Æstetisk Seminar

Efterår 2025

Torsdage kl. 14.15–16
Institut for Kommunikation og Kultur, AU
Bygning 1584, lokale 112
Langelandsgade 145, Aarhus C

Alle er velkomne/All are welcome

Æstetisk Seminar er tilrettelagt af
AIIM – Centre for Aesthetics of AI Images,
Lotte Philipsen og Mette-Marie Zacher Sørensen,
Institut for Kommunikation og Kultur, Aarhus Universitet

<u>11. september 2025</u>

The production of machine vision's aesthetic score
Nicholas Malevé

How to approach the relations between aesthetics and infrastructure? The presentation will approach this question through the case of the AI image generation software Stable Diffusion. To function, image generators need large datasets or collections of images paired with descriptions and several other metrics such as an aesthetic score. This presentation will analyse the various actors, humans and machines, who intervene in the curation of these images and the production of this aesthetic score for which images are rated on a scale from one to ten, from the less to the most aesthetically pleasing. It will do so by unravelling a vast network of image production, exchange, description and exhibition that includes photosharing websites, annotation platforms, chat rooms, and university departments. Through the lens of a background aesthetics, it will show how this network functions as an exhibitionnary complex enabling feedback loops and modes of reflexivity in the design and deployment of image generators as well as the vagaries inherent to teaching the judgement of taste to machines.

Anatomical Architecture
Fashion designs inspired by the lymphatic system
Adrien Sina

As part of 'Feminine Futures' exhibition series, this project investigates radical and innovative frontiers in fashion design by interweaving architecture, medical science, fashion photography, and artificial intelligence. A new paradigm of materiality emerges through the sensual interplay of structural membranes and architectural forms transposed onto human skin. Inspired by the intricate patterns of the lymphatic system, this approach proposes new textures which dissolve boundaries between anatomy and technology, skin and fabric. It reveals a liminal state between translucence and fibrogenic complexity, between nodal networks and aerodynamic smoothness. The resulting aesthetic is architectural, biomorphic and deeply tactile, anticipating a vision of fashion's possible futures.

The lymphatic system, accidentally discovered by Gaspard Aselli in 1622 as 'lacteal veins', has long remained an enigma. Further examined by Giovanni Battista Bidello in 1627, Thomas Bartholin in 1652, and Paolo Mascagni in 1787, it continues to intrigue scientists. Unlike the more visually defined anatomies of muscle, bone, nerves or blood vessels – long the focus of artistic and medical illustration – the lymphatic system appears almost amorphous, if not repellent. Despite its highly sophisticated role within the immune system, the rarity of its representation stimulates unexplored and unforeseen artistic perspectives.

This body of work follows two solo exhibitions 'Archaeology of Desire / Performing Anatomies – a history of medical gaze and flesh' in 2005 at 1+2 artspace, and in 2012 at Richard Roger's NEO Bankside Pavilion, London.

<u>2. oktober 2025</u>

The politics of climate narratives: An age of Polycrisis
Rebecca Duncan, Agnethe Brounbjerg Bennedsgaard & Leonardo Nolé

For the longest time, climate narratives have been defined as that which is strictly "about" climate change (Mehnert 2016). In these talks, and the following roundtable, we will discuss how the climate crisis itself is increasingly interrelated with other crises, resulting in a polycrisis(Albert 2024). Polycrisis is a term used frequently within natural and social sciences, yet it naturally *impacts* and *is impacted by* the arts. As climate crisis mutates into polycrisis, surprising aesthetic registers come into being, challenging limited ideas of genre boundaries. We aim to open a conversation on how the political aspects of literature is foregrounded in a new wave of crisis fiction or cri-fi. We also ask how crisis narratives complicate the common genre trope of speculative fiction being able to *imagine* better worlds. Are new crisis narratives able to move beyond merely representing our current crisis? What unexpected aesthetic modes bloom from the discrepancy between the emotional experience *and* the knowledge of the polycrisis? What ambivalent, minor and ugly affects may appear in the monstrous encounter with a world breaking down? How does crisis narratives negotiate the complex inter-relations of climate crisis with capitalism, class and gender?

There Is No Generative AI: Epistemic Compression and Neural Exchange Value

Leonardo Impett

This talk draws on a central thesis from a forthcoming book, Vector Media (Impett, Offert, Drucker). Vector Media traces the historical epistemology of artificial intelligence, and highlights the latent theories of the image, and of knowledge, inscribed in deep neural networks. The inevitable "bias" of these systems lies not only in what they represent, but in the very logic underlying representation. Their internal ideologies are often not visible in training data or generated outputs, but emerge from how the model organizes and transforms information within itself.

While previous media technologies have created new formats or imitated existing media, neural networks instead seek to dissolve all previous media into a universal space of commensurability: vector space. These models impose operational commensurability on media objects — from representation to interpolation, from medium to vector — making possible their circulation, translation, and manipulation within neural infrastructures. Vector Media thus shows how AI's internal mechanisms inscribe new epistemologies of media. Cultural objects, once specific to a medium, are now rendered fungible — commodities in a new neural economy, expressed solely in terms of their "neural exchange value."

30. oktober 2025

Visualizing War in Digital Images
Art as a Diagnostic of Perception and Affective Mediation
Marie Dias

Contemporary war is not only fought in images but through them. Images act as operative agents, shaping how war is sensed, known, and desired. This talk uses three case studies to examine how artworks function as probes into these operations, revealing the affective, sensory, and technological infrastructures of contemporary warfare.

The first case – a YouTube video of a press conference at the bombed Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital in Gaza – examines the politics of 'truth' in war images, where pixelated or improvised 'snapshots' are perceived as authentic while staged "scenographies of war" provoke skepticism (Baudrillard, Sjöholm, Didi-Huberman). The second, drawing on Thomas Hirschhorn's *Pixel-Collage* and Ilkin Huseynov's AI work *Looming Dreams*, addresses sensory experience, showing how "hyper-aesthetics" and "hyperaesthesia" (Fuller & Weizman) produce aesthetic ambiguity as perception oscillates between coherence and breakdown. Lastly, Noura Tafeche and Tobia Paolo's videowork *MICCHAN*, confronts the gendered and algorithmic dimensions of war, exposing how Israeli MilTok influencers weaponize cuteness and empowerment as soft-power tool functioning as "operational images" (Parikka).

Together, these cases show how war images are not only seen but inhabited, shaping perception, desire, and intimacy. Mediation transforms the perceptual and affective terrain of war through visual formats, sensory oscillations, and platform-specific performances. Understanding contemporary war thus requires mapping its media ecologies as well as political and military strategies, within which art becomes a diagnostic tool, exposing how images operate as agents of aesthetic warfare.

20. november 2025

Sleeping and sensing digital bodies. The aesthetics of platformed corporeality
Franziska Bork-Petersen & Louise Yung Nielsen

New media entail new facets of staging, maintaining and viewing the body. Our talk explores this by looking into the aesthetics and politics of digital bodies on platforms such as Youtube, Twitch and Instagram. We focus on these bodies' interaction with and intriguing capacity to affect their audiences. In our first case, we present *sleep streaming*, formats in which individuals broadcast footage of their sleep to online audiences in real-time. In our second case, we concern ourselves with short-form videos described as *oddly satisfying*. This type of content evokes unexpected pleasure in viewers through its featuring of multisensory stimuli, such as perfectly fitting objects, mesmerising paint mixing and contrasting textures.

      In our talk, we investigate how these videos introduce new modes of 'embodied spectatorship' and sensory-driven consumption. Our analytical approach to the videos is inductive; we take the videos as our starting point and conduct close-readings and aesthetic analyses of the selected content. Finally, we discuss how sleep streams and oddly satisfying content negotiate existing notions of labour and gender, and how platform politics contribute to shaping the seemingly apolitical content.

BIOGRAPHIES

Adrien Sina is architect, artist, curator, dance & performance art historian. He has curated cross-disciplinary exhibitions involving architecture, performance & new media: 'Fugitive Fluctuations', 1995-96; 'Tragédies Charnelles' and 'Immanences Spatiales', 2000; 'Feminine Futures – Avant-garde female artists in the fields of performance & dance', Performa Biennial, New York, 2009, and Le Consortium Contemporary Art Centre, Dijon, 2014; 'Feminine Futures – The Membrane of the Dream I & II', Museum Langmatt, Switzerland, 2015. He has contributed to 'Art, Lies and Videotape: Exposing Performance', Tate Liverpool, 2003; 'Traces du sacré' and 'Danser sa vie', Centre Pompidou, 2008/2011; 'Futurism', Tate Modern, 2009; 'Inventing Abstraction', Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2013; 'The Great Mother', Palazzo Reale, Milan, 2015; 'Elles font l'Abstraction', Centre Pompidou & 'Women in Abstraction', Guggenheim Bilbao, 2021-2022, 'The Milk of Dreams', La Biennale di Venezia, 2022.

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Agnethe Brounbjerg Bennedsgaard is a PhD Fellow in Comparative Literature at Aarhus University. Her research uses planetary comparativism to investigate new kinds of speculative feminst environmental fiction from Latin America and East Asia. She is published in *Passage*, *World Literature Today* and *Standart.*

Franziska Bork-Pedersen is associate professor in Performance Studies at University of Copenhagen. Her latest book, *Body Utopianism: Prosthetic Being Between Enhancement and Estrangement* (*Palgrave Studies in Utopianism,* 2022), explores the paradoxical relationship between bodies and utopianism. Franziska's scholarship on corporeality, performance, fashion, dance, and digital bodies has been published in *Performance Research*, *Nordic Theatre Studies*, and *MedieKultur: Journal of Media and Communication Research*.

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Leonardo Impett is Research Group Leader at the Bibliotheca Hertziana, Assistant Professor in Digital Humanities at the Faculty of English, University of Cambridge, and Bye-Fellow of Selwyn College. His research focuses on crossing AI and visual culture in both directions: exploring AI methods in digital art history, and in examining bias and visual ideology in AI from the perspective of art history and visual studies. He frequently works with machine learning in arts and culture, including with the Liverpool Biennial, the Royal Opera House, and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Leonardo has a background in information engineering and machine learning, having worked or studied at the Cambridge Machine Learning Lab, the Cambridge Computer Lab's Rainbow Group, Microsoft Research, and EPFL's Image and Visual Representation Lab

Leonardo Nolé is a Postdoctoral Researcher at Syddansk Universitet and a member of the Center for Mobilizing Post-Anthropocentric Climate Action (PACA). His researches on Capitalocene narratives and contemporary energy imaginaries, and his postdoc is entitled "<u>Addressing Climate Anxiety Using Flash Fiction in the Classroom</u>"

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Louise Yung Nielsen is Associate Professor and researcher in digital media at Roskilde University. Louise works at the intersection of labour, embodiment, culture and platform economies. She is particularly interested in digital bodies, how they materialise, perform, and become. Louise's publications have featured in *MedieKultur*, *Journal of Media and Communication Research*, *Nordic Journal of Media Studies*, and *Conjunctions: Transdisciplinary Journal of Cultural Participation.*

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Marie Naja Lauritzen Dias is a PhD scholar in Art History at Aarhus University, with a Master's degree in Digital Design. Her research explores the intersections of war, digital media, and contemporary art. Her doctoral project, *The Pixellated War: Artistic Engagements with the New Image War* investigates how images of war and conflict circulate, are mediated, and shape perception, desire, and intimacy. Using contemporary art as a lens, she examines the visual, sensory, and technological infrastructures that structure these images, showing how they function as operative agents in digital environments. Her most recent publication is the peer-reviewed article *Logics of War* in APRJA.

Nicholas Maleve is a visual artist and computer programmer and a post-doctoral researcher in the framework of the Knowledge Servers project at SHAPE and previouslyin the Artistic Practice under Contemporary Conditions project, Aarhus University. After a PhD on Algorithms of vision, he investigates the socio-technical networks of machine learning and their artistic and epistemic implications.

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Rebecca Duncan is Associate Professor in English at Linnaeus University. She is PI on *Resources and Energy in South African Literature* (Vetenskapsrådet, 2024-7), and co-coordinator of the research cluster for *Ecology, Culture and Coloniality*. Recent publications include *Monsters of the Capitalocene* (forthcoming Cambridge UP).