

Aesthetic Seminar

Spring 2017

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

*Seminars are organized by Karen-Margrethe Simonsen & Jacob Lund
on behalf of the School of Communication and Culture, Aarhus University*

09.02.2017 Ane Petrea Danielsen: *The Medieval Religious Icon as Body – Spatial and Temporal Proximity as Foundation for an Alternative Ontology*

Over the past few years a focus on the religious image's matter and agency has emerged in fields such as Art History, Anthropology and History. Scholars such as Hans Belting, Caroline Walker Bynum and Bissera Pentcheva have all been pioneers in articulating the religious icon as an active entity not only passively being observed by a viewer, but interacting with him or her. In this context they have all more specifically initiated the idea of the icon as an entity sizzling on the edge of dead matter and living body. It is exactly this idea the presentation builds on and attempts to further nuance and expand by suggesting an alternative ontology of the medieval icon as body. Danielsen will thus demonstrate the tender birth of a perception of the icon as a body, which reaches its full potential in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. More specifically, she will argue that the medieval icon seeks the legitimization and proximity related to relics in early Middle Ages and has in the later Middle Ages obtained this and heightened or even overridden it at times by being described as and acting like the actual body of the divine.

23.02.2017 Ulrik Reindel: *Magtens vævede scenografi*

Vævede tapeter – eller *gobelin*er som disse figurative vægprydelser i daglig tale kaldes – forbindes formentlig af mange med en støvet og afdanket herregårdskultur, hvis værdi snarere skal måles efter kulturhistoriske end æstetiske alen. I renæssancen og barokken nød tapetmediet imidlertid en anderledes høj anseelse blandt Europas herskende elite. Med deres materiale-mæssige pragt og monumentale historiefortællinger transponerede de eksklusive vævbejdede magthavernes økonomiske og kulturelle kapital til rumlige kategorier, idet de indvævede motiver samtidig tjente som affirmative spejle for den sociale og rituelle praksis, der udspillede sig i interiørens *hic et nunc*. Tapetvævning, frem for anden figurativ kunst så som maleri eller skulptur, var ganske enkelt periodens foretrukne repræsentative medium. Gennem analyseeksempler hentet fra en særskilt dansk kontekst er det forsøgsvis hensigten at indkredse de særlige materiale- og virkningsæstetiske (og overvejende mediespecifikke) kvaliteter ved tapetkunsten, som appellerede så stærkt til datidens magthavere.

09.03.2017 David Roden: *Aesthetics at the Edge of the Human*
At Kunsthal Aarhus, J.M. Mørks Gade 13, Aarhus C

Speculative posthumanism conceives posthumans as agents made inhuman by a technologically induced disconnection or “withdrawal” from human social systems. However, this “disconnection thesis” offers a very minimal conception of what posthuman life would involve and thus no criteria for evaluating the long-run implications of our technical practice. Posthuman lives, Roden argues, can only be understood by making or encountering them. Consequently, a posthuman ethics is impossible. In its place, Roden will argue, we must develop an aesthetics for technical existence. This will be explored through aesthetic models – including the “weird” fiction of China Miéville and Jeff Vandermeer, “noise” music and practices of bodily modification. Each model will be used to give nuance to the thought of a transformative encounter “at the edge of the human”.

16.03.2017 Marit Grøtta: *Poet i massemedienes tidsalder: Charles Baudelaire og 1800-tallets medier*

Charles Baudelaire's forakt for tidens nye medier er velkjent. I denne forelesningen vil Grøtta gi et litt annet bilde av Baudelaire og vise at han hadde et nyansert og produktivt forhold til 1800-tallets medier. For Baudelaire var mediene (slik som aviser, fotografi og pre-cinematisk leketøy) en viktig del av det moderne liv, og han forstod at de formet, tilpasset og innrammet erfaringen av verden. I sin diktning og essayistikk eksperimenterte han med den nye medieestetikken og prøvde ut de nye sansemulighetene. I forelesningen vil Grøtta også diskutere hvilke teorier som er fruktbare for å forstå Baudelaire's interaksjon med de nye mediene. Walter Benjamins perspektiver er viktige i denne sammenheng, men Grøtta vil også inndra begrepet *dispositif*, som hun henter fra Michel Foucault og Giorgio Agamben. Hennes tese er at Baudelaire leker seg med de nye medie-dispositivene i sin diktning og slik parerer mediens forflatende virkning.

30.03.2017 Mathias Danbolt: *Who Carries the Weight of History? Artistic Responses to Colonial Ruin(ation)s in the former Danish West Indies*

In his 2017 New Year's Address, the Danish Prime Minister devoted a section of his speech to the centennial of the Danish divestment of its colonies in the Caribbean. "This is not a proud part of the history of Denmark," he explained. "It is shameful. And it is fortunately in the past." In this lecture Danbolt questions the temporal and historical logics behind the idea of Danish colonialism as something existing "fortunately in the past," through an analysis of recent artworks by two Virgin Island artists: Janet Cook-Rutnik's performative intervention *ROCK/TRANSFER* (2009) and La Vaughn Belle's sculpture *Trading Post* (2016). He argues that Cook-Rutnik and Vaughn Belle's material engagement with the ruins of Danish colonial architecture call for understandings of colonialism as an unfinished process of ruination – not only of goods and wealth, but of embodied knowledge and cultural memory. Working with rocks and corals drawn from the pillars of colonial support structures, Danbolt suggests that these projects speak to the unequal distribution of labor in carrying the weight of history.

20.04.2017 Sianne Ngai: *Theory of the Gimmick*

This lecture offers a theory of the gimmick as an explicitly capitalist aesthetic category. The gimmick is both a form that simultaneously repels and attracts us and the judgment by which we express this ambivalent mixture of feelings. Brought out in a unique way by comedy, the particular mix of irritation and charm that the gimmick elicits stems from a series of internal contradictions, all related to labor, time, and value. Most significantly, gimmicks strike us as both working too little (e.g., as labor-saving "tricks") but also as working too hard (overstrained efforts at getting our attention). In both cases the aesthetic judgment implies a norm of social labor akin to Marx's concept of the "historical level of productivity," which in turn mediates the gimmick's unusually direct relation to a judgment of economic worth: "cheap." This sets the gimmick apart from all other aesthetic categories, including commodity aesthetics like cute or glamorous, which do not wear ties to the economic world on their sleeves. As both a compromised aesthetic form and equivocal aesthetic judgment encoding a specific relation to production, the gimmick offers us an surprisingly rich place to think about capitalist aesthetics and the intertwining of technique and enchantment therein.

11.05.2017 Inge Hinterwaldner: *Signer's Temporalities*
At Kunsthall Aarhus, J.M. Mørks Gade 13, Aarhus C

"... and the cooker exploded. All the soup hit the ceiling. A wonderful sculpture, fantastic!" From this comment by Roman Signer who by chance witnessed his aunt's misfortune, we can sense the humour of the Swiss artist that leaks also into his works. He arranges unstable situations where prosaic everyday things meet forces (eg. TNT, gravity, stream water). Together, they tend to act out movements of various and surprising kind. In contrast to positions that characterise Signer's detonations as being 'destructive', Hinterwaldner frames his oeuvre in terms of 'temporality' that may comprise also very quick forming procedures. His works are discussed in relation to the French philosophers Henri Bergson and Gaston Bachelard. The latter criticized Bergson's notions of duration due to its incompatibility with rupture and the discontinuous. Is it possible to connect both concepts to Signer's oeuvre and how does the sculptor himself perceive his own plastic events?

- Mathias Danbolt** is an art historian with a special focus on queer, antiracist, and decolonial perspectives on contemporary art and performance. His current research project deals with the effects and affects of Danish colonialism within the field of art and culture. Recent publications include “Striking Reverberations: Beating Back the Unfinished History of the Colonial Aesthetic with Jeannette Ehlers’s *Whip it Good*” (*Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Histories*, 2016) and “New Nordic Exceptionalism: Jeuno JE Kim and Ewa Einhorn’s *The United Nations of Norden* and Other Realist Utopias” (*Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 2016). Danbolt is Assistant Professor of Art History at University of Copenhagen.
- Ane Petrea Danielsen** is a PhD student in Art History at Aarhus University in Denmark. Her PhD project titled *The Medieval Icon as Body* studies the conceptualization of the religious icon as an acting bodily prosthesis for the divinity. The project aims to uncover the medieval icons ontology and its development from the early to the later Middle Ages. It thereby suggests an alternative history of development in which the perception of the icon as body is conditioned by its temporal and spatial proximity to its divine prototype.
- Marit Grøtta** er førsteamanuensis i allmenn litteraturvitenskap ved Universitetet i Oslo. Hun har utgitt *Baudelaire’s Media Aesthetics: The Gaze of the Flâneur and 19th-Century Media* (2015), "Reading/Developing Images: Baudelaire, Benjamin, and the Advent of Photography", *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* nr. 1-2, 2012 og "Fotografi og følelser: Om Proust, portrettfotografier og lenselen etter å nå utover seg selv", *Agora: Tidskrift for filosofisk spekulasjon*, nr. 1, 2016.
- Inge Hinterwaldner** is currently professor for modern and contemporary art in the Institute of Art and Visual History at the Humboldt University in Berlin. She is writing a book on *Fluid Form Conceptions* in kinetic art since the 1960s. In 2009 she received her PhD in art history from the University of Basel with a thesis on interactive computer simulations (*The Systemic Image*, 2010/2017). Her research focuses on interactivity and temporality in the arts, computer-based art and architecture, model theory, and the interdependence between the arts and the sciences since the 19th century. She has co-edited several volumes, e.g. on medical and scientific visualizations as composites (2006), the relation between image production and modelling practices (2011, 2017), and disposable images (2016).
- Sianne Ngai** is Professor of English at Stanford University. She is the author of *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (2012) and *Ugly Feelings* (2005). Selections from both books have been translated into Portuguese, Slovenian, German, Italian, Swedish, and Japanese.
- Ulrik Reindel** er ph.d.-stipendiat i kunsthistorie ved Institut for Kommunikation og Kultur, Aarhus Universitet, hvor han i sin aktuelle forskning har sat sig for at undersøge det danske hofs repræsentative brug af nederlandske tapeter i perioden 1500-1700. Inden for samme emne har han tidligere forfattet bogen *Kronborgtapeterne. Pragt og propaganda på Frederik II's Kronborg*, København 2009.
- David Roden** has worked as a Lecturer and Associate Lecturer in Philosophy at the Open University. He is author of *Posthuman Life: Philosophy at the Edge of the Human* (published by Routledge 2014). His research has addressed posthumanism, philosophical naturalism, cyberculture, deconstruction, the metaphysics of computer music and new realism.