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Notes: 3 / Paul Glennon

LCP / London / 7 – 8.15pm, Thursday 10th Feb / 2005

Screens & the Social Landscape: Social/Cultural History of the Screen

Clive Dilnot: Senior Dean, Parsons School of Design

A Graphic Design lecturer (whose name I did not catch) introduced the speaker Clive Dilnot who immediately admitted that he was 'left of the field' when it came to the Screen. He did, however, reveal some very interesting insights into the world of 'the artificial'. The main focus seemed to be how we deal with this now, and in retrospect.

Dilnot celebrated this new way of 'being human' by deliberating over 'reconstructing representation', and how we can 'engage with violence' in such a way that we make suffering important so it does not happen again (a reference to the Holocaust).

During his lecture he quoted many people, all of which I did not catch (he used no overhead device nor gave any aide memoire, which was a surprise) Hegel and Adorno were among the list. Dilnot spoke as if everyone had his reading list, which I found rather presumptuous. Georg Hegel and the use of 'Dialectic' were familiar, but Theodor W. Adorno's work was not. The latter is a Jewish German Philosopher who wrote 'Dialectic of Enlightenment'. His work is not that well known as it may have been dismissed in the 50s & 60s due to his criticism of democracy in America. It would appear that his work is becoming more popular now. This information had to be gleaned after the lecture, as Dilnot offered no biography. (Questia Online Library) As photography affected painting, so screen affects the verisimilitude of the photograph. Dilnot presented the screen as a 'filter' that can be misused. He cited the media as an example and reported that they 'make, not report.' (David Mamet's 'Wag the Dog' came to my mind at this point).

'Design does not design things but is the relationship between things'. This viewpoint was very interesting and gave Dilnot the opportunity to show some slides. Marion Post Wolcott the 20th century American photographer was used to exemplify Dilnot's interest in revealing layers of information in a medium. One photograph of a queue of Black Americans standing below a billboard, which included an advert of a white American family, was a perfect example. "The American way...". More than mere photographic documentary, it serves an important communication purpose.

An A3 sheet was handed out to the audience, which showed examples of signs that were placed on posts around Bayerische Viertel, a neighborhood in Berlin-Schöneberg. They were erected in June 1993 in memory of Jews living there during the Third Reich. These double-sided framed signs acted as condensed versions of rules and regulations passed from 1933 to 1945. The signs were to force passers by to remember the horror of the past. One example from the 80 signs was a rubber stamp that on the reverse side said: "Jewish civil servants may no longer serve the State." Dilnot was interested in the power and potency of this device.

The London Underground tube diagram (Edward Johnston) was sited as a design with a 'depth of understanding'. Dilnot stated that if the 'future screen' did not have this understanding then the 'artificial would defeat'.

In reflection this lecture was interesting, but lacked samples from the screen, such as the work of Bill Viola, Pierre Huyghe, or even a film such as 'Blade Runner' (Philip K Dick).