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CAMERA OU STYLO: A PROBLEMATIC DIALOGUE?

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Conference Chair and Editor.

For eight years our interdisciplinary graduate student conference has afforded an opportunity to students and scholars from humanity departments nationwide to present their research, as well as to engage in stimulating discussions of current issues in Critical Studies. Each year the French Graduate Student Conference carefully chooses a specific theme that reflects pressing issues in Critical and French Studies. In the past, conference topics have ranged from "Sites of Memory" to "Crime and Punishment," from "States of Identity" to "Body and Mind," from "Spectrality and Haunting" to "Murder and Massacre."

This year's topic centered on the interplay of the textual and the visual in literature and the arts. Participants from diverse disciplines addressed the topic of "*Camera ou Stylo: A Problematic Dialogue?*," which attracted interest and participation from graduate students and scholars from universities all over the country: Columbia University, Indiana University, Johns Hopkins University, Princeton University, Rice University, UC Riverside, USC, University of Texas, as well as UCLA. The two-day discussion sought to bring together departments, disciplines, and methodologies, as the panelists and the audience examined the interdisciplinary convergence of text and visual arts. The conference consisted of five panels entitled: "Cinematic Discourse Revisited," "Visual(izing) Poetry," "Textual Imagery," "Scopophilia Unmasked," and "Cultural Collages."

The conference title, "*Camera ou Stylo*," mirrors Alexandre Astruc's term, *la caméra-stylo*. The concept of camera-pen refers to his theory in which cinema becomes a language capable of expressing abstract thoughts. By providing diverse methods of signification, cinema goes beyond the mere iconicity of its visual signs, forging the affinity between director and writer. Meanwhile, the conjunction "or," in our version of this term, reflects the sense of disjunction that often permeates contemporary discourse on the interplay of words and images. On the one hand, today's advancements in technology redefine texts as hypertext, filled with links and audio-visual components, resulting in multimedia hybridity. On the other, there are still debates feeding the rivalry between words and images and promoting hierarchies of language and vision. Thus, while John Berger reminds us in his book, *Ways of Seeing*, that a child sees before he is able to use language,¹ Martin Jay in *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* warns us about the hegemony of the eye sweeping across the arts and humanities.² For centuries, however, text and image have existed side by side. For instance, the visual commentary of a medieval illuminated manuscript often questioned the main text, and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century engravings in travel narratives provided their readers with glimpses of exotic alterity. Problematic or not, the dialectic of the textual and the visual continues to inform our perceptual and sensual experience.

We were fortunate to welcome Alain Robbe-Grillet as keynote speaker for our 2003 Conference. Groundbreaking writer, filmmaker, and theorist, Alain Robbe-Grillet

revolutionized, in his artistic works, the interplay of the visual and the textual. Throughout his literary and cinematic career, Robbe-Grillet has challenged the limitations imposed on genres, laying the foundation for the concepts of *Nouveau Roman*, *Nouvelle Autobiographie* and, may I add, *Nouveau Cinéma*. He consciously broke down and moved beyond the existing confines of literature and cinema, giving first place to artistic inspiration itself. His speech, entitled "Image réelle, image textuelle, image virtuelle," provided a perfect launching point for the conference. As a new addition to our graduate student journal, the audio recording of Robbe-Grillet's address in CD-ROM format, along with a ten-minute video segment, recaptures the interdisciplinary spirit of the conference.

This issue of *Paroles Gelées* features two introductions. Ben Stoltzfus, professor emeritus of French and Comparative Literature at UC Riverside, has collaborated with Robbe-Grillet and has worked extensively on his œuvre. Stoltzfus' introductory address points out that Robbe-Grillet escapes the referential compulsions of realism and instead stages the unfolding of the writing process itself. Following Stoltzfus' commentary, Professor Andrea Loselle from the Department of French and Francophone Studies at UCLA offers introductory remarks to the selected papers gathered in this issue. She has indeed always supported and encouraged graduate students to go beyond the conventional discipline boundaries.

Organizing the conference was a particularly enriching experience and I would like to express special thanks to all the graduate students in the UCLA Department of French and Francophone Studies. A personal expression of recognition goes to my assistant Nadège Veldwachter. The help from our chair, Professor Françoise Lionnet, has been invaluable throughout this entire process, along with administrative expertise of Kathlene Avakian and Cyndia Soloway. The continuing support of our sponsors truly enables us to carry out our annual event: the Albert and Elaine Borchard Foundation, the UCLA Campus Programs Committee of the Program Activities Board, the Center for European and Russian Studies, the Center for Modern and Contemporary Studies, the French Consulate in Los Angeles, and the Graduate Students Association.

Notes

¹ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1977) 7.

² Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 150-151.

Selected Proceedings from
the UCLA Department of French and
Francophone Studies
Annual Graduate Student Conference

CAMERA OU STYLO:
A PROBLEMATIC DIALOGUE?

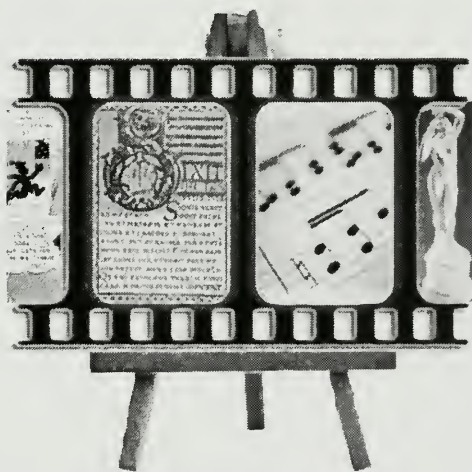


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*Ce serait le moment de philosopher et de rechercher
si, par hasard, se trouvait ici l'endroit où de telles
paroles dégèlent.*

Rabelais, *Le Quart Livre*.

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For more information regarding previous issues of *Paroles Gelées* and our conference, please visit our home page at:

<http://www.french.ucla.edu/gradconf>

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