

Art, Aesthetics, and Philosophy

International Conference
Purdue University
September 30-October 1, 2016



Anita Friccek, *Karolina Paints Flowers*, 2016

Organized by the Philosophy and Literature Interdisciplinary Program
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Purdue University / Université de Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense

https://www.cla.purdue.edu/philosophy/news_events/index.html

“Art, Aesthetics, and Philosophy” Conference Friday-Saturday, September 30-October 1, 2016

The “Aesthetics and Philosophy” conferences brings together philosophers and scholars from the analytic and European traditions in order to foster conversation about and advance the understanding of the key issues currently animating both traditions and having a broad impact in the academy and culture at large.

The conference is part of a three-year joint project between the University of Paris 10, Nanterre, and Purdue University, made possible through the generous support of a grant from the Partner University Fund (<http://www.facecouncil.org/puf/>), and contributions from both Nanterre and Purdue.

Established in 2007, the PUF is a collaboration between the French government and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support academic partnerships between French and American institutions of higher education at the graduate and post-doctoral levels.

Sessions will be held on the Purdue University West Lafayette campus in the Yue-Kong Pao Hall of Visual and Performing Arts, Room 1197

Guest Artist

Anita Fricsek, Vienna Austria

Exhibition: “From Flowers to Gardens,” Patti and Rusty Rueff Galleries, Sep 26-Oct 5

We would like to thank **Liz Erlewine**, the gallery coordinator for the Patti & Rusty Rueff Galleries, for her generous assistance is making this exhibition possible.

Keynote Speaker

Graham Harman, Philosophy, Southern California Institute of Architecture (on leave from the American University in Cairo)

Speakers

Lisa Banu, Lafayette, Indiana

Vincent Beaubois, Philosophy, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense

Camille Chamois, Philosophy, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense

Elie During, Philosophy, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense

Sandor Goodhart, English, Purdue University

Matthew Kroll, Philosophy and Literature, Purdue

Ariane Mayer, Philosophy, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense

Arkady Plotnitsky, English, Purdue University

Jean-Michel Salanskis, Philosophy, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense

Daniel W. Smith, Philosophy, Purdue University

Stephen Zepke, Vienna, Austria

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Anita Fricck

From Flowers to Gardens

A special exhibition being held at Purdue University in conjunction with the international conference “Art, Aesthetics, and Philosophy.”

Patti and Rusty Rueff Galleries, East Gallery
Yue-Kong Pao Hall of Visual and Performing Arts
26 September – 5 October 2016



Anita Fricck, *Flowers in our Home:
Children and Parents as Flower Gardeners, 2003-4*

Anita Fricck's exhibition **From Flowers to Gardens** explores the 'garden' as a place of social cooperation and aesthetic production, and is part of her ongoing project examining the structures and effects of different educational models through painting and drawing. Fricck's exhibition not only represents, but also practices 'gardening' as a mode of community and artistic composition, investigating how systems interact and grow on the level of both their content and material relations. The starting point of the show are three paintings from 2003/4 based on photographs from the book *Blumen in unserem Heim* (Flowers in our Home, Children and Parents as Flower Gardeners – a Family Hobby), a how-to-guide by the Austrian gardener and educator Anton Eipeldauer published in 1973. Two new paintings show a girl and a boy painting and drawing flowers and plants as part of the art classes Fricck runs with another artist. Both works also include the child – Karolina Macsayova's still life of flowers is exhibited alongside Fricck's painting showing her doing it, and the painting of Xavier Steinberger drawing plants in a community garden includes his actual drawing within it. The third part of the show presents a new project involving a community garden close to Fricck's home in Vienna. These works are drawings of movement sequences taken from videos of families working and harvesting in the garden. Finally, the animation film *Little Sculpture Garden* (1995) by special guest Iby-Jolande Varga will be on display for the duration of the show.

Conference Program

Sessions will be held in the Yue-Kong Pao Hall of Visual and Performing Arts, Room 1197

Friday, September 30

9:00-10:00am Continental Breakfast
9:45-10:00am Opening Remarks, **Arkady Plotnitsky**

Session I

10:00am-10:45am **Daniel W. Smith**, Philosophy, Purdue University
“Aesthetic Metaphysics: On Raymond Ruyer’s Neo-Leibnizianism”
10:45am-11:30am **Vincent Beaubois**, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense
“Arthur Danto/Gilbert Simondon: What Machines Do to Danto’s
Philosophy of Art”

11:30am-12:00noon **Morning Break**

Session II

12:00noon-12:45pm **Matthew Kroll**, Purdue University
“Archaic/Postmodern: On Charles Olson’s Poetics”

12:45-2:00pm **Lunch**

Session III

2:00-2:45pm **Elie During**, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense
“What Speculative Aesthetics Could Be”
2:45-3:30pm **Ariane Mayer**, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense
“The Relationship between Philosophy and Literature in Arthur Danto and
Serge Bouchardon: A Comparative Approach”

3:30-4:00pm **Afternoon Break**

Session IV: Keynote Address

4:00-5:30pm **Graham Harman**, Southern California Institute of Architecture (on leave
from the American University in Cairo)
“The Theatrical Structure of Aesthetics”

Session V: Exhibition Reception

5:30-7:00pm Anita Fricek, From Flowers to Gardens
Patti and Rusty Rueff Galleries, East Gallery
Comments by Stephen Zepke at 6:00pm

7:30pm Dinner (for conference presenters) at Restauration, 731 Main St, Lafayette

Saturday, October 1

Sessions will be held in the Yue-Kong Pao Hall of Visual and Performing Arts, Room 1197

9:30-10:30am Continental Breakfast

Session VI

10:30am-11:15am **Jean-Michel Salanskis**, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense
“Aesthetics Between Identity and Sensation”

11:15am-12:00noon **Stephen Zepke**, Vienna, Austria
“Art Against Itself, Again. Modernism and Speculative Realism”

12:00noon-12:30pm Morning Break

Session VII

12:30pm-1:15pm **Lisa Banu**, Lafayette, Indiana
“Cooking Consuming Experiences: Food, Design and Object Oriented Philosophy”

1:15pm-2:45pm Lunch

Session VIII

2:45pm-3:30pm **Sandor Goodhart**, Purdue University
“Levinas, Aesthetics, and Literary Counter-Aesthetics”

3:30pm-4:15pm **Camille Chamois**, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense
“M. Baxandall and P. Bourdieu’s Visual Habits and the Dispositional Theory of Perception”

4:15-4:45pm Afternoon Break

Session IX: Closing Address

4:45-5:30pm **Arkady Plotnitsky**, Purdue University
“The Most Beautiful Equation”

6:30pm Reception
At the home of Daniel W. Smith and Catherine Dossin
216 S. 6th St., #3A, downtown Lafayette
All are welcome!

Paper Abstracts

Lisa Banu, Lafayette, Indiana

“Cooking Consuming Experiences: Food, Design and Object Oriented Philosophy”

What is the connection between food, design and philosophy? This presentation offers a possible answer by investigating how contemporary object-oriented philosophers employ food examples such as Ian Bogost’s pound cake, Jane Bennett’s berries and beef, Tim Morton’s *Shredded Wheat* and Levi Bryant’s brazil nuts. Each philosopher invites us to consider the agency of food (as alien, as vibrant, as duplicitous and as machine) and highlights the dynamics between consumption and coexistence. I argue that these object oriented philosophies show us gastronomic consumption to be a process of internalizing other things and inversely design consumption to be a process of internalizing ourselves within things, such as rooms, homes, cities, clothing, machines, books, etc. The argument proceeds by considering:

1. How Ian Bogost’s pound cake shows us complex “alien” encounters that yield a pound cake. He compares Alton Brown and Duff Goldman’s approach to cake baking;
2. How Jane Bennett’s berries and beef show us by comparison Nietzsche and Thoreau’s food preference as indicative of their philosophies;
3. How Timothy Morton borrows from the *Shredded Wheat* commercial slogan of “*nothing added nothing taken away*” to celebrate things as they openly announce their duplicity; and
4. How Levi Bryant’s brazil nuts exemplify bright objects capable of exerting existential gravity on things around them.

While each uniquely employs food examples to help support their philosophical perspectives, they all insist on coexistence as a condition for autonomous agency. Their inclusion of food or literal consumption of the other serves also to expose, I suggest, the role of art and design in cooking consuming experiences. This philosophical inversion between food and design alerts us of the fragile coexistence of autonomous objects that generate, for better and worse, consuming experiences. Most importantly, object oriented thinking about berries, beef, wheat, nuts and cake humble us to witness these thingly encounters as capable of countering our violent and misguided will to master everything.

Vincent Beaubois, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense

“Arthur Danto/Gilbert Simondon: What Machines Do to Danto’s Philosophy of Art”

The specificity of Danto’s philosophy of art is to examine works that disrupt the classical paradigm of Fine Arts, such as Andy Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes* or Marcel Duchamp’s snow shovel (*In Advance of the Broken Arm*). The primary material of these artworks is—literally—technical artifacts produced industrially in series. However, the analysis of technology seems under-determined in Danto’s analyses of these contemporary artworks. Utilizing a number of Gilbert Simondon’s concepts about technology, I will develop an experimental dialogue between the two authors about the place of technology in the understanding of contemporary artworks: What difference does technology make in the interpretation of these artworks?

Camille Chamois, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense
“From ‘Period Eye’ to ‘Schemes of Perception’: M. Baxandall and P. Bourdieu’s Theories of Art”

In 1972, Michael Baxandall published *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, in which he developed the concept of “period eye”: Baxandall argues that everyone processes visual information in a different way, using a combination of innate and culturally determined skills. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu based his late theory of art on this concept (renamed in a Kantian way “schemes of perception”) and managed to criticize modern and contemporary philosophy of art (Derrida, Iser, Jauss).

In this communication, I aim to review the concept of “period eye” in Baxandall’s Art History, and then to explain the way Bourdieu uses it. In one hand, Bourdieu uses analytic philosophers (Goodman, Danto, Dickie) to develop a semiotic theory of art against the Kantian paradigm of aesthetic judgment – arguing that only a semiotic approach is compatible with a historical and social constructivist definition of art. But, on the other hand, Bourdieu qualifies these analytic theories of art as “scholastic points of view” (according to Austin’s expression) because they focus on the way people *understand* a work of art and leave out the way they *perceive* it: the concept of a “period eye” is thus supposed to correct this tendency.

Finally, I will argue that Bourdieu develops a perceptual (and neither a theoretical nor an affective) theory of art, but without clarifying the theory of perception on which this theory of art is based. I intend to reconstruct this implicit theory of perception and then try to locate it within the contemporary debates about (non)conceptual content of perception.

Elie During, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense / Institut Universitaire de France
“Weird Coexistence: What Speculative Aesthetics Could Be

For the past ten years, speculative realism and object-oriented philosophies/ontologies have popularized the idea that one should strive to say something substantial about what reality is like *without us*—that is, beyond the human perspective, and more radically, independently of the conditions of access (“correlation”) imposed upon the world by sensible subjects. This renewed interest in “things in themselves” is closely linked with aesthetic concerns. Besides the “arche-fossil” bearing testimony to ancestral times preceding the appearance of terrestrial life, there is the sublime of deep-space and high-frequency trading, the beauty of algorithmic design, the fascination for animal worlds, machinic agency, inhuman networks... But if aesthetics typically focuses on certain ways of *relating* to the world as such, how could it not be inherently correlational? How could there be an aesthetics of that which, by definition, exceeds the bounds of experience? An aesthetics *without us*? There are two ways to meet this challenge. Drawing inspiration from the doctrines of the immanent sublime, we may want to enact the requirements of speculative realism on the *fringes* of experience. To this end, a bat—what is it like to be one?—is just as good a starting point as a mathematical form or a gothic novel. But we may also want to confront the problem head-on by placing the thing in itself at the center of aesthetic reflection, and by acknowledging what is already obvious in Kant: its connection with the issue of the Whole—not the quantitative notion of totality, the super-object criticized in the antinomies, but the *tota simul* exhibited in certain varieties of aesthetic experience, the intuition that everything *coexists* in some sense with everything else, including beings, events, or perspectives that are by principle withdrawn from us.

Sandor Goodhart, Purdue University
“Anti-Literature or Anti-Idolatry? Reading, Levinas, and Art”

Levinas’s excoriating of literature as irresponsible and evasive is well-known. Published in 1948, “Reality and Its Shadow” challenges readers who expect the great thinker’s extolling of art – a disappointment compounded by his praise for Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, Molière, Goethe, and Cervantes. But an examination of the context in which the essay was written renders the document more complex. Sartre and Blanchot, for example, are critical to its understanding. In “What is Literature?” Sartre argues for a committed or engaged literary writing at odds with the “art for art’s sake” movement in literary fashion in France since the nineteenth century. Rejecting Sartre and the autotelic approach, Levinas opts for a counter aesthetic approach he shares with Blanchot – expressed, in the latter’s “Literature and the Right to Death” (1949). We know that from comparing the essays, but also from Levinas’s recently published *Prison Notebooks* where he details his rejection of aestheticism along lines virtually indistinguishable from Blanchot’s critique. Another source is Levinas’s early post war concern with Judaism where idolatry and its dangers are of primary concern, and in a religious and cultural context in which the iconoclastic rejection of images is paramount. “Modern literature,” Levinas writes, “disparaged for its intellectualism (which, none the less goes back to Shakespeare, the Molière of Don Juan, Goethe, Dostoyevsky) certainly manifests a more and more clear awareness of this fundamental insufficiency of artistic idolatry” (“Reality,” 143)

Graham Harman, Southern California Institute of Architecture (on leave from the American University in Cairo)
“The Theatrical Structure of Aesthetics”

In his seminal 1967 essay “Art and Objecthood,” Michael Fried argues against two features of minimalist art that he sees as both intimately related and equally defective: (1) literalism, and (2) theatricality. This lecture will begin by arguing that Fried is wrong to identify the two, and wrong to condemn both. While Fried’s critique of literalism is convincing, his dismissal of theatricality is not. I will argue that theatricality is the very essence of art. As a result, we need to rethink not only the aesthetics of Immanuel Kant, but his ethics and metaphysics as well. In this way, Fried’s assessment of the minimalists brings us to central questions concerning the heart of modern philosophy.

Matthew Kroll, Purdue University
“Archaic/Postmodern: On Charles Olson’s Poetics”

It is difficult to pin down a concise statement on aesthetics by American poet Charles Olson (1910–1970). This is not due to any reticence on his part. Rather, what Olson does have to say about art or, for example, a concept such as beauty, tends to come in one of two manners: as an aphoristic line of poetry; or in the midst of a diatribe in his interviews, lectures, or public readings. Through these same media, Olson has a great many things to say about poetry. But as there is such an overwhelming amount of these latter statements, it can be hard to boil them down to a digestible set. That is, however, what I shall attempt to do in my talk. In particular, I will examine Olson’s concepts of history and space, and how these inform his deeply intertwined concepts of the archaic and the postmodern. Through this cluster of concepts, central to his poetics, I will then attempt to understand what Olson’s broader aesthetic theories are (or might be) and how they apply not only to his own poetry, but to literature in general, and as I hope we shall see, life as itself an aesthetic category.

Ariane Mayer, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense
“The Relationship between Philosophy and Literature in Arthur Danto and Serge Bouchardon: A Comparative Approach”

From the Platonic identification of the poet as the “Other” of the philosopher, and as a creator of illusions that should be banished from the city-state, to Derrida’s deconstruction which sees in literature the “unthought of philosophy”, the status of literature was the focus of much debate throughout the history of philosophy. We seek to compare two contemporary points of view on this question: those of Arthur Danto (American analytical aesthetic) and Serge Bouchardon (French digital writer and theorist).

One can be struck by a common topic among both of these researchers: the interrogation on a collision between literature and philosophy. Arthur Danto questions philosophy “as” literature (“Philosophy as/and/of Literature”, in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*), while Serge Bouchardon claims that digital literature becomes a speculative discourse about literature (“The heuristic value of digital literature”). We try to compare the heterogeneous approaches through which those researchers come to the similar idea of a chiasmus, whereby literature and philosophy both seem to take each other as its contemporary horizon.

Arkady Plotnitsky, Purdue University
“The Most Beautiful Equation”

Taking as its point departure Paul Dirac’s famous maxim “the laws of nature must have mathematical beauty” and Richard Feynman’s ironic commentary on it, which also presents “the most beautiful equation” of physics, this paper will consider the complexities involved in Dirac’s and persistent related claims. Then, it will address the relevance, or possibly irrelevance, of aesthetic considerations in mathematics and science, via Kant’s and Hegel’s analysis of the nature of the aesthetics. These considerations, the paper argues, bear significantly on our philosophical understanding of the nature of the aesthetic in general.

Jean-Michel Salanskis, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense
“Identity, Sensibility, Normativity”

The paper begins by an overview of analytic philosophy of art, which appears as dominated by the issue of identity of the work of art. I attempt to understand how, in such a framework, arise the issues concerning reception of the work of art and its value, and how the issue of the general meaning of art in human culture comes to surface.

Then, I make a few comments about two highly characteristic conceptions of art in French contemporary philosophy, expressed by Deleuze and Lyotard. They primarily understood art in terms of sensibility, and I show how such a way of framing art leads to various observations on desire, revolution, language or systems.

Ultimately, I offer another comprehension of art: I strive to formulate the etho-analysis of art, in the line of my general philosophical endeavor. Here, art is first of all understood in terms of normativity. I argue that my approach has its ways of overcoming difficulties encountered in either analytic or Deleuzian-Lyotardian conceptions, while I also try to identify some of the problems which etho-analysis of art will need to address.

Daniel Smith, Purdue University

“Aesthetic Metaphysics: On Raymond Ruyer’s Neo-Leibnizianism”

The French philosopher Raymond Ruyer (1902-1987) was an important influence on contemporaries such as Merleau-Ponty, Canguilhem, Simondon, and Deleuze, and the recent English-language translation of his classic book *Neo-Finalism* (trans. Alyosha Edlebi, Minnesota, 2016) provides an occasion to assess the ongoing relevance of Ruyer to contemporary philosophy. This paper will examine a set of concepts that lies at the heart of Ruyer’s philosophy—absolute forms or domains, absolute survey, and non-localizable liaisons—in order to show how Ruyer’s work is a kind of revived monadology: an “aesthetic” metaphysics freed from the dogmatic exigencies of Leibniz’s “theological” metaphysics.

Stephen Zepke, Vienna, Austria

“Speculative Anti-Aesthetics: Art as Cognitive Acceleration”

Speculative Realism has divided into two clear streams over the last decade; a rationalist and anti-aesthetic school around Quentin Meillassoux and Ray Brassier, and an empiricist and aesthetic school around Graham Harman. While the latter is not without interest for contemporary artistic practices, in particular Harman’s recent affirmation of the modernist theorists Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, as with so much in Speculative Realism, the rationalist side has gone in completely the opposite direction to explore how aesthetic experience might provoke new concepts. In this way it amplifies elements of Joseph Kosuth’s seminal essay ‘Art After Philosophy’ into a political anti-aesthetics capable of contributing to a process of cognitive acceleration. Is this a progressive development exploring contemporary art’s postconceptual status, or is it a reboot of art’s desire to do politics by negating itself, this time with philosophy as its enabler? In either case, the relation of philosophy and art would seem to increasingly by-pass the aesthetic.



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