

VARIETIES OF CONTEMPORARY AESTHETICS

FRANKFURT – WARWICK WORKSHOP

Friday 31/3 – Saturday 1/4 2017

Room 5.01, Building "Normative Orders", Max-Horkheimer-Straße 2,
Goethe-University, 60323 Frankfurt am Main

FRIDAY 31 MARCH

12.45–13.00: Martin Seel (Frankfurt/M.)

Welcome and Introduction

13:00–14:30: Diarmuid Costello (Warwick)

‘On the (So Called) Problem of Detail: Michael Fried, Roland Barthes and
Roger Scruton on Photography and Intentionality’

14.30–15.00 Coffee & Tea

15:00–16:30: Juliane Rebentisch (Offenbach/M.)

‘The Abyss of the Photographic Surface’

16.30–17.00 Coffee & Tea

17:00–18:30: Christoph Menke (Frankfurt/M.)

‘The Paradox of Ability and the Value of Beauty’

SATURDAY 1 APRIL

9.30–11.00 Eileen John (Warwick)

'Fiction that feels like a parable: the disturbing children of Erpenbeck and Coetzee'

11.00–12.30 Stephen Mulhall (New College, Oxford)

'Philosophy, Autobiography and the Ascetic Ideal: J.M. Coetzee's *Scenes from Provincial Life*'

12.30–14.00 Lunch

14.00–15.30 Peter Poellner (Warwick)

'Horizontality, Possibility, Value: Some Thoughts on Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*'

15.30–16.00 Coffee & Tea

16.00–17.30 Christiane Voss (Weimar)

'Dioramatic Perspectives'

17.30–19.00 Martin Seel (Frankfurt/M.)

'What is a poetic thought?'

NORMATIVE ORDERS

Exzellenzcluster an der Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main

ABSTRACTS

DIARMUID COSTELLO

'On the (So Called) Problem of Detail: Michael Fried, Roland Barthes and Roger Scruton on Photography and Intentionality'

Roger Scruton claims that photography cannot be a "representational art" because its causal substrate undermines the photographer's ability to control detail. One can never be sure what is relevant to interpretation, because so much of what appears only does so because it was in shot alongside the intended subject. Michael Fried, by contrast, celebrates Thomas Demand's images of carefully reconstructed scenes as "allegories of intendedness as such." Now everything that appears in the photograph only does so because the photographer expressly intended it. Though Fried thinks Demand succeeds where Scruton thinks photography must fail, the underlying reasoning is the same: it is only because photography suffers from the problem that Scruton identifies that Demand's demonstration is significant. Call this the "orthodox" view.

I bring this out by focusing on some tensions between what Fried has to say about Demand and Roland Barthes. Despite celebrating Demand for making fully intended images, Fried celebrates Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, for its account of the "punctum" as that detail that is "seen but not shown," because not intended by the photographer. On the one hand what is fully intended, and on the other what cannot be intended, are supposed to secure their authors' "anti-theatrical" credentials. Prima facie, both claims cannot be true. I ask whether these tensions arise from conflicts in how Fried employs the notion of "theatricality," a poor theory of photography, or both; I propose that some widespread, but mistaken, assumptions about the nature of photography, shared by philosopher, art historian and literary theorist alike, may ultimately be responsible.

EILEEN JOHN

'Fiction that feels like a parable: the disturbing children of Erpenbeck and Coetzee'

I am interested in contemporary fiction that can make a reader feel that she is being offered a parable. But some of these parable-like works go on for too long and are too disorienting, perhaps, for purposes of effective teaching or illumination. Erpenbeck's novellas *The Old Child* and *The Book of Words* and Coetzee's *The Childhood of Jesus* and *The Boyhood of Jesus* will be considered as works that put a child or child-like figure at the centre of such stories, and that press the question of what kind of readers we need to be.

CHRISTOPH MENKE

'The Paradox of Ability and the Value of Beauty'

The decisive practical question of the project of enlightenment is the paradoxical relation between the growth of abilities and the intensification of power relations. Indeed, the

question is whether ability and domination (or servitude) can be disconnected from one another at all. Are there any free abilities, any abilities of freedom? Or is the freedom of ability, that is, the ability of freedom, a paradox which can only be maintained and sustained rather than resolved?

The discourse of aesthetics, the modern theory of the aesthetic, offers the possibility for an investigation of this question. For it is in aesthetics, that is to say, in the domain of semblance, that the being of ability appears. But it appears here, from the beginning and throughout, in an internally opposed and contradictory way. In the context of modernity, aesthetics, as theory and praxis, is the field of the struggle over what abilities (that is to say: 'subjects') are. This defines the debate about the concept of beauty.

STEPHEN MULHALL

'Philosophy, Autobiography and the Ascetic Ideal: J.M. Coetzee's *Scenes from Provincial Life*'

In this paper, I utilize Nietzsche's concept of the ascetic ideal, and his vision of its pervasive presence in Western culture, as a lens through which to understand J.M. Coetzee's idiosyncratic approach to the task of autobiographical writing, both in his theoretical writings on the topic (in *Doubling the Point*) and in a trilogy of texts that his publishers present as autobiographical exercises. This means tracing Coetzee's understanding the role of the concepts of confession, sincerity and truthfulness in the field of life-writing, as well as the existential difficulties they engender of telling the truth about oneself without self-deception, and of bringing confession to a decisive and productive end. The final part of the paper looks at how these theoretical issues work themselves out in the first volume of Coetzee's autobiographical trilogy – *Boyhood*.

PETER POELLNER

'Horizontality, Possibility, Value: Some Thoughts on Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*'

Musil's philosophy of mind in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* crystallizes around a distinctive inflection of characteristically modernist dualisms – specifically around the distinction between an essentially power-oriented "ratioid" *Wirklichkeitssinn* and an *anderer Zustand* associated variously with imagination, metaphor, and "possibility". The phenomenology of the *andere Zustand* in *MwQ* has partial affinities with traditional characterizations of the aesthetic attitude while also being canvassed as the basis for a non-distorted or proper ethical orientation. Musil's thinking on this is challenging and elusive but still potentially fruitful – or so I shall argue in this paper.

JULIANE REBENTISCH

'The Abyss of the Photographic Surface'

MARTIN SEEL

'What is a poetic thought?'

"We speak of understanding a sentence in the sense in which it can be replaced by another which says the same; but also in the sense in which it cannot be replaced by any other. (Any more than one musical theme can be replaced by another.)" Starting from this remark in §531 of the *Philosophical Investigations* my presentation will deal not with poetry in particular but with the difference and interrelation between "poetic" (in a wide sense) and "prosaic" (more or less Fregean) thoughts. This will lead to the question of whether the established theoretical hierarchies – prose (and its analysis) as prior to (the analysis of) poetic language, or the other way around – are sound.

CHRISTIANE VOSS

'Dioramatic Perspectives'

While it is already a truism, that postmodern aesthetics expanded into fields that lead and lay far beyond the Arts in a narrow sense (e.g.: politics, rhetoric, everyday-life, games, architecture etc.) it is less often considered how far aesthetics play a role in institutions and exhibitions that play educational and epistemic roles, for example in a scientific way. Especially the traditional division between "realms of aesthetics" and "realms of science" seem to suggest that scientific and aesthetic forms of knowledge are alien to one another. This presupposition will be critically considered in the light of an analysis of so called "Habitat Dioramas". These are museal dispositifs and "look-arrangements" that exist in Natural History Museums worldwide since the late 19th century. They figure as "windows to nature" and are constructed by taxidermists, biologists and zoologists to reenact and/or represent a vivid and illusionistic picture of an allegedly untouched nature. The questions are: 1) how and which aesthetic strategies are employed that impart scientific knowledge to laymen and children? 2) What philosophical notion of "aesthetic" is here involved? 3) How could the somewhat anachronistic style of "Habitat Dioramas" be related to modern concepts of aesthetic?