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Between Word and Image
An Interview with Carolyn Dever and Gregg M. Horowitz

The 2006/2007 Fellows Program at the Warren Center, “Between Word and Image,” will study the relationship between language and visual artifacts as that relationship is articulated through various disciplinary perspectives in the humanities. Exploring the connections, obstructions, and interchanges between word and image, the Fellows hope to rediscover the disciplinary boundaries of their individual fields while strengthening an interdisciplin ary discourse. The program also seeks to draw upon those exchanges as a means of forming intellectual relationships within the Vanderbilt community, with the goal of making the most out of the unique resources Vanderbilt has to offer its humanities scholars. The Fellows represent divinity, English, film studies, history, philosophy, religious studies, communication studies, teaching and learning, and women’s and gender studies. The program’s co-directors are Carolyn Dever, professor of English and women’s and gender studies, and Gregg M. Horowitz, associate professor of philosophy.

Carolyn Dever and Gregg M. Horowitz

Letters 

This year’s fellows will study the relationship between language and visual artifacts across academic disciplines. Could you talk about the cultural context of this relationship, particularly as it affected your approach to the program’s theme?

Horowitz: Given that for most of our history human beings were illiterate, the dominant mode of non-oral communication was pictorial. So it is arguably only after the invention of the printing press that the word begins to ascend to predominance, and it is only relative to that historical moment that the twentieth century can be understood as the century in which the image again overtook the word as a communicative technology. That is, a certain technology of communication which had been present all along rose to a new—or renewed—centrality. But what is most deeply interesting to me is the way in which the contest between language and visual representation is so intensely fought in the twentieth century. For instance, something that is mostly forgotten in contemporary visual studies is its own origins in the efforts in the 1940s and 1950s to think of images, or visual representations more generally, as essentially linguistic. There used to be a flood of books with titles like The Grammar of Film and The Language of Painting, so insofar as language was the better understood mode of communication—insofar as linguistics was a more advanced science—there was an effort to export the understanding of linguistic representation to visual representation. As they say, if all you have is a hammer, everything is going to look like a nail. In some ways, it was the analytic failure to map the linguistic onto the visual that gave rise to the idea that the visual is an especially demanding or excessive mode of communication that puts extreme pressure on the modes of analysis we bring to bear on it. And I think in some ways we’re inheritors of the collapse of the effort—which nobody, as far as I know, talks about anymore—to make sense of the visual in strictly linguistic terms.

Dever: Let me suggest that new possibilities for the mass mediation of visual phenomena in the nineteenth century enabled the kind of contest that you are describing in the twentieth century: the reemergence of the visual as a medium that could contest the linguistic in the eyes of scholars and in the eyes of culture. To choose an obvious example: photography and its distribution and its reproduction. Its easy, inexpensive reproducibility and its claims to veracity made the image a new kind of problem in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
Even before we ask questions about disciplinarity or interdisciplinarity, it seems important to ask what we are doing as humanistic scholars these days.

That, I think, gives a backstory to why the term "interdisciplinarity" is the way it is used, so there is a sense of language, and one name we give to that force is disciplinarity. Whatever name we use, there is, in fact, a material force here. And so you realize that, while as scholars, we are all committed to rendering our insights intelligible to others in linguistic form, nonetheless there is something that always shadows or stains the ways in which we do that and which you can only feel the power of that stain when you are dealing with a problem along with a colleague who is equally interested in the material, but you still can't quite see it from her point of view.

Dever: That is what I think our main task is: to answer a question about intelligibility by way of different disciplinaries. And I think that, in its relation to the uniformity of language, this is thought of as the medium of thought. Language is thought of as the very medium of thought. Language is thought of as the medium of understanding, and ultimately, intelligibility is practically everything understood with translation into language. Language is thought of as the very medium of thought.

Horowitz: That is an especially interesting point. Through much of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century modernity, lingu- phy, intelligibility is practically everything understood with translation into language. Language is thought of as the very medium of thought.

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One of the central reasons we do not know how to talk about the university and universality now is that, as long as the humanities were conceived as essentially linguistic disciplines, they were held together by the idea of a common language. But we are not just workers in a field of language anymore.

What We Are Reading

Harry Berger, Fictions of the Past: Rembrandt Against the Italian Renaissance (Stanford UP, 2000), investigates the complex dynamics of early modern Italian and Dutch portraiture before moving to very close readings of Rembrandt’s self-portraits. A literary critic, Berger here shifts his attention to visual rather than verbal images, proposing along the way a theory about authorship, sound eerily familiar.

Leonard Folgarait, Professor of Art History: Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War, by Retort (name of collective authorship: Ian Boal, T.J. Clark, Joseph Mathews, Michael Watts), (Verso, 2005) is a driven and stinging analysis of contemporary global politics as determined by the powers in Washington, these motivated by a “military neo-liberalism” all the more frightening because fueled by “a thirst for oil” and “permanent war.” The book provokes such long and almost ungrammatical responses because the content truly left me breathless and reaching for a new vocabulary and syntax of appropriate response. The politics of fear has only empowered these writers to speak against power.

Janet Besant, Hands: Physical Labor, Class, and Cultural Work (Rutgers UP, 2004). This book is full of wonderfully pressing questions that no one else seems to be asking, such as: why do we subject workers to “acceptable” risks in their work place that are not “acceptable” to other classes, and what makes a work of literature or a piece of visual art “working class” and who profits from such social constructions.

A scholar of literature and language turns in a tour de force of cultural and social analysis and proves that literature is social and language is political in ways that ultimately exploit those who do not process these terms in abstract ways, but rather in forms of endurance and injury to their very bodies.

Michel Werner, Associate Pro-
fessor of German: Peter de Mendelssohn, S. Fischer and one Verlag (S. Fischer, 1970). Mendelssohn’s sprawling, nearly 1,500 page biography of the publisher Samuel Fischer and his building house is an arresting work—a wonderful, learned narrative history that tells us about the most famous German publisher of what we now think of as classically modern literature. Through Mendelssohn’s publishing, we come to see the many publishing decisions that helped bring Gerhart Haupt- mann, Thomas Mann, Arthur Schnitzler, and Hugo von Hofmannsthal to the center of modern literature. We see, not the last few letters Mendelssohn cites, how a literar
y milieu came to form; and when all this is taken together, we see the shaping of classical modernism in Germany and in Europe. Even in American exile, as the many letters of authors to their publishers suggest, this was a literary world whose center of gravity remained, with no small measure of tragedy, Europe. Mendelssohn’s book is based on an archive of letters and documents that he was the first to examine, but it is not only in this that his work is irreplaceable.

otherwise—but especially cre-
vation in the domain of intel-
ligibility. It is a matter of fact that it is not the creativity that people sometimes think of—that creativity is what happens at the limits of language, which I don’t think anybody in this room thinks. Forging concepts is cre-
active work. It is not just repro-
ducing past efforts, but it is if we can get at that creative moment in which conceptual fields get generated, we will see that it is, to some extent, signifi-
cant creative work. And that is part of what we want to educate graduate students about also. Dever: But we have to start by challenging our own frame-
works. Horowitz: Yes, absolutely. Dever: You are doing it in a useful project for a group of faculty to undertake for a year. Letters: Finally, although from different disciplines, each of you is currently focusing your critical inquiry on an aspect of the visual. Can you say more about how your individual research interest has brought you to this particular project and how you say that is contributing to the program’s dialogue? Dever: The book that I am working on has to do with late-Victorian aestheticism and with the way in which the politics of sexuality in late-Victorian Eng-
land are mediated through all kinds of interactions with visual culture. The very concept of beauty itself, artistic beauty or beauty as such and through not only the fine arts but through claims to fineness or beauty, becomes tied to the construction of public sexual identity. Through this medium of visual beauty and through these kind of protective cover of Art with a capital “A,” Victorian writers and painters and artists introduce certain socially extremely difficult topics with Carolyn’s work, is that the art is not merely the material. It is something old that promises some kind of significance, which means it is allied with the future but also, it has to be unlocked in a certain way. In certain cases, it needs the decler of the fine arts to unfold its significance. This raises the great danger that people sometimes think of—that that this archaic heritage by emptying it of its historical significance. There is a tension here that I am drawn toward between visibility, or making visible, and significi-
cant, or understanding. Dever: How do you reconcile the fact that you work on the visible, but you also work on psychoanalysis? Horowitz: In the following way: there is a subtext, an understructure, an unconscious to visibility. When things become visible, they become visible against a background that itself remains—I’m not sure what you call it —non-visible. and this is one way of thinking about the unconscious: what is hidden, what is not visible, what is not appearance. It is active and makes demands on thinking, even though it is out of sight. I have a metaphor here that is very useful. It is that the unconscious jealousy or unconscious is an interloper not because it is out of sight, but because it is jealous. It is jealous of the way it played out, however. Dever: Thank heavens! Horowitz: Indeed. Although, the fact that the silhouette got trapped in the space of the beauty, the way in which the body is mediated through not only the fine arts but through claims to fineness or beauty, becomes tied to the construction of public sexual identity.通过 this medium of visual beauty and through these kind of protective cover of Art with a capital “A,” Victor...
Humans, Heal Thyself?  
By Helmut Walser Smith

Europe was in the midst of a deep crisis and a war far more disastrous than the one the United States currently finds itself in. Max Weber accepted an invitation to speak before a group of free students (those who consciously didn’t join fraternities) at the University of Munich on the topic of “Scholarship as a Calling.” Weber was a famous professor. The students wanted answers, orientation, guidance. Instead, Weber offered distinctions: between value-free inquiry and politically motivated scholarship; between the dilettante, who may arrive at a scholar-like insight, and the scholar, who works through the insight; and between wisdom, and the cynics, rationals, experiments, and openness to criticism that are part of the scholarly enterprise. Most importantly, he insisted that scholarship does not offer answers to the great questions of the world—and how shall we live?—and that the prophets do not have their place in lecture halls (where they can scarcely be contradicted). Scholarship, Weber said, is a specialized profession in the service of self-consciousness and the knowledge of factual connections.” This, Weber continued, was not a normative position but “an inexorable result of our historical situation.” To imagine otherwise is mystification.

Do we imagine otherwise? Weber pleaded for a sharp separation between scholarship and politics, not in order to save politics but to protect scholarship, which he believed held a special place in the world. Scholarship, let us return to humanities scholarship, had to be defended not for its current utility but for its ability to show the existing connections in the world, for the general importance that societies attach to understanding in depth. There is of course another model, even though its explicit place was not the university. This is the model of Mann’s final thesis on Feuerbach: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways, the point is to change it.” If the thesis was originally meant to underscore the difference between thought and act, the “only” ought to alert us to its implicit denigration of thought. Moreover, its nineteen-century context, marked by revolutionary urgency, has been replaced by the dull and deadening experience of oppressive having captured state power. When you enter the foyer of the Humboldt University in Berlin, after first passing between the statues of Helmholtz and Mommense, the thesis still stands at you in larger-than-life letters. At the time when Marx wrote his treatise on Feuerbach, in 1845, the University of Berlin (as it was originally called) was one of the greater repositories for the humanities in the western world, rivalled only, in my opinion, by the Sorbonne; by 1846, when the theses were first published, its preeminence was hardly challenged. Soon thereafter, the United States shaped grand educational aspirations, and we know it on the Berlin model, first developed by Wilhelm von Humboldt. Then the crossroads of twenty-century politics, world, first from the right, the Nazis perverted the university, and a tradition, that has stranger compatriots than he could have easily imagined. In the end, though, what is needed is not another sermon about how its extremes are too harsh, but its coming together to affirm and to ground the aspiration of a university as a place of value of knowledge-in-depth, and the special place of the humanities in universities and of universities in the world.
Circum-Atlantic Studies Group. Now in its sixth year, this group meets monthly and will read and treat works-in-progress authored by participants. Participants’ work, scholarship should be interdisciplinary in nature, focus on at least two of the following regions—Africa, Europe, Latin and Central America, the Caribbean, and North America—and treat some aspect of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, and/or post-colonialism. Seminar coordinators: Seve Landeros (history) and Scott Ackerly (polical science and women’s studies and gender studies). Language Matters. How are lan- guage, identity, and conceptual development linked? What can child language acquisition tell us about the educational and social processes within and across different con- texts? Participants will attempt to take a fresh look at the artistic and creative impulses of our culture, with an eye to pulling out larger trends and insights into which both scholars and citizens, parents will pay particular attention to the processes by which culture is produced and consumed both within and across different con- texts. Participants will strive to treat works-in-progress authored by editors and scholars who work in psychology, philosophy, anthro- pology, sociology, and modern foreign languages, the Language Matters group will explore issues related to language and cogni- tion. Seminar coordinators: Susan Bartk (Spanish and Latin American Studies) and Virginia F. Tepper (Cuban Center and sociology). Diabetes Work Group. The diabe- tes working group consists of scholars across the disciplines whose research involves the social aspects of diabetes. They will meet several times this semester to discuss common research interests and possibilities for collaborative research. Seminar coordinator: Arleen Tuchman (history). Global Feminisms Reading Group. This reading group is designed to explore and debate issues related to the growing field of “global feminism.” This seminar is known as “global feminism.” This field locates women’s lives and work in the context of transnational and global frameworks, includ- ing processes of globalization, and it investigates the operations of “local,” “national,” and “global” perspectives on sex, gender, and inequality. The field is emergent, contested, and dynamic. The reading group will meet three times each semester. Seminar coordinators: Monica Casper (sociology) and women’s studies and gender studies and Brooke Ackerly (political science and women’s studies and gender studies). Medicine, Health, and Society Seminar. This interdisciplinary seminar will meet monthly to discuss common concerns and hear talks by visiting researchers. Seminar coordinator: Arleen Tuchman (history). Women’s and Gender Studies Seminar. This seminar will high- light work being done on campus in the areas of women and gender studies. If you would like to be added to the mailing list for this seminar, please email Lacey Gal- heat and American poetry, and she is the author and editor of over twenty books. Cur- rently Vender has two works in progress: “Our Secret Discipline,” Yeat’s Stiles and Hains, New York: Sons, and “Last Looks, Last Books: Scenes, Plath, Lowell, Brazil, Merrill, Ammons.” In 2004, she delivered the National Endowment for the Humanities’ Jefferson Lectures—lecture the federal government’s most distinguished award for intellectual achievement in the humanities—and she is the recipient of twenty-three honorary degrees from universities throughout North America and Europe. The Harry C. Howard Jr. Lecture Series was established in 1994 through the endowments of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas E. Nale, Jr., and Mr. and Mrs. George D. Renfro, all of Asheville, North Carolina. The lecture honors Harry C. Howard Jr. (B.A., 1951) and allows the Warren Center to bring an outstanding scholar to Vanderbilt annually to deliver a lecture on a significant topic in the humanities.

Carola Daffner is a doc- toral candidate in the History and American Studies programs. Her dissertation, titled “Spaces of Provocation: Jewish Topogra- phies of Colonialism,” explores the topogra- phies of Gerold Kolman’s poetry. Daffner’s work is influ- enced by theories of space that emphasize in sociological, polit- ical, and collective nature, and she uses Kolman’s re-work- ings of contemporary spatial images that attempt to de- tach, confront, or manipulate the Jew- ish self and the predominant idea of “Jewish space” as it is described in the works of con- temporary Jewish intellectuals.

Brian Rabinowitz, a doc- toral candidate in philosophy, works on the relationships between differing conceptions of justice, the possibility for social and polit- ical criticism. His dissertation, titled “Experience and Critical Theory,” explores the impact of the civil rights movement on the state Democrap- tic parties in the southern United States. He is particularly interested in the way that southern pro- gressives in the 1940s attempted to reshape the Democrats in their states and thereby paved the way for the emergence of the “New South” Democrats of the 1970s.

Noted Scholar Helen Venderle to Present

Helen Vender, the A. Kingsley Porter Uni- versity Professor at Harvard University, will present this year’s Harry C. Howard Jr. Lecture at 4:10 p.m. on January 18 (location to be announced). Her lecture title is “The Yeatsian Sequence: Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen and ‘Blood and the Moon.’” Professor Vender’s research interests include English and American lyric poetry, and she is the author and editor of over twenty books. Cur- rently Vender has two works in progress: “Our Secret Discipline,” Yeats Stiles and Hains, New York: Sons, and “Last Looks, Last Books: Scenes, Plath, Lowell, Brazil, Merrill, Ammons.” In 2004, she delivered the National Endowment for the Humanities’ Jefferson Lectures—lecture the federal government’s most distinguished award for intellectual achievement in the humanities—and she is the recipient of twenty-three honorary degrees from universities throughout North America and Europe.

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RICHARD Mc Gregor is an assistant professor of religious studies who specializes in Islam and medieval and mystical traditions. He teaches courses on Qur’an and interpretation, Sufism, and methodology in the study of religion. His book Sincerity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt: the Wifaq, Safi Order and the Legacy of Ibn Arabi (SUNY Press, 2004) looks at the construction and theory of ‘sainthood’ in Islam. His current project, a study of aesthetics in the Islamic mystical tradition, argues against claims that the Muslim tradition has typically excluded imagery and poetics that aesthetics are integral to Islamic religious thought.

KEVIN M. LEANDER is an associate professor of language, literary, and cultural studies, is the Jacques Voegeli Fellow and co-director of the Department of Teaching and Literacy, and culture in the department of teaching and learning at Peabody College. Leander specializes in Victorian education; socio-cultural theory and literacy; classroom discourse and identity; multiliteracies; and the connections among literacy, social space, and technology. Most recently he has been examining the social production and uses of images and language, and exploring the connections between images and language in adolescent classroom presentations and interactions.

TERESA A. GODDU, an associate professor of English and the director of American Studies who specializes in American literature and culture, is the author of Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation (Columbia University Press, 1997) and has published numerous articles and essays. She is currently working on a project called “Stilling Antialienation: Amencan Print Culture and Social Reform,” which examines the interactions between print culture and the American mass market, and it details the antislavery movement’s use of print culture to circulate its message.

ROBIN MARGARET JENSEN is the Luce Chancellor’s Professor of Christian Art and Worship in the Vanderbilt Divinity School and is a historian of Christian art and liturgy. She has written about early Christian art in the Minoan period and is currently working on a book about early Christian art in the Roman Empire. Her current research explores the relationship between art and liturgy, and she is currently working on a project on early Christian art in the Roman Empire.

CATHERINE A. J. MOLLIE is an assistant professor of history whose research interests involve race, slavery, and empire. Her most recent article, “Pleasures of the Smoke: Popular Representations of Black Virginia in Early Modern London’s Tobacco Shops,” is forthcoming. Currently she is working on her first book, “The Peripheries Within: Race, Slavery, and Empire in Early Modern England,” which examines early modern visual and literary representations of black slavery and their relationship to popular beliefs about race and slavery from the late-seventeenth to early-eighteenth centuries.

PAUL YOUNG is an assistant professor of English and the director of film studies. His book, The Cinema Dreams itsビル: Media Fantasy Films from Radio to the Internet (University of Minnesota Press, 2006) investigates the impact of radio, television, and the internet on Hollywood in addition to the ways in which Hollywood changes and uses these mediums for its own ends. More recently, he has begun work on a project tentatively titled “The Mass-Produced Instant: Cinema, Realism, and the Mediatized Nation.”

HIt in April 2006, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, in cooperation with the Warren Center, presented its first regional education summit, titled “Expanding the Future of Holocaust Education.” The program was designed to build connections between Holocaust educators and non-profit organizations with the same interests. The meeting drew thirty-five participants from across the Southeast and took place on Vanderbilt’s campus in Peabody Library’s Fireside Reading Room.

Peter Fredlake, coordinator of the museum’s Teacher Fellowship Program, approached the Warren Center about the collaboration due to the Center’s central involvement in the publication of The Holocaust and Other Genocides: History, Representation, Ethics (Vanderbilt University Press, 2002). In 1999 the Warren Center sponsored a year-long seminar on teaching the Holocaust and other genocides, which culminated in the publication of the interdisciplinary volume edited by current Warren Center director Helen Waller Smith. The volume was distributed free-of-charge to all high schools, public and private, in the state of Tennessee.

Fredlake, a former high school teacher, said that educators often have difficulty finding the resources they need when teaching the Holocaust. One of the goals of the sessions was to help educators become aware of resources available at the local level and at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. In addition, the museum was interested in assisting in the creation of a network to further Holocaust education in the Southeast region.

One of the participants, Paul Fleming, principal at Mepham High School in Nashville, Tennessee, said that the summit was notable in that it included both educators and staff members of regional Holocaust organizations. Both Ruth Tanner and Felix Ancho from the Tennessee Holocaust Commission, as well as individuals from other state Holocaust commissions, participated in the conversations and roundtable discussions. There were several presentations by the Holocaust Museum’s historians, including Bridgen Conley-Zilkis’s discussion of “Holocaust Education in the Age of Genocide,” and Will Metzger’s presentation on “The Role of Teachers in Nazi Germany.” Following the Nashville meeting, a second regional education summit was held in Denver, Colorado.

Peter Fredlake address workshop participants in Peabody Library’s Fireside Reading Room.

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The Warren Center will sponsor two fellowship programs in the 2007-2008 academic year: one for faculty members and one for Vanderbilt University graduate students.

The 2007-2008 Faculty Fellows Program will be co-directed by Tracy Dennan Sharpley-Whiting (African American and Diaspora Studies/French) and Lucius T. Outlaw, Jr. (philosophy) and will examine the topic “Black Europe, or Diasporic Research in/on Europe.” The seminar will examine “Black Europe” and the emergent field of Black European Studies in all of its contours, across periods, and from various disciplinary and methodological perspectives. (Though aware of the various ways in which the term “black” has been used in the European context, we are restricting the use of the term to descendants of the African continent.)

A number of engaging interrogations will structure the seminar: interrogations of identity, race, democracy, citizenship, expansion, migration, and immigration function as points of departure, particularly as these relate to such themes as the transatlantic (or transcontinental) “race” and discourses of racial difference in Europe; Europe in the making of the Americas; slavery and Europe; race and European modernity; modernism, and European engagements (literary, philosophical, historical, artistic, ethnographic) with Africa. One of the focal and particularly complicated suppositions to be taken up during these interrogations is geopolitical, relating as much to diaspora identity politics as to postcolonial studies: What, where, and when is there “Europe”? For example, how will the cultural, political, and economic uniqueness of France’s colonial history and the introduction of “departmentalization” impact that identity?

The Warren Center will sponsor a Visiting Fellow with expertise in the area of study, in addition to selected Vanderbilt faculty members. Information regarding the internal and external application process can be obtained from the Warren Center or its website, www.vanderbilt.edu/pwccenter.

The Warren Center will also sponsor an interdisciplinary year-long Graduate Student Fellows Program. Vanderbilt University graduate students in the traditional humanities departments or those whose work is of a humanistic nature are invited to apply for the six dissertation-completion fellowships. The fellowship provides a stipend of $18,000 as well as a $2,000 research fund. Students are not allowed to hold any other form of employment during the term of the fellowship. Graduate Student Fellows are expected to complete and defend their dissertations before the start of the next academic year. The Graduate Student Fellows will meet in weekly seminars at the Warren Center, giving presentations from their work to the seminar and discussing texts of common interest. The Warren Center will also arrange for a number of visiting speakers to meet with the seminar during the year to provide opportunities for discussion of issues pertinent to scholarly life, such as the art of writing, successful strategies for publication, funding opportunities, grant writing, and workshops on delivering academic presentations. The seminar will also have funds available to invite outside speakers of their choosing. Each Warren Center Graduate Student Fellow will be asked to give a public lecture in the spring term. Fellows will also be expected to be active participants in the life of the Warren Center during their fellowship year.