Münsterberg, Hugo (July 1, 1863–December 16, 1916)

Hugo Münsterberg was a German-American psychologist whose pioneering work in applied psychology led him to investigate such topics as forensic psychology, industrial efficiency, and even the motion pictures. Born in Germany, he studied psychology under Wilhelm Mundt (1832–1920) before being invited to teach at Harvard by William James (1842–1910). While making important contributions to experimental and clinical psychology from a behaviorist standpoint, his belief in applied psychology made him a prominent contributor to popular magazines, commenting on the contributions of psychology to industrial organization (as a Taylorist), business, science, education, and criminology. In terms of modernism, his greatest contribution was as the author of *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (1916), one of the first theoretical examinations of the cinema. While defending film as an art through a neo-Kantian analysis of its differences from both other media and physical reality, Münsterberg in particular argued the parallels between emergent filmic devices such as the close up and flashbacks and psychological processes like attention and memory. Cinema was a superior art because of this, becoming aesthetic in Kant’s sense—disinterested and purposive without purpose—because it was not a slavish reproduction of reality but rather an embodiment of the workings of the human mind. Münsterberg’s approach to film influenced later attempts to understand the medium through psychology and spectatorship.

Further reading:

Andrew, D. (1973) *The Major Film Theories*, New York: Arno Press

Paratextual materials

Münsterberg on Project Gutenberg:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/author/5888>

Wikipedia photo:

<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/30/Hugo_Munsterberg.jpg>

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