



GUEST LECTURE

The History of the Sleepwalker

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Dienstag, 04. Dezember 2012

18 Uhr c.t., Campus C5 3, HS 1.20

This presentation will discuss the figure of the sleepwalker and the functions of sleepwalking in texts by Charles Brockden Brown, Wilkie Collins, Vladimir Nabokov and others. The first issue I will highlight is transgression. Sleepwalkers are notoriously transgressive figures but there can be something oddly mechanical about their transgressiveness. The sleepwalker is often both the most wayward and the most predictable person in the text. The second issue is the usefulness of the sleepwalker. Sleep is by definition a state in which we are idle, unproductive and socially 'useless' – but the sleepwalker is none of these. He or she gets things done, either at the bidding of another person – or at the bidding of the narrative itself. This instrumentalization of sleep, I will argue, accounts for the fascination and horror of narratives of somnambulism.

