

Æstetisk Seminar

Efterår 2024

Torsdage kl. 14.15–16

*Institut for Kommunikation og Kultur, AU
Bygn. 1584, Langelandsgade 145, Aarhus C*

Alle er velkomne/All are welcome

*Æstetisk Seminar er tilrettelagt af
Christiane Særkjær og Jan Løhmann Stephensen,
Institut for Kommunikation og Kultur
Aarhus Universitet*

19. september 2024 – lokale 124

Contests over a privileged praxis: Institutional transformations in contemporary European theatre

Peter Boenisch

Our AUFF-funded research project *Reconfiguring dramaturgy for a global culture: Changing practices in 21st Century European theatre* investigated current attempts to reposition (mainly publicly funded) theatre institutions within a shifting socio-cultural context. In this new “post-representational” reality, as art scholar Nora Sternfeld calls it, traditional ‘high art’ institutions like museums and theatres no longer affirmatively represent cultural capital, civic *Bildung* and national prestige, and instead of being able to rely on the subscriber patronage of middle-class, educated, White audiences, they must confront a globalised, mediatised, politically split plural public sphere. In this lecture, I will less focus on concrete institutional case studies, but instead concentrate on principal conceptual and theoretical insights that emerged from their analysis. In particular, I will focus on the potential of an extended dramaturgic analysis to identify the shifting institutional values, and moreover to analyse the contest over the institution as a public space of appearance and of public communication. Far more than mere organisational restructuring, the institutional transformations we have investigated reveal such a “post-representational” renegotiation of the role of theatre as institutionalised cultural *praxis*, in a strict Arendtian sense: as not (only) facilitating the production of theatre art works, but as a crucial mediating practice-process qua its institutional expository agency. We here can glimpse the transformation of theatre institutions from their role as bulwarks of national cultural identity towards becoming negotiators of common societal (inter-)relations that Arendt termed (human) “inter-esse”: the neither expressive nor affirmative *being in-between* that is a fundamental prerequisite for the engagement with the complex, plural reality of the present.

26. september 2024 NB. Kunsthall Aarhus – 15.00-17.30

Living Surfaces – book launch and discussion on environmental humanities, media, and art

Abelardo Gil-Fournier and Jussi Parikka

Diving into the world of plants and vegetal surfaces, artist Abelardo Gil-Fournier and professor Jussi Parikka offer an experimental way to understand visual media culture in dialogue with the worlds of biological and ecological life. While “surfaces” have been central to art history and for example modernist aesthetics, Gil-Fournier and Parikka’ new book *Living Surfaces Images, Plants, and Environments of Media* (MIT Press, 2024) looks at the different scales of management and control of living surfaces of the planet from biosphere to agriculture, remote sensing to forests as sites of mediation – of visibility and hiding, of obfuscation and targeting. Their approach combines questions of datafication with aesthetics and even (landscape) architecture as they discuss their theoretical and artistic inspiration in surfaces as part of current topics and debates on planetarity.

The event will also feature their new video essay on planetary light. It focuses on how disappearance of ice and glaciers can be described as aesthetics of reflection, the albedo effect. Sound artist María Andueza Olmedo has designed the soundscape of the new video work.

The event is organized by Kunsthall Aarhus together with the Department of Digital Design and Information Studies and the Aesthetics Seminar, School of Communication and Culture at Aarhus University. It is also supported by the Environmental Media and Aesthetics research program.

3. oktober 2024 – lokale 124

Power With: Approaches to Epistemic Justice in Arts Research

Matthew Reason

Following Foucault, we have a strong appreciation of the intersection of knowledge and power. We can also identify the ways in which the universities in which we operate as researchers are in the business of controlling, gatekeeping and delimiting forms of knowledge and therefore forms of power. Within this some ways of knowing – and therefore also some peoples and their lived experiences and expertise – are delegitimised and pushed to the margins. As Miranda Fricker puts it, epistemic injustice describes the experience of ‘people who are wronged in their capacity as knowers.’ To what extent is it possible to begin to address epistemic injustice while simultaneously working from within the university?

This lecture will explore examples of work with which I have been involved that has – perfectly, hesitantly, progressively – sought to enact approaches that address these concerns. First, I will discuss structural approaches, within my role as Director of the Institute for Social Justice at York St John University. Here we have begun to consider what might constitute a co-productive research culture. How can not just research participation, but also research commissioning, design, authorship and ownership be done in co-production with communities and stakeholders.

I will then present a case study from my own arts-based research. This has been to take an inclusive and creative approach to researching with learning disabled and autistic artists. Here we have sought to avoid models of deficit and vulnerability and find ways of involving people with learning disabilities in all aspects of the process. The case study will work through a series of challenges in processes of design, purpose, process, control and dissemination. It’ll also reflect on the centrality of creative methods within this process and share some of the emerging outputs. From these I will draw out insights that we might apply to our collective attempts to ensure that both universities and our own individual research shifts so that we utilise knowledge to enact power with rather than power over?

10. oktober 2024 – lokale 126

Generative AI: from Machine Vision to AI Stories

Jill Walker Rettberg

In this lecture Jill Walker Rettberg will present her research on the aesthetics and cultural implications of generative AI. She will begin with her work on machine vision technologies, discussing issues of bias in the technology but with a focus on how the technology is dependent on its cultural contexts and on imaginaries and our desires and fears of what technology can do. Next, Rettberg will discuss her new project, AI STORIES: Narrative Archetypes for Artificial Intelligence, which will test the hypothesis that language models are identifying narrative structures in the training data and replicating these in their output. Examples of such structures include the narrative need for a conflict followed by a resolution, or the pattern of the hero going on a journey and meeting an opponent and a helper, or that if a contract is made (do not open the seventh door!) it will be broken (the princess will definitely open that door). If there are cultural differences between narrative structures – Bollywood movies vs Hollywood movies, for instance, or the collective resolution of many Scandinavian stories vs the individual hero/villain of American stories – then this could mean that generate AI creates a new kind of AI bias that is deeper than the type developers are already trying to address – a narrative bias. Does generative AI threaten cultural diversity? Do we risk losing our stories?

31. oktober 2024 – lokale 126

Funded by the [Unit for Song Studies](#) & the research programme [Arts, Aesthetics and Communities](#):

The co-evolution of music and language

Steven Mithen

Music and language have numerous similarities. They share the principle of compositionality, the use of a finite number of units to create phrases that are more than the sum of their parts and potentially infinite in number. Both can be expressed by the voice, by

the body – as in singing and dancing – and in written form. They are typically undertaken as a form of communications between individuals and groups but can also be pursued alone. And yet, music and language are also profoundly different: words and spoken utterances have semantic meanings that are shared within a speech community; musical tones and phrases do not. Music may induce a shared emotional response but, unlike language, lacks any informational content. The overlaps between music and language have long suggested they have a shared evolutionary history. By drawing on my research published within *The Singing Neanderthals* (2007) and *The Language Puzzle* (2024), I will suggest music and language evolved from a single archaic, multi-purpose communication system and diverged at c. 1.5 million years ago when the first words emerged from what had been holistic ape-like calls. Those words provided the first towards language and liberating the remnant holistic calls to focus on the unique roles that music accomplishes today.

7. november 2024 – lokale 126

Børn og det (ikke)inkluderende museumsrum

Christiane Særkjær

Museumsrummet har altid tilskyndet en bestemt ritualiseret adfærd og en bestemt måde at opleve kunst og kulturhistoriske genstande på (Duncan, 1995). Det sker både i form af en række uskrevne regler, men også qua de arkitektoniske rammer, der påvirker, hvordan vi bevæger os og dermed agerer i disse rum. Rummets udformning spiller med andre ord en afgørende rolle for museumsoplevelsen (Tzortzi, 2015; Troelsen og Pedersen, 2009; O'Doherty, 1976), og får dermed betydning for, hvordan nogle besøgende føler sig anerkendt og velkomne, mens andre ikke gør (Mchangama og Larsen, 2023; MacLeod, 2005; Sandell, 2005).

I dette foredrag vil jeg med særligt fokus på børn som publikum undersøge, hvordan museumsrummet former deres oplevelse og mulighed for agens og inklusion. Med udgangspunkt i eksempler fra henholdsvis Statens Museum for Kunst og Nationalmuseet, vil jeg analysere den dualitet, der kan opstå mellem rum designet med særligt henblik på børn, fx i form værkstedet på Statens Museum for

Kunst og Børnenes Museum på Nationalmuseet, og museumsrum designet til 'alle'. Jeg vil i forlængelse heraf diskutere, hvilke potentialer og implikationer de forskellige rum har for repræsentation, og hvordan de påvirker relationer og magtdynamik mellem børn og institutioner samt mellem børn og deres medfølgende voksne.

28. november 2024 – lokale 126

Skyggerne af den oplyste viden

Rebekka Boyding

Aldrig har vi forhandlet mere intenst, hvad viden er, hvad det vil sige at vide noget, hvem der ved noget, hvem der har ret eller adgang til at vide hvad, samt hvilken rolle universitet og uddannelse skal spille. I så forskellige retninger og tendenser som postkritik, dekolonialisme, queer-teori, praksisbaserede ph.d.-projekter, kunstneriske ph.d.'er, kunstnerisk vidensproduktion o.l., synes der at være en fælles kerne af at ville kræve plads til de følelser, de mennesker, de livsformer og de videns- og erkendelsesformer, der har levet i skyggerne af det oplyste. På samme tid har universitetet i sit homogene format aldrig været større, end det er nu. Med afsæt i mit arbejde med min afhandling om kunstnerisk viden og VELUX Fondens writers-in-residence-program, hvor forfattere rykker ind på universitetets oplyste gange og mit arbejde som kunstner fra teatrets mørklagte sale, vil dette foredrag undersøge forholdet mellem kunst og institution og kunst og universitet med fokus på tendensen til, at alt skal indlemmes i eller imitere universitetets tænkning.

5. december 2024 – lokale 124

From fields and worlds to a multiplicity of spheres? Theorizing cultural production in the 21st century

Sara Malou Strandvad

Digitalization, internationalization, and mass education have radically transformed art production. Yet, sociologists of the arts continue to

promote conceptual models developed in bounded national spaces with analogous social interactions and clear internal power dynamics. The most dominant approaches in the sociology of the arts have long been inspired by Pierre Bourdieu and Howard S. Becker. Bourdieu's work on the production of culture, presented in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (1993) and *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (1996), and Becker's *Art Worlds* (1982) remain the cornerstones in cultural production studies. These works have been essential in defining what the sociology of the arts is, demonstrating how artists and their work are made by the social worlds in which they exist. Nevertheless, these perspectives have also been criticized for their dated empirical foundations and for ignoring the affective properties of the art that is made. Bourdieu's fields of cultural production concept is mapped on the French literary field of the late 19th century, and Becker's notion of art worlds is based on the 1940s Chicago jazz scene. Both highlight the importance of social conventions: they demonstrate how conventions are maintained and how they steer cultural production processes.

Using contemporary artist residencies as an empirical case study, including publicly funded intercontinental network collaborations and a myriad of self-organized initiatives, this presentation takes some first steps towards a new conceptualization of the multiplicity of social spheres in the arts in the twenty-first century. By unpacking how residencies embody constructive institutional critiques that counterbalance the notoriously precarious work in the arts and promote global mobility, diversity and sustainability, the presentation offers 'ecologies of artistic production' as an alternative, moving us toward a transnational approach centered on artistic projects in-the-making.

BIOGRAPHIES

Peter M. Boenisch is Professor of Dramaturgy at Aarhus University since 2019. Originally from Munich (Germany), he previously worked at LMU Munich and in the UK, among others at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama/University of London. His research areas are *Regietheater*, dramaturgy, and the intersections of theatre and politics, as they become manifest in aspects such as spectatorship, the

institutional conditions of theatre production, and transcultural performance in a globalised Europe. He is also the current president of the European Association for the Study of Theatre and Performance (EASTAP).

Abelardo Gil-Fournier is an artist and researcher based in Madrid (Spain). Originally trained in Physics, he holds a PhD in Art from Winchester School of Art (UK) and has worked as a postdoctoral researcher at FAMU in Prague. His work has been exhibited and discussed in international spaces such as Transmediale (Berlin), Fundación Cerezales Antonino y Cinia (León), Fotomuseum Winterthur (Switzerland), Le Bal (Paris), Fotocolectania (Barcelona), Galeria Millenium (Lisbon), Medialab Prado (Madrid), Strelka Institute (Moscow), MUSAC (León), NeMe Center of Art (Cyprus), Centro de arte Matadero (Madrid), Laboral centro de arte (Gijón) as well as in Spanish Cultural Centres in Mexico, Nicaragua and El Salvador.

Jussi Parikka is professor in Digital Aesthetics and Culture at Aarhus University where he is also the director of the Digital Aesthetics Research Centre as well as the co-director of the research program Environmental Media and Aesthetics. His earlier books include *Digital Contagions* (Peter Lang Inc, 2007/2016), *Insect Media* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), *What is Media Archaeology?* (Polity Press, 2012), *A Geology of Media* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015), *The Lab Book* (University of Minnesota Press, 2022, co-authored), and *Operational Images* (University of Minnesota Press, 2023). In addition, he has published several co-edited volumes, such as *Photography Off the Scale* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021). Parikka's books have been translated into 11 languages including Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Czech, Italian, French, Spanish and Portuguese. His curatorial work includes for example the recent co-curated *Climate Engines* show that ran at Laboral, in Gijon in 2023-2024.

Matthew Reason is Professor of Theatre and Director of the Institute for Social Justice at York St John University (UK). His research focuses on politically and socially engaged arts practice, audience research and co-productive and participatory research methodologies. He is interested in research as a creative and relational activity and the

relationships between research and activism and epistemic justice. Central to his work is collaborative partnerships with arts organisations, with examples including with Imagine, Mind the Gap, Teatrecentrum and Theatre Hullabaloo.

He has received research funding from the Arts and Humanities and Natural Environment research councils, including for a current project titled I'm Me, which explores themes of identity, representation and voice with learning disabled and autistic artists.

Major publications include *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance* (Palgrave 2006), *The Young Audience: Exploring and Enhancing Children's Experiences of Theatre* (Trentham/IOE Press 2010), *Kinesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Contexts* (co-edited with Dee Reynolds, Intellect 2012), *Experiencing Liveness in Contemporary Performance* (co-edited with Anja Mølle Lindelof, Routledge 2016), *Applied Practice: Evidence and Impact Across Theatre, Music and Dance* (co-edited with Nick Rowe, Bloomsbury 2017) and *The Routledge Companion to Audiences and the Performing Arts* (co-edited with Conner, Johanson and Walmsley, Routledge 2022). For further information visit www.matthewreason.com

Jill Walker Rettberg is professor of Digital Culture and Co-Director of the Center for Digital Narrative at the University of Bergen. Jill Walker Rettberg is Professor and Co-Director of the Center for Digital Narrative at the University of Bergen, where she leads the node on social media and networked narratives. She also leads the project AI STORIES, which is funded by an ERC Advanced Grant from the European Research Council. Jill's most recent book is *Machine Vision: How Algorithms are Changing the Way We See the World* (Polity 2023).

Steven Mithen is Professor of Early Prehistory at the University of Reading, UK. His interests are with the evolution of language, music and mind, prehistoric hunter-gatherers, and the transition to farming economies. He has undertaken long term-field projects in southern Jordan, finding and excavating the early Neolithic site of Wadi Faynan 16, and in western Scotland where he has reconstructed Mesolithic settlement patterns. His two most recent books are *Land of the Ilich* (2021) and *The Language Puzzle* (2024).

Christiane Særkjær er ansat som postdoc i det treårige forskningsprojekt BØV – Børns møde med den nationale kulturarv, der er et samarbejde mellem Aarhus Universitet, Statens Museum for Kunst, Nationalmuseet og Det Kongelige Teater, støttet af Augustinusfonden. Derudover underviser hun på Æstetik og Kultur og er tilknyttet Center for Kulturevaluering på Aarhus Universitet. Christiane er i sin forskning særligt interesseret i, hvordan kultur opleves og formidles i forskellige former, herunder hvilken betydning dette har for relationen mellem kulturinstitutioner og publikum. Hun har for nylig udgivet artiklen: "Visitor voices in the museum space: sharing art experiences as a dialogic mode in museum communication" (2024) i *Conjunctions*.

Rebekka Boyding er sceneinstruktør, dramatiker, forfatter og sanger/sangskriver og ph.d.-studerende ved Nordisk sprog og litteratur med et projekt om kunstnerisk viden. I sin afhandling undersøger hun med afsæt i VELUX Fondens writers-in-residence-program, hvordan man kan integrere forfattere på universitetet på en måde, der er til gensidig gavn, hvilken viden, der opstår i mødet mellem forskere og forfattere, og hvad kunstnerisk viden er. Rebekka instruerede sidste efterår PIGEDYR på Sort/Hvid, hvortil hun også skrev sange og komponerede musik, og er i den kommende sæson kunstnerisk profil ved Teater Momentum vol. 18, hvor hun skriver og instruerer en forestilling om friktionsløse virkeligheder. De tværæstetiske spor spiller derfor en afgørende rolle både i Rebekkas kunst og hendes forskning, hvor hendes eget virke som praktiserende kunstner er af afgørende betydning.

Sara Malou Strandvad is Lead of libraries, citizen service and culture houses in Odsherred municipality, Denmark since August 2024. Before then, she was Associate Professor in Arts Sociology at the Department of Arts, Culture and Media at University of Groningen and chair of the section on Arts, Policy and Cultural Entrepreneurship for seven years.

A sociologist whose research concerns creative work and production studies, her research includes studies of development processes in

Danish film production based on a socio-material perspective inspired by science and technology studies, observation studies of the valuation processes in a design school entrance exam, research on the market creation among social media performance artists, studies of cultural entrepreneurship training for self-employed Dutch artists, supported by the Dutch Research Council, and interview studies with self-employed production staff in the performing arts sector in the North of the Netherlands.

