ASAP 2

Abstracts
(In order of presentation)

Dietmar Böhnke (University of Leipzig)
(Re)Fashioning the Neo-Victorian Canon: An Interim Assessment

Neo-Victorian Studies are clearly here to stay. During the past decade or so, at least a dozen academic books, several international conferences and a peer-reviewed e-journal have testified to the growing popularity not only of the neo-Victorian phenomenon itself but also of its study in academic circles. It is much less clear what exactly is being studied, however. There have been various attempts at definition of the 'neo-Victorian', but the field is both amorphous and rapidly changing. How, then, can we pretend to talk of a neo-Victorian 'canon'? I believe that already at this point, we can see certain key works and themes emerging in the discussion that seem to constitute something like a makeshift canon. In this paper, I will try to evaluate this development by looking at several of the academic guides to the field (including Clayton, Gutleben, Joyce, Kaplan, Kucich/Sadoff and Krueger) as well as the e-journal *Neo-Victorian Studies*, and ask the following questions: Which are the most popular novels/authors, films, cultural phenomena etc. discussed? Are there any significant central topics or key concepts? Is there a preferred approach or methodology discernible? Are there conspicuous absences? Finally, this will lead me to my 'interim assessment' of the neo-Victorian 'canon' as it presents itself at this moment in time, and perhaps even a few suggestions as to what changes the next round of refashioning might bring.

Brian McHale (The Ohio State University)
"Things then did not delay in turning curious": Some Versions of Alice, 1966-2010

Adaptations and rewritings of Carroll's/Dodgson's *Alice* books – some overt and declared, others more or less covert – have been a recurrent feature of cultural production since the books first appeared in the 1865 and 1871. The *Alice* intertext – versions, crypto-versions, versions *of* versions – has only become more densely overwritten with the passage of time. This paper addresses the presence of the *Alice* books across a range of media and genres in the postmodern era, beginning from the striking convergence of two ambitious mass-entertainment *Alice* versions in 2009-10 – Tim Burton's spectacular 3-D film and a television version shown on the Syfy channel – then working backwards from there to the onset of the postmodern wave of *Alice* versions in 1966-67. Two types of *Alice* version will be identified, one strongly narrativized, the other only weakly so – roughly, *Alice* as mission (e.g., the Burton and Syfy versions) and *Alice* as trip.

Eckart Voigts-Virchow (University of Siegen)
Bio-Fiction: Neovictorian Revisions of Genetics and Evolution – The Cases of Darwin and Mendel

Taking the abbreviation 'bio' to refer both to biographies and biological science, the paper looks at the way in which Neovictorian bio-fiction reviews Victorian science. In short, the paper discusses a bio-fictional version of the Great Evolutionary Synthesis (Darwinian evolution and Mendelian genetics), considering the novels *Mendel's Dwarf* (Simon Mawer, Penguin, 1998) and *The Darwin Conspiracy* (John Darnton, Knopf, 2005). Mawer's erudite and stereoscopic view on the vagaries of scientific discovery and present-day "gene-centrism" (John Dupré) contextualizes the achondroplasiaic (i.e., short) geneticist Benedict Lambert and his love interest Jean (sic!) with Lambert's great-great-great uncle Gregor Mendel in order to intervene satirically in current neo-eugenics and discussions of the role of heredity in constructing human nature. Darnton's novel casts Darwin as a murderer manqué, which becomes obvious in forgotten manuscripts. This intertwining of present-day positivism and fabricated Victorianism is one the one hand a stale re-hash of A.S. Byatt, complete with eager young academics turned manuscript fetishists and liaising romantically in an unnecessary subplot. On the other hand it casts a fascinating look at how post-colonial positions may review evolutionary science. Texts such as Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plot*, Janet Browne's magisterial two-volume biography (*Voyaging* 1995, *The Power of Place* 2002), Peter Nichols's non-fictional *Evolution's Captain* (2003), *Mr Darwin's Shooter* by Roger McDonald will provide points of biographical comparison.

The important Neovictorian sub-genre of scientific bio-fiction, i.e. fictionalizations of biological science and scientific biographies, will be used to link popular 19th-century notions of Charles Darwin and the unlikely posthumous success story of Mendelian genetics to contemporary issues in the arts of the present such as evolutionary aesthetics, bioethics, biotechnology and genetic engineering.

Maria Engberg (Bleking Institute of Technology)
Polyaesthetics in Digital Literary Arts: Steve Tomasula's *TOC* and Multi-Media Fiction

The field of digital literature is still fairly unknown among scholars and a wider readership despite recent efforts by organizations such as the Electronic Literature Organization and critics like N. Katherine Hayles (2009). Digital platforms that support reading and image consumption such as the Kindle, iPad, and smart phones have prompted discussions about what Jerome McGann might call the textual condition of books. However, it does not seem that literary writing as aesthetic form is under threat by the changes to its material support. Instead, book-bound forms of creative expression are now entering into the process of negotiating their material circumstances with digital technology, like film, TV, newspapers, and other media forms did before them. This process involves more than just technical transformation and is not one of mere supercession (Gitelman 2008). Rather, in the words of Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, this process of remediation requires that older and new forms of media interact and engage with each other in a refashioned relationship: both printed and digital-born literary works mirror in various ways the ongoing cultural, aesthetic and economic transformations.

One consequence, it seems, is the veritable explosion of use of visual material in verbal texts. The pictorial turn — the growing importance of and anxiety about the visual (Mitchell 1992, Jay 1993) — has culminated in the digital media ecology of our current cultural moment. Images proliferate and spread globally, creating what Johanna Drucker has called a "condition of media saturation, of image glut and visual overstimulation" (193). In this landscape, writers reflect on and respond to that contemporary condition of excess by creating reflective and challenging verbal-visual texts. Authors such as Steve Tomasula simultaneously respond to a long tradition of word-and-image combinations in literature, and engage with radically new possibilities for re-imagining the function of the visual in written and oral texts. The resulting texts, for instance digital works such as Tomasula's *TOC*, Andy Campbell's *Dim O'Gauble*, or Stephanie Strickland's *Slippingglimpse*, challenge the reader to engage in a different process of reading and meaning-making. That reader, I would argue, is already being conditioned into a transformed set of expectations because of our changing relationship to media today, one that I would call "polyaesthetics." The multifaceted reading of the contemporary texts that this paper analyzes demands critical attention to multimodal aesthetics, the reader's sense of proprioception (true or imagined), spatiotemporality as navigational device propelling experiences, and the expectations of readers who are moving away from predominately print-based conventions and habits. The paper explores some of these facets of the polyaesthetic in relation to digital literary arts.

Alexa Weik von Mossner (University of Fribourg)
Looking Back to the Present: The Future History of Climate Change in Franny Armstrong's *The Age of Stupid*.

The arts of the present define and shape themselves and the world they interact with by entering into dialogue with not only the past, but also the future; and in some cases they even transform the present into the past from the perspective of a possible future. This is exactly what the British filmmaker Franny Armstrong has accomplished in her 2009 documentary film *The Age of Stupid*. Tackling the contemporary issue of climate change, as well as other global environmental problems, Armstrong offers us a possible future history of the present. She combines six intertwined documentaries from around the world with a dystopic fictional frame narrative which is set in 2055 – a time when the world has been devastated by unmitigated climate change and humanity has gone nearly extinct. The film is narrated by an archivist who is one of the last human survivors and who now looks back through "historical" documentary footage of the years 2005-2008, trying to understand why humanity was not able to save itself during what is now called "the age of stupid." Armstrong has repeatedly emphasized that this historicizing of the present is the most powerful rhetorical device of her film because it offers a new critical perspective on the things we are doing – and not doing – right now.

Filmic narratives imagining scenarios of global environmental change, I will argue in my paper, are of great significance for the contemporary discourse on ecological risk because they transform abstract scientific knowledge and perceived risk into stories about specific places and particular people, which are accessible and emotionally engaging. This is important because, as Paul Slovic and other psychologists working in the field of risk perception have found out, emotions matter at least as much as analytical thinking in both risk perception and decision making. *The Age of Stupid* is a particularly interesting contribution in this regard because it "shows" us something that we are not yet able to see:

3

the possibly catastrophic future consequences of our present behavior. This might not necessarily be untypical for a dystopian narrative; however, what makes the film special is that it uses contemporary documentary footage to criticize the stupidities of the "past."

Heather J Hicks (Villanova University)
The Postmodern Post-Apocalypse

In the past two decades, there has been an unmistakable groundswell of post-apocalyptic novels by major literary figures from around the globe. What has motivated so many major writers associated with postmodernism, including Margaret Atwood, Paul Auster, Jeanette Winterson, David Mitchell, and Cormac McCarthy, to generate post-apocalyptic narratives? One must wonder if the interest among contemporary writers in post-apocalyptic narratives signals some significant new evolution in literary form beyond what we understand as postmodernism. This would not only include the clear shift toward a global sensibility that critics such as Ursula K. Heise have identified, but also some new forward-looking sense of the elegiac that is distinct from but resonant with the nostalgia that tinged modernist works. In the post-apocalyptic section of David Mitchell's novel *Cloud Atlas*, for instance, the narrator looks into the eyes of a tortoise that he is contemplating killing, and sees that they are "so ancient… they [have] seen the future" (256). Such a detail is not incidental in this novel obsessed with both reincarnation and Nietzsche's notion of eternal return. The novel moves forward into an apocalypse, and then backward, attempting to find a thread through its own stories that might lead us away from an apocalyptic end. While modernist texts may have yearned backward toward the possibility of formal and epistemological unity, postmodern post-apocalypses move forward partly by rescripting histories which they take to be highly — and necessarily — malleable. This paper will consider the ways this new generation of post-apocalyptic texts engages with new forms of historicity, loss, and "last-ness."

Brian Richardson (University of Maryland)
No End: Unnatural Endings in Contemporary Literature

This paper will survey a variety of experimental and unusual forms of narrative ending, paying particular attention to the unresolved endings of recent works that center on the experience of trauma, including post 9/11 texts. The variety includes narratives that refuse to disclose their endings, that insist that they never end, that offer divergent options for their audiences, that circle back on themselves temporally like a Moebius strip, and that employ a reverse chronology and causality. The paper gives special attention to texts that attempt in some fashion, to "undo" catastrophes such as the Holocaust, an apocalyptic future, or 9/11, e.g., Martin Amis' *Time's Arrow*; Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*, and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close.* The paper will employ some basic concepts of traditional narrative theory like fabula and sjuzhet and go on to show how many of these texts require us to emend, alter, or reconceive those concepts. The paper will conclude by suggesting that there is often a homology between the depiction of extreme events and antimimetic narrative practices, but that this relation should not lead to reductionist treatments.

Robyn Warhol (The Ohio State University):
"You Know *They* Know": Realist Narration in *The Office*

This paper will analyze the formal conventions of realism deployed by *The Office*, focusing in particular on narrative point of view and its function in the show's overall critique of the conventions of verisimilitude in both visual and print media.

To make *The Office* seem like a *real* reality TV show, the producers use standard conventions of reality TV. Those conventions include using a hand-held camera to imitate the perception of natural actions; intercutting between scenes involving different characters to achieve a multi-plot structure; and making heavy use of interviews in which the questions are edited out and characters speak directly to the camera. Improvised dialogue and action on *The Office* add to the sense of pseudo-spontaneity that reality TV strives for. Of course, by using all these techniques in order to make the Scranton office of Dunder Mifflin as real as any setting in a reality series, *The Office* sends up the fundamental conceit of reality TV, the pretense that what is being viewed is in some sense actually real.

More subtle, though, are the structural techniques *The Office* borrows from the realist literary tradition, particularly its handling of narrative point of view. This paper will focus on the nature and effects of this borrowing, dividing the analysis into two main parts: (1) an examination of the ways in which *The Office* follows conventions of narration in the realist novel, conventions that can be usefully analyzed through such narratological concepts as narrator, focalization, and diegetic level; and (2) a demonstration of how *The Office* strategically plays with the conventions in order to foreground their fictionality and thus remind the audience that this fiction that feels so real is indeed a fiction.

James Phelan (The Ohio State University)
Assessing the Contemporary Novel: The Case of Franzen's *Freedom*

Because Jonathan Franzen's new novel *Freedom* (published at the end of August of 2010) has been both widely celebrated and roundly criticized, its reception provides an excellent case study of the criteria by which reviewers evaluate novelistic success. *Time* magazine put Franzen on the cover with the caption, "Great American Novelist," and praised the scope of the novel's concerns as well as its exploration of the theme named by the title. Sam Tanenhaus, the editor of the *New York Times Book Review*, called the novel "a masterpiece of American fiction," and "a capacious but intricately ordered narrative that in its majestic sweep seems to gather up every fresh datum of our shared millennial life." But in his review for the *Atlantic*, C. R. Myers attacked the novel for its "juvenile prose," arguing that Franzen's style sends the signal that he doesn't really care about his characters. And Ruth Franklin in *The New Republic* complained that the novel is "all mirror and no lamp. Franzen substitutes the details for the big picture, a hyper-realistic portraiture for genuine psychological insight." This paper will attempt to sort out the debate in order to shed some light on both Franzen's novel and what Jauss would call the horizon of expectations for the contemporary novel.

Elizabeth Ho (Ursinus College)
Neo-Victorianism at Sea: Towards a Global Memory of "the Victorian"

At its simplest, neo-Victorianism is a term that covers the proliferation of contemporary texts and artifacts from multiple genres and media set in or telescoping between the usually British nineteenth-century and the present. A.S. Byatt's Booker Prize-winning novel, *Possession* (1990), initially the most well-known and respected example of literary neo-Victorianism, has since been eclipsed by the popularity of the nineteenth century as a period of return in the present and the expansion of neo-Victorianism into a huge global literary and cultural industry. If neo-Victorianism is a deliberate misreading, reconstruction, or staged return of the nineteenth century in and for the present, it becomes necessary to ask: why the Victorian? Why now?

Reading British and postcolonial texts produced in the last twenty years, I have argued that this memory of "the Victorian" in the present is one of the primary memorial strategies used to incorporate and work through persistent anxieties and uncertainties that emerge in the wake of the British empire's dissolution. However, a recent sub-genre has formed based around the sea voyage rather than the more "settled" locales of conventional neo-Victorian texts that marks a sea change in why we "do" the Victorian in the present. In addition to drawing our attention the dispersal of Englishness around the world in the nineteenth century, this sub-genre, what I would like to call "neo-Victorianism at sea," creates alternate histories of empire and establishes the memory of the Victorian as the precursor to our current moment of globalization. The shift from destination to voyage widens the scope of neo-Victorianism beyond its primarily British archive to include new locations – and thus new histories – previously overlooked. Novels like Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008) and Matthew Kneale's *English Passengers* (2000), for example, admit India during the Opium Wars and Tasmania respectively into the realm of neo-Victorianism, while novels such as Andrea Barrett's *Voyage of the Narwhal* (1999) and Harry Thompson's *To The Edge of the World* (2006) offer American authorship and pan-American locations (from Philadelphia to the Galapagos and other South American climes) all heretofore neglected by the neo-Victorian canon. More importantly, "neo-Victorianism at sea" injects race into a popular phenomenon often more preoccupied with aesthetics and postmodern play. In this paper, I read the "neo-Victorianism at sea" as an attempt to move beyond conventional neo-Victorianism's bounded territorial spaces and status as national literatures and argue instead for a shared heritage or global memory of "the Victorian" that simultaneously destabilizes our understanding of the cartography of the British Empire and traces the contours of globalization.

Amy J Elias (University of Tennessee)
The Politics of Steampunk: Time/Space in Pynchon's *Against the Day*

Perhaps originating in the U.S. 1960s with TV shows such as *Wild Wild West*, "steampunk" is everywhere in popular culture today, ranging from the latest Sherlock Holmes film (2009, starring Robert Downey Jr.) to Ning fan groups to *Second Life* roleplaying, video games, and music. As a subgenre of contemporary literature, steampunk's nostalgia for and pastiche of Victorian culture and technologies comment in complex ways on contemporary anxieties about technological imperialism and social control. Embedding elements of SF, fantasy, and gothic, as well as stylistic and cultural references to Victorian England, *fin de siècle*

Modernism, and Art Deco, steampunk has entered the realm of literary art in works by Neil Stephenson, William Gibson, China Meiville, Michael Moorcock, Paul Di Filippo, Scott Westerfield, and others, while Alan Moore, Steve Tomasula and others have extended the genre into the domains of visual narrative.

This paper explores what steampunk is and also how Thomas Pynchon's massive novel *Against the Day*, published in 2006, turns steampunk generic motifs to the purposes of social critique. Pynchon's text, only recently published, has received relatively scant criticism to date, and no one to my knowledge has linked the novel to steampunk. Yet steampunk gains force in popular culture in the decade immediately preceding the publication of Pynchon's novel, and the novel everywhere embeds its conventions. I am interested not only in how *Against the Day* incorporates steampunk's blending of genres (SF, Fantasy, historical novel, gothic, alt-history), its reversal of SF history (rewriting the past instead of the dystopian future) and its period mashups (Romantic Gothic combined with Victorianism and Modernism), but also how it thematizes steampunk's complex fetishizing of and anxiety about technology. Steampunk gains prominence in the early 1990s at the moment of the birth of the home computer and the internet, a moment that generated both great utopian hopes and strong dystopian fears about technology and social control. Constructing a neo-Victorian past where technology is more material and less virtual, more accessible to mechanical logic and everyday manipulation by ordinary people, steampunk gives nostalgic comfort to a culture swimming in the BWO chip networks of interfaced technocracies. Setting *Against the Day* in relation to steampunk arts reveals how Pynchon embeds a steampunk ethos at the heart of the novel but also uses generic conventions to implode this nostalgic conservatism at the heart of this "punk" genre.

Jeffrey Di Leo (University of Houston at Victoria)
Criminal Editors and the Critical Present

Negative reviews are an editor's bogeyman. Few things are potentially scarier than the spectre of a negative review published in their journal. But just like bad dreams and bad books, negative reviews are a part of life. In a recent conversation with fellow editors, I was taken aback when my peers adamantly argued that negative reviews should not be published. Their thought was, since so few books are reviewed compared to the total number of books published, why waste valuable review space and time reviewing bad books?

There is no doubt that publishing a negative review is more difficult than publishing a positive review. The potential discontent of the book's author, the author's friends, and the author's publisher can be intimidating. It's no wonder that most reviewers suffer from what the Greeks called *akrasia*, or weakness of the will, when they are faced with writing anything less than glowing about a book. The vast majority of book reviews tend to be positive rather than negative not because there are more good books out there than bad ones, but because the possible effects of negative reviewing are much less appealing than the effects of positive reviewing. Reviewers today err toward the side of sympathy — or as Gail Pool calls it "faint praise" — in their reviews when they feel themselves reacting negatively toward a book. Some even refuse to write a review if they feel it will be negative. But do these current practices really help the cause of book reviewing? I'm not so sure.

If book reviewing is to distance itself from the perception that it is simply a promotional service for the publishing industry, then it needs to engage in legitimate

practices. The task of the reviewer should not be to prejudge their reviews, but rather to be open to following them through to the natural conclusion of the aesthetic and intellectual interaction resulting from the act of reading. To write only about the fruitful ends of these readings is like a restaurant critic who only tells us about the good restaurants in which she's eaten. The question of what a reviewer should do when they find themselves reacting negatively to a book that has been assigned to them for review though seems fairly obvious: write the review. And this negative review should be subject to the same quality protocols as a review that is positive, which is to say, if it is the result of an honest engagement with a competent reviewer, then it must be published.

Peter Howarth (Queen Mary, University of London)
Poetic Form and Ecological Place in Contemporary British Poetry

This paper will be about Alice Oswald's surprise hit book, *Dart* (Faber, 2002), which makes a poem from the two years' worth of tape recordings of those who live and work and play on the river Dart in Devon. I think Oswald is breaking with the long ecopoetical, Wordsworthian, Ted-Hughesian tradition of mutual reflection between the solitary poet's organic instincts and the natural environment, by making a poem instead from the social nature of the river. The river's 'place' is not simply between its banks or moving in the poet's mind, but in the bodies, imaginations, jobs and instincts of those who live and work in and around it; the poem explores how it's got into their habits and ways of thinking, and more obliquely, how they are changing it. One source of Oswald's idea, I'll argue, is the performative site-specific idea of poetry being forged by Sean Borodale and Caroline Bergvall at Dartington College while Oswald was resident there in the 1990s, whereby geographical setting becomes an element of poetic form. Another is Richard Long's conceptual walk-sculptures across Dartmoor, with their creation of an artistic 'field' from apparently neutral territory, a field in which the usual differences of small and large, influential and irrelevant, body and landscape, momentary chance and evolutionary aeons are co-implicated. All these artists try to make art where the sites which frame the art become themselves part of the art; where the artwork moves out from a sense of being framed or instrumentally positioned by anything. That, too, is what Oswald is doing with *Dart*, and her poem is meant to enable us to read the real landscape of the Dart — its place names, tributaries, towns, inhabitants and so on — as part of the poem-river itself.

Yasmine Shamma (University of Oxford)
"All I Want is a Room Up There": Conversations between Poetry and Architecture

My paper will look at the crowded rooms described and imitated by poets from the First and Second Generation New York Schools. Post Cold War American poets like Frank O'Hara, Ted Berrigan and Alice Notley not only responded to changing ideas of form in poetry, but changing forms of buildings and cities. In this way, their poems become places to register impressions of city life.

Berrigan scatters the following line repeatedly throughout his sonnets: "Is there any room in that room that you room in?"; Notley confesses "There isn't any room / People keep coming in", from within her "101" (a poem named after an apartment), and O'Hara calls up at a building from street level "All I want is a room up there." These New York poets speak of

city situations from their poetic situation: A sustained moment of formlessness. Berrigan's stuffed and rearranged sonnets throw questions of there being enough "room" or the right kind of "stanza" into question. Notley's poems in *Mysteries of Small Houses* revisit old apartments and rooms, written from outside of them (in Paris), and O'Hara writes to New York City from multiple other cities. I am interested in the idea that these poets and poems speak across location and time, and the fact that these conversations are, in part, facilitated by poetic form.

I will look at these poems in the context of poetry movements and urban theory discussions. How do urban poets formally (through the means of seemingly informal poetry) respond to their situations by recreating them in poetry. My paper considers this formal response to environmental situations. While ecocriticsm has given attention to landscape in poetry, and earlier French theory to the subject of the city, the smallest unit of place — the room, or "stanza" — the "place one stands in," has been curiously elided. My paper will dwell on this elision with respect to these poets who repeatedly make room for themselves through their poetry in New York.

Jay Clayton (Vanderbilt University)
Faerie Queene Online: Augmented Reality and Storyworlds

This paper draws upon a multiplayer online game based on Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* that has been developed by a collaboration of engineers, narrative theorists, and artists at Vanderbilt University. Spenser's poem is set in a world of knights, castles, dungeons, and dragons, just as are the majority of online games. The intense engagement with the text required to build this virtual world brings Spenser's poetry alive for a media-savvy generation and generates new insights into fundamental aspects of narrative such as characterization, focalization, and the experience of space and time. The designers are working to add an augmented reality interface accessible through a user's cell phone or other mobile device, which will allow real-world movement or action to impinge on the game world, and images and messages from the virtual game space to surface in the player's real world. Augmented reality technologies could change our understanding of the concept of storyworlds first proposed by David Herman. How does blurring the boundary between the imaginary storyworld and the player's actual world alter our understanding of narrative? How does the ability to execute real-world actions that alter the outcome of a virtual narrative affect our understanding of the nature and meaning of storyworlds?

Jürgen Ronthaler (University of Leipzig)
Scandalizing Shakespeare: Re-Presenting the 'Bard' in Contemporary Popular Fiction

Always considered a touchstone for the relationship of 'past significance' and 'present meaning', Shakespeare has triggered off a multitude of reworkings of his texts and their author(ship). In *The Shakespeare Secret* (2007) and *The Shakespeare Curse* (2010), American scholar and writer J(ennifer) L(ee) Carrell re-invents the canonical author, his plays and their contemporary reception in Dan-Brown-like fashion. In a funny postmodernist pastiche Myrlin A. Hermes, likewise American researcher and author, mixes in her novel *The Lunatic, the Lover and the Poet* (2010) Hamlet, its creation and its author. In crossover style the two authors add fabric to the intellectually less demanding thriller and 'scandalous romance'

genres by referring to scholarly data about Shakespeare's life, authorship, work and context (or at least playing with them). Thereby they enrich the present meaning of the Shakespeare canon and — possibly — gain it a new audience by tapping into an elite tradition which they seem to eschew in their popular narrative structures. The paper intends to show how Shakespeare is used to satisfy a recent need in new and popular narrative forms and themes, and to give them an aura of seriosity (not unlike in the early films), as well as to sell the new books.

Amir Eshel (Stanford University)
Hannah Arendt's Politics and Poetics of Insertion

In her 1968 work *Between Past and Future*, Arendt argued that "from the viewpoint of man, who always lives in the interval between past and future, time is not a continuum…it is broken in the middle, at the point where 'he' stands; and 'his' standpoint is not the present as we usually understand it but rather a gap in time which 'his' constant fighting, 'his' making a stand against past and future, keeps in existence. Only because man is inserted into time and only to the extent that he stands his ground does the flow of indifferent time break up into tenses; it is this insertion — the beginning of a beginning, to put it into Augustinian terms — which splits up the time continuum into forces which then…begin fighting with each other and acting upon man."

Arendt's model of "insertion" offers us a potent heuristic device for understanding the culture of time that has unfolded since 1945, especially contemporary fiction's unmistakable interest in the past both as a mode of intervention in the present, and as an opening of political possibilities for the future. The paper will show how Arendtian insertion works in Michael Govrin's 2002 novel *Hevzekim* (translated as *Snapshots*) and the visual art of Yigal Shtayim by exploring how Govrin and Shtayim evoke the 1948 exodus of Palestinians from Palestine/Israel as a historical means of considering what it may take to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict today.

Joel Burges (MIT)
Suddenly, September 11th: The Contemporary Novel, Hannah Arendt, and the Big Bang Theory of 9/11

The idea that "9/11 changed everything" was ubiquitous in both the days and the decade after the events of September 11, 2001. This idea, in fact, can be seen as part of a much larger big bang theory of historical change in which 9/11 suddenly unhinged past from future, not unlike the singularity that initiated the beginning of time in theories positing how the universe began, but in this case enabling extended military actions by the U.S. in the world. In this essay, I use Hannah Arendt's idea of the present as a gap in time between past and future as a suggestive aesthetic model for talking about how two novels — Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundmentalist* and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* — develop temporal structures and devices that seek to interrupt the big bang theory of 9/11 with what Arendt calls a "thought-event." In her preface to *Between Past and Future*, Arendt writes that the interval between past and future "may well be...the path paved by thinking, [a] small track of non-time which the activity of thought beats within the time-space of mortal men and into which the trains of thought, of remembrance and anticipation, save whatever they touch

from the ruin of historical and biographical time." In Hamid's novel, the path towards this interval and thus, potentially, this thought-event opens up as a function of the Pakistani narrator's constant oscillation between past and present, where past and present are divided from one another by the events of 9/11; this oscillation, moreover, is charged by a strong element of futurity introduced through the device of suspense about whether or not the narrator is a terrorist. In DeLillo's novel, the path opens up as a function of the recursive temporal structure of the novel, which begins as workers flee the World Trade Center, then moves to the immediate and longer-term aftermath of 9/11, only to end as the hijacked planes strike the Twin Towers; suggesting on the one hand that all we have is the event itself, this recursive temporal structure is, on the other hand, an effort to open up the interval of "non-time" in which thinking about a seemingly singular historical event that unhinged past from future might occur.

While I remain unconvinced that either novel fully succeeds at producing the kind of thought-event Arendt posits as an existential possibility of human experience, I nonetheless see these two novels as ultimately interesting in how they attempt to intervene in the present conjuncture of global power by getting their readers to question the big bang theory of 9/11. At the same time, these novels prompt a whole series of questions about Arendt's model of the present as an interval between past and future, especially the distinction between events that produce that interval within the existential experience of time, and events that produce it within the historical experience of time.

Michael Benveniste (Stanford University)
Getting over Magical History: Fatalism and Idealist History in Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

The paper will examine how Diaz's novel inextricably ties counterfactual narratives of historical causality about the past—offered up in alternately magical realist, science-fictional, and fantastic modes of narration—to the project of characters' reevaluating the present and gaining the ground of agency in the future. Crucially, this novel presents its characters' actions as conscious responses to their understandings of the past in moments akin to Arendtian insertion into the present. The novel, however, ultimately critiques these actions, responses, and understandings by weirdly turning around the notion that those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it. In Diaz's novel, those who remember the past, especially the damages it has enacted and the wounds it has produced within the postcolonial scene of the Americas, are doomed to repeat its traumas. Moreover, they do so willingly rather than — to mobilize Arendt's ideas and idiom — taking a stand against the past and the future as forces acting upon them.

Joe Brooker (Birkbeck, University of London)
Is Fat a Formalist Issue? Lorrie Moore and the Question of Scale

How does a text's size determine or contribute to its form? In this contribution to a renewal of formal attention to texts, I want to consider the role of scale. American literature displays both a penchant for the expansive (the Great American Novel) and a valuation of the minimal (a rich tradition of short stories). My paper considers a writer who has moved from one pole to the other. Lorrie Moore is renowned for her short stories, exemplifying some of

that form's major features: significant moments, turning points, ambiguous endings. But after a quarter-century of publishing, in *A Gate at the Stairs* (2009) she occupies the terrain of the extended American novel. The book explores the state of the nation prior to the Iraq war, while also seeking to represent the regional atmosphere of the Mid-West. Moore admits to facing challenges of narrative and speed in the longer form.

My questions are: what has this first essay in the big American novel done to Lorrie Moore's writing? How does the work compare with a smaller one: for instance, are matters of style also affected by changes of scale? What does Moore's move tell us about scale as a formal matter?

Andrew Hoberek (University of Missouri-Columbia)
Cormac McCarthy and the Aesthetics of Exhaustion

The novelist Cormac McCarthy has, in recent years, achieved both critical and popular acclaim via his turn to genre fiction: the crime thriller in *No Country for Old Men* (2005) and the post-apocalyptic science fiction story in *The Road* (2006). One of a number of authors who has wed serious and genre fiction in the early twenty-first century, McCarthy has conspicuously accompanied this shift with a transformation of his style, cutting down on the Faulknerian flourishes of his earlier writing in favor of a more pared-back, almost minimalist prose. Yet focusing on *The Road* I argue that, paradoxically, McCarthy's turn to genre fiction constitutes an endorsement of style for style's sake lacking in his earlier work. Whereas this earlier fiction associates style with McCarthy's trademark sociopathic characters, *The Road* — for all it attempts to match its gray and lifeless post-apocalyptic world with a similarly spare prose — associates its occasional shifts into McCarthy's earlier, more baroque style with both the lost world of natural abundance and the forms of social engagement that McCarthy embodies in the character of the son. In this way *The Road* participates in what I will argue is a general tendency of contemporary fiction writers interested in genre models to see such models as synonymous with literary form itself.

David James (University of Nottingham)
A Renaissance for the Crystalline Novel

The first decade of the twenty-first century has witnessed a renewed commitment to formal proportion shared by novelists who might otherwise appear to be distinct from each other in style and vision. This paper considers writers who are developing an increasingly contracted, miniaturized, and rhetorically frugal manner of engaging with public and domestic histories. By reading Don DeLillo's *Point Omega* (2010) alongside Paul Harding's *Tinkers* (2009) and Marilynne Robinson's *Home* (2008), I explore how these inter-generational novels evoke what Robinson calls (in praising Harding's Pulitzer-winning debut) "a frisson of deep recognition, a sense of primal encounter with the brilliant, elusive world of the senses." In the course of identifying the techniques that frame and refract such encounters, I reassess the pertinence of Iris Murdoch's famous distinction in "Against Dryness" (1961) between the "journalistic" and "crystalline" novel. Insofar as their highly economical yet oblique works counteract literary-critical approaches to post-millennial fiction of a purely thematic or instrumentalizing kind, DeLillo, Harding, and Robinson not only exemplify the renewed

efficacy of the crystalline mode, but also compel us to reconsider formal questions of scale and their implications for the reading the politics of aesthetics in American fiction today.

Hilary Dannenberg (University of Trier)
Restorative Nostalgia and its Counter-Narratives in British Television Texts

All national cultures generate a sense of identity constructed around historical and other key narratives from the past, but contemporary British culture demonstrates a particularly strong and complex preoccupation with the past. Key changes in British society in recent decades mean that contemporary British culture is shaped by an ambivalent mix of multiple visions, and versions, of the past. One of the many manifestations of this complexity is the empire nostalgia which is still strongly present in British cultural memory but which conflicts with new post-imperial identities in contemporary multi-ethnic Britain. Nowhere is this fascination with the past, coupled with a *re-visioning* of the past, more evident than in British television texts. As David Cannadine writes in *History and the Media* (2004): "In Britain, the late 1990s and early 2000s witnessed [...] an unprecedented interest in history [...] especially [...] on television." The different approaches to the past which shape contemporary British culture can be analysed using the key distinction between *restorative* and *reflective* nostalgia made by Svetlana Boym in *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001): restorative nostalgia believes in the past as a place of truth which can be rebuilt; reflective nostalgia treats the past as a site of ruins and dreams. The paper will show how British television texts reveal a strong interplay of restorative nostalgia and counter-narratives of more reflective nostalgia by looking at different genres which focus on the past: poet Benjamin Zephaniah's autobiographical documentary *This OBE Is Not For Me* (BBC 2005), the time-travel/police-procedural hybrid drama series *Life on Mars* (BBC 2006-2007), and the long-running science-fiction series *Doctor Who* (BBC 1963-1989; 2005-2010).

Anna Linetsky (University of Trier)
Revealing History's Unstable Letter: Jewish Identity in Contemporary Film

The representation of Jewish identity and culture in American film has undergone significant transformations since the second half of the twentieth century, frequently mirroring the changing modes of American Jewish self-determination. John Stratton suggests that from the 1940s until the late 1960s cinematic productions "naturalized Jews as white", depicting modes of assimilation and placing Jewish culture within mainstream Anglo-American culture. On the other hand, the shift towards an acknowledgement and exploration of difference first occurred towards the 1980s, pioneered by such films as *Zelig* (1983) and *Yentl* (1983) (Stratton 2001).

The depiction of the postmodern nature of Jewish identity and its constant revision through the "self-critical joke" characterize more recent (post-1990s) cinematic portrayals of Jewishness (Johnston 2006). This paper seeks to analyse the protagonists and events of two contemporary films, *The Believer* (2001) and *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), which envisage unprecedented and highly controversial Jewish characters but simultaneously participate in the process of postmodernism's critical rethinking of monolithic narratives of history and culture. *Inglourious Basterds* creates a grotesque image of a violent 'Jewish guerrilla squad'

in an alternative Second World War universe and *The Believer* offers a disturbing portrait of a 'Jewish skinhead', living in New York in the late 1990s. The paper will dwell on the representations of historical narrativity and its function in both films. Furthermore, employing Bhabha's concept of mimicry, it will discuss the characters of both films in terms of "prodigious and strategic production of conflictual, fantastic, discriminatory 'identity effects'" (Bhabha 1993) that lead to a disruption of authoritative and homogenous discourses on identity and history, criticizing radicalism in all of its forms.

Aparna Bhar (University of Trier)
Constraints and Opportunities of the Genre: Changing Gender Roles and Sexuality of Muslim Characters in British Soap Opera

In the wake of recent socio-political developments following September 11, 2001, and more so the London Bombings in July 2005, British film and television has witnessed a new turn with increasing representations of the British Muslim minority. Most of these concentrate on the question of religious fundamentalism of British Muslims perpetrating acts of terror, or the plight of this ethnic group in the face of ever increasing Islamophobia, which is often portrayed as a further motivating force behind terrorism. The long-running soap opera *EastEnders*, in an effort to accurately represent the ethnic demographics of London's multicultural East End, also incorporates the story of a British Muslim family into its multi-stranded plot. However, in a rare exception, the series looks at diverse standpoints, ranging from extreme cultural conservatism to absolute liberalism, most specifically in the areas of gender roles and sexuality. In this process, the programme succeeds in questioning both traditional as well as newer contemporary depictions of British Muslims. In this regard, the paper will explore the opportunities provided specifically by the genre of soap opera and their implications for the politics of representation of British Muslims in the contemporary socio-political climate.