

Oct. 03 – Dec. 14, 2013:

**Adorno's Grey**

Hito Steyerl

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**Audain Gallery**

# Artist Talk: Oct. 2, 6pm

## Opening: Oct. 2, 7pm

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### *Events*

#### ***Hito Steyerl Artist Talk***

Wed. Oct. 2, 6pm

Wong Experimental Theatre

#### ***Grey on Grey Lectures***

Wed. Oct. 16 and Wed. Nov. 6, 6pm

World Art Centre

#### ***No Looking After the Internet***

Wed. Nov. 20, 6pm

Audain Gallery

#### ***Perspectives on a Vertical Plane:***

#### ***Hito Steyerl's videos and .mov files***

Wed. Nov. 27, 6pm

Djavad Mowfaghian Cinema

#### ***Exhibition Tours***

Sat. Oct. 19, Sat. Nov. 9, and Sat. Nov. 30, 1pm

Audain Gallery

For detailed information about these events, please see the inside back cover.

The Audain Gallery is part of Simon Fraser University Galleries and a vital aspect of the Visual Art program in the School for the Contemporary Arts.

Encouraging conceptual and experimental projects that explore the dialogue between the social and the cultural in contemporary artistic practices, the Audain Gallery's mission is to advance the aesthetic and discursive production and presentation of contemporary art through a responsive program of exhibitions.

The Audain Gallery staff are Melanie O'Brian, SFU Galleries Director, Amy Kazymierchuk, Curator, and Brady Cranfield, Gallery Assistant.

*Hito Steyerl: Adorno's Grey* is curated by Melanie O'Brian with Amy Kazymierchuk in collaboration with the School for the Contemporary Arts' Audain Visual Artist in Residence Program.

For more information, please contact [info@audaingallery.ca](mailto:info@audaingallery.ca)

## *Hito Steyerl: Adorno's Grey*

*Adorno's Grey* features a single channel video set in the Goethe-Universität in Frankfurt, where German philosopher Theodor W. Adorno famously taught. It shows two conservators scraping the walls of a lecture hall, looking for the legendary grey that Adorno had his classroom painted in order to promote concentration. The excavation is staged as a film set: the technical apparatus of the production is exposed and Steyerl's directions for the excavators can be heard off camera. The video returns to an image of a camera being set up to take a photo of the lectern.

Adorno's 1969 lecture series, "An Introduction to Dialectical Thinking", intended to consider the relation between social theory and practice. Amidst a climate of student unrest within the university, Adorno wanted to create an open forum for dialogue and invited questions from students at any time. During his first lecture on April 22, he was bombarded by a series of critical provocations from Students for a Democratic Society, including three female students who emerged from the audience to scatter flower petals and then bare their breasts to him. That "Busenattentat" (Breast Attack) incident is described and interpreted over the forensic performance.

Parallel to the excavation, Steyerl uncovers a constellation of artifacts from the histories of student protests, nude protests and monochrome painting to expand and complicate the aesthetic and social significance of Adorno's writing and biography. These threads are woven into a timeline on the wall opposite the viewing room's entrance.

In her practice, Steyerl employs riddles, puns and word play as tools for ideological critique. In *Adorno's Grey*, she examines the dialectical properties of grey within philosophy, aesthetics, pedagogy and politics. Formally, the video projection is disrupted across four staggered, oblique panels painted a gradient of greys. The image's continuity is further disjointed by Steyerl's editing, which shuffles multiple images across shifting vertical planes.

An imposing form in the gallery, the exterior of the viewing room is painted the supposed grey of Adorno's classroom. Opaque and monochromatic, it is the central object for interrogation, confining Steyerl's restaging of the Goethe-Universität lecture hall and the history that took place within its walls.

When the on-set camera finally captures its image, the video cuts to a low-resolution digital video of a recent Book Bloc protest. In it, one student protestor holds the front-line behind a makeshift shield painted as Adorno's book *Negative Dialectics*. With this final image, Steyerl exposes the continued negotiation of social relations and theory within contemporary life.

The exhibition of *Adorno's Grey* at SFU's Audain Gallery situates Adorno's classroom within a gallery within a university. With an interest in how the conditions surrounding Adorno's "Introduction to Dialectical Thinking" lecture series still resonate in contemporary academic and artistic dialogue, the gallery will expand upon the phenomenon in Steyerl's constellation through a series of public programs.





## Hito Steyerl Biography

Hito Steyerl works as a filmmaker and author in the areas of documentary film, media art and video installation. She consistently questions and expands the form of the documentary essay, starting with time-based practices and increasingly in other media. In all her works, she sustains a use of media that highlights the material objectivity of images and their infrastructures. Over the past two decades, Steyerl has engaged with the issues of political violence, the circulation of media and digital popular culture, and she is influenced by a range of artistic and non-artistic traditions, from Russian avant-garde art to militant Japanese cinema to low resolution YouTube clips. She has exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions, including dOCUMENTA 12, the Taipei Biennial (2010), the 7th Shanghai Biennial and Venice Biennial (2013). As a writer, she contributes to e-flux journal, Frieze, October and the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Politics. Steyerl teaches New Media Art at the University of the Arts in Berlin and holds a Ph.D. in philosophy from the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna. The most formative parts of her education, however, include working as a stunt-girl and bouncer.

### Selected filmography:

*November* (2004), *Lovely Andrea* (2007), and *Abstract* (2012), *The Empty Centre* (1998), *Normality 1-10* (1999), *Journal No. 1, An Artist's Impression* (2007), *In Free Fall* (2010), *Adorno's Grey* (2012), *Guards* (2012), and *How Not To Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational Mov. File* (2013).

## Adorno's Grey Credits

Protagonists: Gerd Roscher, Nina Power, Peter Osborne and anonymous protester (read by Leon Kahane).

Camera, Sound, Editing, Colour:  
Hito Steyerl

Large Format Photography:  
Leon Kahane

Wall Plot Research and Assistant  
Director: Alwin Franke

Conservators: Sina Klausnitz and  
Benjamin Rudolph.

Production Managers: Maike Banaski  
and Anna-Victoria Eschbach.

Postproduction: Maria Frycz and  
Christoph Manz.

Screen Design: Studio Miessen, Diogo  
Passarinho and Yulia Startsev.

Graphic Design: Vincent Grunwald

Painter: Logi Bjarnason

Produced by Wilfried Lentz, Rotterdam.

Supported by Nikolaus Hirsch, Sophie  
von Olfers and Claudia Stockhausen.

Previous spread: *Adorno's Grey* (detail), 2012, single channel HD video projection (14.20min), four angled screens, wall plot, photographs. Courtesy Wilfried Lentz, Rotterdam.



## Events

### Hito Steyerl Artist Talk

Wed. Oct. 2, 6pm, Wong Experimental Theatre

### Grey on Grey: Samir Gandesha and Jaleh Mansoor

Wed. Oct. 16, 6pm, World Art Centre

#### Samir Gandesha: *The Colour of Adorno's Thought*

In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno posits that "Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it failed." By considering references to the October Revolution and Karl Marx's program of simultaneously abolishing and realizing philosophy, Gandesha will explore the extent to which Adorno's thought manifests a stark opposition between red and grey – between the vital, struggling labouring body and the detached, abstract work of philosophical conceptualization.

#### Jaleh Mansoor: *On Monochromy and Repressive Tolerance: Notes on the Post WWII Recrudescence of the Revolutionary Form*

Mansoor will speak about monochrome painting in France and Italy in the 1950s and 1960s in consideration of her research on modernism, European and American art since 1945, and Marxist and Feminist theory and historiography.

### Grey on Grey: Sara Mourad and Michael Rattray

Wed. Nov. 6, 6pm, World Art Centre

#### Sara Mourad: *From Feminism to Titslamism: The Politics of Bare Breasts*

Boobs are making a comeback. Mourad will consider young Egyptian blogger Alia el-Mahdy's nude photograph, published online in the midst of the Egyptian uprising in 2011, as well as her naked protest action with FEMEN in Sweden in 2012, amongst a litany of other global contemporary examples of bared breasts, to ask the following question: How do we conceptualize the role and nature of transgression in these media events?

#### Michael Rattray: *The Global Artist Amongst Unrest*

*Adorno's Grey* suggests a vertical presentation of narrative, which reflects a chaotic ordering of related elements that represents, to quote Steyerl, a "radicalization of the paradigm of linear perspective." Rattray examines concepts drawn from Steyerl's 2012 essay, "Free Fall in the Vertical Perspective," and Adorno's use of "vertiginous" to consider the concept of the Global Artist and how it informs local manifestations of unrest.

### No Looking After the Internet

Wed. Nov. 20, 6pm, Audain Gallery

#### Robin Simpson: *Modern Colour, Concentration, Referred Itch*

The popular application of colour therapy can be credited to Swiss psychotherapist Max Lüscher. Grey figures in Lüscher's spectrum as representative of neutrality, reticence, retreat or indecision. Alongside a cycle of colours selected from the Lüscher tests, Simpson will present a selection of images that respond to the motif of hands and the motion of investigative scratching in *Adorno's Grey*.

### Perspectives on a Vertical Plane: Hito Steyerl's Videos and .mov Files

Wed. Nov. 27, 6pm, Djavad Mowfaghian Cinema

*Lovely Andrea*. 2007, 30min.

*In Free Fall*. 2010, 32min.

*HOW NOT TO BE SEEN A Fucking Didactic Educational .Mov File*. 2013, 15min.

### Exhibition Tours guided by SCA MFA Visual Arts Candidates

Sat. Oct. 19, 1pm

Juan Manuel Sepulveda

Sat. Nov. 9, 1pm

Didier Morelli

Sat. Nov. 30, 1pm

Gabriel Saloman

SFU

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ENGAGING THE WORLD

Audain Gallery

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Goldcorp Centre for the Arts

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