with the absolute transcendence and unknowability of the other, of giving and receiving things that are not within us, of historical knowledge and of history itself.

Michael Clegg and Martin Guttman (artists)
The Monument for Historical Change

Clegg and Guttman will present and reflect on their public sculpture *The Monument for Historical Change*, sited in the Rosa Luxemburg Platz, Berlin. The work was completed in 2004 and has become an integral part of its surrounding. The sculpture has become a stage (or host) for local neighborhood activities. Some of these ‘public moments’ have been photographed by local residents and it is in particular these images that form the link to Ahuvia Kahane’s presentation. Through their series of images and supporting text Clegg and Guttman explore how the *Monument for Historical Change* embodies a new conception of monumental works, centered on ideas rather than on individuals and which is critical rather than idealising, less oriented towards the creation of a spectacle than towards a reflection on its urban environment. They argue that their sculpture was conceptualised as a site for reflection on the public sphere, on history and on political life, rather than seeking to inspire emotions like pride and awe. The images testify to the way that visitors and local residents engage with the sculpture. Here we see how the *Monument for Historical Change* functions as a tool for generating a heightened awareness of the character and history of its location.

Esther Leslie (Birkbeck, University of London)
The Politics of Friends

Much has been made in the manifesti of the avant garde of enemies and hostilities. Journals have taken such concepts into their names: *The Enemy* (Lewis), *Der Gegner* (Franz Jung). A recent book on the relationship between Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht has, however, returned the question of friendship to the arena of avant-garde practice and theory. Erdmut Wizisla's book, subtitled *Story of a Friendship*, overturns an institutionally forwarded and long-held shibboleth about the dynamics of interaction between the two men. In short, it conceives between them a genuine friendship, not a pragmatic alliance (on Benjamin's part) nor an exploitative and negating attitude (on Brecht's part). More than this, the book presents an opportunity to return to Benjamin's and Brecht's writings to witness a veritable politics of friendship, a theory of alliance, a manual for intersubjective exchange in the harshest of times, the times in which the enemy has not ceased to be victorious indeed. This paper picks up some of these threads and attempts to see what they might expose about our friendships, in a mediascape in which a friend may now be an electronic impulse updating statuses at a precise moment in time that is recorded on one's networks.

Blake Stimson (University of California, Davis)
Methodological Hospitality

This presentation considers hospitality as an antidote to liberalism. Liberalism is understood as a form of being in the world that disavows universal claims to subjectivity, value, and morality, first and foremost, as a means of opening new markets and stimulating new consumer desires. To achieve its liberty, liberalism is necessarily 'parasitic' on the same 'communal values that it undermines', as one recent commentator has put it, and thus inadvertently preserves and invigorates the tendency towards fundamentalist backlashes and the resurgence of other-directed political being of both the modern blood-and-soil and the pre-and-postmodern god-and-prophet types. 'Methodological hospitality', as it is meant here, stands against the insularity and xenophobia associated with fundamentalism, for sure, but even more so the tranquilising, dehumanising effects of liberalism and particularly its central concern with so-called 'methodological atheism'. As such, it stands for the form of subjectivity and its corresponding object relation that both fundamentalism and methodological atheism bracket out. Kant called this form *sensus communis*, Hegel called it *Geist*, and Marx 'species being' but for our purposes, it is something like art appreciation, or, more generally, a subject-object relation that forever seeks to reconcile some inner claim to universality with the facts of the world outside.

Juliet Flower MacCannell (University of California, Berkeley)
On the Inexplicable Persistence of Strangers

From the dawn of society, human groups have made a place for the stranger, who comes from elsewhere, trading in prized goods and wisdom or news from afar. We are set toward hospitality, welcoming the stranger. Aimé Césaire called 'the old, courtly civilizations' those where 'the foreigner was called *vazaha* [...] *honorable stranger*'. By definition, a stranger does not participate in a group's own identifications, its shared traits. But stranger and host

do participate in a common humanity. No longer the bearer of distant wisdom, the stranger has become an avatar of horror and fear. Countless films of vicious strangers (Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*, *Dead Calm*, *The Hitcher*,) demonstrate fear of the stranger's lethal 'freedom'. The honoured place once reserved for the stranger is now 'slated for expulsion', indicating the rise of what Freud calls the 'artificial group' of imaginary identifications hostile to strangers.

German sociologist Georg Simmel formalised the role of the stranger, distinguishing *the stranger* from *the wanderer* (freed of spatial location) and from *the settled member of society*. Strangers occupy a middle distance between the fully far and the near, yet remain 'an element of the group itself'. They have greater freedom and objectivity than group members do—traits reviled by conservative politicians. If Simmel tried to secure a structural role for the stranger, his effort signals the demise of 'the old courtly civilizations', and predicts the later purging of those 'foreign' to his own culture's collective identity.

Dany Nobus (Brunel University)

Kant with Klossowski: Invitation, Visitation, and the Protreptic to Acceptance

In his 1795 essay 'Towards a Perpetual Peace', Kant famously argued that the law of world citizenship should be restricted to conditions of universal hospitality, whereby he defined hospitality in terms of the host's invitation and the guest's right of visitation. Following Jacques Lacan's notorious confrontation of Kant with de Sade, which was primarily designed to expose the destructive erotic underside of the philosopher's *Critique of Practical Reason*, I will read Kant's essay on peace with Pierre Klossowski's erotic trilogy *Les lois de l'hospitalité* (*Roberte ce Soir*; *La révocation de l'Edit de Nantes*; *Le souffleur*). In these novels, the laws of hospitality are written in a frame above the male protagonist's bed and they state that every visitor shall sleep with his wife, whilst the host is watching her surrender to the guest. Apart from the fact that Klossowski demonstrates how a right to participate may become a duty to enjoy, he also opens up a perspective on the ethical disjunction between invitation and exhortation (protreptic), and on the conditions of the acceptance (of an invitation), without which hospitality becomes impossible. Through Klossowski's 'perverse' view on hospitality, the obscene core of Kant's arguments will be revealed, and a critical view on Jacques Derrida's (Kantian) notion of unconditional hospitality will be developed.