

Aesthetic Seminar

Spring 2018

*All talks held 14.15 at Kasernen, Aarhus University,
Langelandsgade 139, Aarhus C, Building 1584, Room 124,
unless otherwise stated*

*Seminars are organized by Solveig Gade & Jacob Lund
on behalf of the School of Communication and Culture, Aarhus University*

22.02.2018 Bojana Kunst: *The Labour of the Performance Artist*

Over the past years, the proximity of art and capitalism has been analyzed through a perspective stressing the proximity between artistic work and post-fordist work. Here the artist is seen as a model for the contemporary worker, because of her linguistic and creative skills, which are at the center of contemporary exploitation. However, the reason for the proximity lies not only in the social transformation of work, but can be related to the material quality of artistic labour: there is something in the inclination, weight, temporality and materiality of artistic work, which is causing the proximity. The artist not only becomes a model for the contemporary worker because of his or her (super)creativity, precarious position and diminishing of the life/work relation; something else is at stake here. In my lecture, I would like to show how artistic labour has become visible again, because there is so much stupid, idiotic, wasteful, repetitive, passive work in the core of contemporary capitalism, which continuously has to produce value from even the most meaningless and useless labouring gestures to sustain itself.

08.03.2018 Georgina Born (and for Chris Haworth): *Internet-Mediated Musics: Aesthetics, Materialities and Social Forms*

How is the internet changing how music is made and experienced? We address this question through an analysis of five internet-mediated music genres from the 90s to the present: microsound and four 'nostalgia' genres—hauntology, h-pop, chillwave and vaporwave. We show first how the internet has catalyzed transformations of their discursive, social and material mediations, and how the evolving aesthetics of the five genres respond to heightened reflexive engagements with music's expansive materialities. We trace a reflexive concern with curating music's organisational forms, so that labels take on a role as unified aesthetic subject, while artists abandon any illusion of unified musical subjectivities. For the nostalgia genres, in which cultural-historical connotations attached to media and their paradoxical juxtaposition are to the fore, rather than remediation we witness a pervasive intertextuality of media—an intermedial intertextuality. Since time enters richly into the genres' materialist aesthetics, we take our findings to media archaeology and cultural techniques, finding both unequal to theorizing the relations between media, aesthetics and time.

15.03.2018 Kathrin Maurer: *The Sensorial Experience of the Drone: Technology, Aesthetics, and Communities*

This talk investigates the aesthetic representation of civilian and military drone technology with a specific focus on sensorial experience. Remote sensing, fluid surveillance, and algorithmic data streaming make drones into powerful "sensing" machines that in turn not only supersede and extend the human sensorium but also evoke specific affects within the subject. The talk further demonstrates how these sensorial experiences can inform visions of human collectives and communities. Drones and their agents can generate perceptions of the world, ideologies, racial dichotomies, and bio-political discourses. Artists have engaged with these "drone imaginaries" and have tried to create alternative images and narratives dismantling the power of the drone. By discussing "drone art" (novels, art installations, photography, films about drones), the talk demonstrates how the aesthetic realm can deconstruct, de-territorialize, and experiment with the sensory power of the drone and its scopic regimes. In doing so, these aesthetic works can critically reflect the communities and their vulnerabilities constructed by this technology and its agents.

19.04.2018 Anne Kølbaek Iversen: *A Question of Rhythm? On Migratory Memories and Archival Control*

At what frequency is an event registered, circulated and retained? This lecture suggests reading contemporary arts practices dealing with issues of archivization and memory building through a sensibility to rhythm. Following the assumption that the individual is infiltrated by global exchanges – and itself dispersed and distributed within globally connected networks – the hypothesis is that contemporary art shows an increased sensitivity to horizontal connections on a global scale, replacing acts of vertical anachronizing by acts of what may be called *xenochronizing*. By investigating the relation between the different temporalities of very different materialities and technologies addressed within these practices, the lecture critically addresses conditions of memory and archival control.

03.05.2018 Devika Sharma: *The Predicament of Privilege*

Everyone knows what the predicament of privilege is. In the contemporary world of Western popular culture, the reassuring tone of markets telling us, as one consumer brand has it, that *This is Okay, Certified Okay*, takes up a lot of space. This is the culture of the materially privileged who have come to see their privilege as their problem. In a 2014 campaign the Danish branch of Doctors Without Borders likewise reminded their constituency that it was okay: “With the campaign we also want to get across to the Danes that it’s perfectly okay to live a good and safe life here in Denmark – and to do so without feeling guilty. It’s okay as long as every now and again we look up and refrain from closing the door to those, who live in a part of the world that is neither safe nor good.” This reassuring tone of okayness, however, does not necessarily or entirely calm and relieve the experiences of guilt, confusion, ambivalence, injustice, resignation, boredom, and anger that have become part of the materially privileged sensorium of late capitalism. In this lecture I explore the mode of “the predicament of privilege” in relation to one important playground for this predicament, namely humanitarian arts and culture.

22.05.2018 T. J. Demos and Line Marie Thorsen

T. J. Demos: *TBA*

Line Marie Thorsen: *Eco-Arts as Practices of Comparison: Hong Kong Farmers at Echigo Tsumari Art Field*

How do artists come to play a role in the articulation of global climatic issues as relevant to local and everyday ecological attachment and their politics? This is the central question I will engage in this presentation, focusing on a specific subset of my research: the Japanese art triennale Echigo Tsumari Art Field, in Niigata, and the art collective Hong Kong Farmers + Sense Art Studio, participating in the triennale. Both are formulated as environmental engagements, thoroughly situated within Japanese and Hong Kong specific social, political and material ecologies, however, I will suggest that both also come into being as climate-political gestures in practices of constant comparison, that are iteratively being done in and between both places. Building on field research and Timothy Choy’s *Ecologies of Comparison* (2011), I will suggest that universalities and particularities blur in practices of eco-art as political act, since ‘the environment’ is articulated *as* politics, in the comparisons and translations *between* such scales. As such, noticing the comparisons practiced in eco-arts may open a space for grabbling with the above question.

07.06.2018 (NB room 112) William Clare Roberts: *Karl Marx and the Katabatic Tradition*

The descent into the world of the dead is one of the oldest motifs in world literature, going back at least to the epic of Gilgamesh. Within the Greco-Roman tradition, this descent received an influential early articulation in the Homeric *Odyssey*, a political-philosophical reworking by Plato (*Gorgias* and *Republic*), and a political-historical reinscription in Vergil’s *Aeneid*. These precedents, in turn, furnished the materials for Dante’s *Inferno*, the most famous and most elaborate of the classical *katabases*. In conversation with the mainstream of this tradition, one can also find a counter-tradition, which asserted, with Lucretius, that “whatever things are rumored to dwell deep in Acheron are all things that exist in life for us.” This counter-tradition criticized the things of this world that provoke us to project another, mythical world, the Hell on Earth that induces us to imagine a mythical Hades. I argue that Marx, in *Capital*, attempts to merge these two katabatic traditions, the mythic and the critical, by leading his readers on a critical journey through political economy, the science of capital.

- Georgina Born** is Professor of Music and Anthropology at Oxford University. Earlier in her life she worked as a musician, performing and recording with groups including Henry Cow, the Art Bears and the Michael Nyman Band, and playing improvised music. Trained as an anthropologist at University College London, her work combines ethnographic and theoretical writings on music, media and cultural production. From 2010 to 2016 Born directed the ERC research programme ‘Music, Digitisation, Mediation: Towards Interdisciplinary Music Studies’, which examines the transformation of music by digitisation and digital media. Her books include *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde* (1995), *Music, Sound and Space* (2013), *Interdisciplinarity* (2013), and *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics* (2017).
- T. J. Demos** is Professor in the Department of the History of Art and Visual Culture, University of California, Santa Cruz, and Founder and Director of its Center for Creative Ecologies. He writes widely on the intersection of contemporary art, global politics, and ecology, and his essays have appeared in magazines, journals, and catalogues worldwide. His published work centers broadly on the conjunction of art and politics, examining the ability of artistic practice to invent innovative and experimental strategies that challenge dominant social, political, and economic conventions. Most recently Demos is the author of *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology* (Sternberg Press, 2016).
- Anne Kølbaek Iversen** is a PhD candidate and part of The Contemporary Condition research project at Aarhus University, funded by the Danish Council for Independent Research (www.contemporaneity.au.dk), 2016-2019. She was previously Curatorial Assistant at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Roskilde, external lecturer at Copenhagen University, and also part of the curatorial team for the exhibition *Systemics #4: Aarhus Rapport – Avantgarde as Network (or, the politics of the ultralocal)*, co-curated with Joasia Krysa and Lars Bang Larsen at Kunsthall Aarhus (2014), developing an archive section for the exhibition.
- Bojana Kunst** is a philosopher, dramaturg and performance theoretician. She is a professor and managing director of the Institute for Applied Theater Studies in Justus Liebig University Giessen. She is a member of the editorial board of Maska Magazine, Amfiteater and Performance Research. Her last book is *Artist at Work, Proximity of Art and Capitalism* (Zero Books, 2015).
- Kathrin Maurer** is Associate Professor of German Studies at the University of Southern Denmark in Odense (DK). Recent Publications: “The Paradox of Immersion: Watching War in Nineteenth-Century Panoramas” in *Visualizing War: Emotions, Technologies, Communities* (Routledge, 2018, ed. by KM); *Visualizing the Past: The Power of the Image in Nineteenth-Century Historicism* (Walter de Gruyter, 2013). Her research interests are in visual culture, technology, discourses of war, representations of history, and German literature. She is also the leader of the research network “Drones and Aesthetics” sponsored by the Danish Research Council.
- William Clare Roberts** is Assistant Professor of political science at McGill University, where he teaches the history of political thought, with a focus on Marx and Marxism. He is the author of *Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital* (Princeton University Press, 2017).
- Devika Sharma** is Associate Professor of Modern Culture at the University of Copenhagen. She is the author of *Amerikanske fængselsbilleder: Kunst, kultur og indespærring i samtidens USA* and the co-editor (with Frederik Tygstrup) of *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and the Study of Culture* (De Gruyter 2015). Sharma is the co-editor of the Nordic journal *K&K*, having recently edited issues on affectivity, cultural critique, and the politics of shame. She is, at times, working on a monograph with the working title *The Predicament of Privilege*.
- Line Marie Thorsen** is a PhD student in art history, Aarhus University, researching ecologically and climatically engaged artists in Hong Kong and Japan, and Europe. In 2017, she edited the volume *Moving Plants* published alongside the namesake exhibition. Thorsen has also studied art after the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster in Japan 2011 and is an affiliated researcher of Aarhus University Research on the Anthropocene (Aarhus University) and Changing Disasters (Copenhagen University).