Gray on Gray

Conference convenors: Aron Vinegar and Per Sigurd Styve, IFIKK, University of Oslo
Date: May 22-23, 2018

Location: Domus Academica: Theologisk eksamenssal, University of Oslo

The title of this conference comes from a famous passage in the philosopher G.F Hegel’s preface to the Philosophy of Right: ”When philosophy paints its grey in grey, one form of life has become old, and by means of grey it cannot be rejuvenated, but only known. The owl of Minerva, takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering.” This passage is derived from an utterance by Mephistopheles in Goethe’s Faust, ”Gray, my dear friend, is all theory, and green is the golden tree of life.” Hegel’s phrase has been taken up in various ways by Marx, Adorno, and others in the 20th century. The colour gray also features strongly in notions of boredom, the everyday, and indifference as articulated by Heidegger, Blanchot and Beckett. In art and art history there has been a similar interest in the colour grey, perhaps beginning with use of grisaille technique in classical, renaissance, and post renaissance art, as well as in the art historian Aby Warburg’s account of how grisaille is supposedly a way to absorb and dampen the intensities and pulsions of the past, and by artists such as as Vilhelm Hammershoi, Gerhard Richter, and various practitioners of what might be called deadpan photography.

The common interpretation of the colour gray—stemming from Hegel’s passage—is that it is the color of belatedness, a perpetual coming on the scene too late to do justice to the rich colour and intensity of the world, or that it drains that immediacy and life through abstraction, interpretation, and theorization. This conference is an attempt to question this common interpretation of the colour grey, and to explore the important issues that the colour grey raises in terms of the relationships between abstraction and immediacy, color and colourlessness, life and death, nuance and flattening out, difference and repetition, finite and infinite, boredom and wonder. The papers will draw upon those working in the fields of philosophy, art history, music, ecology and literary studies.

Paper Titles, Abstracts and Bios

Hegel’s Shadow Theatre
Rebecca Comay, Philosophy, University of Toronto, Canada

In his infamous Preface to the Philosophy of Right, Hegel describes the crepuscular condition of philosophy: “When philosophy paints its grey in grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy; the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk.” The image is odd, not only because it suggests a tinge of the “monochromatic formalism” that Hegel will never stop reviling (in everybody else), but also because it seems to cast a shadow on the very idea of Absolute Knowing as consummated enlightenment. It also, or so I will argue, brings Hegel into surprising company with Samuel Beckett.
**Bio:** Rebecca Comay is a professor of Philosophy and Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto, where she is also an associate member of the Jewish Studies Program, the German Department, and the Program in Literature and Critical Theory. She is also a faculty member of the European Graduate School. She has published extensively on continental philosophy, psychoanalysis, literature, and contemporary art. Recent books include: *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (Stanford, 2011), Hegel and Resistance (co-edited with Bart Zandvoort, Bloomsbury, 2017)), and *The Dash - The Other Side of Absolute Knowing* (co-authored with Frank Ruda, MIT, 2018). She is currently working on a book on the temporality of the deadline. entitled *Deadlines (literally).*

**Grey Time: Waiting for Beckett**
Laura Salisbury, English and Medical Humanities, University of Exeter

There is a well-known story that when Beckett got to see the colour footage of his television play *Quad* played back on a black and white monitor he insisted it was ‘marvellous, […]’ 100,000 years later’. Beckett went on to record a monochrome, slowed down version of the play, *Quadrat II,* to sit alongside alongside the surprisingly colourful, rhythmic jerks and swerves of *Quadrat I;* together these snapshots of life represent an asymptotic stretching of time, a shuffling on and off towards a final still state. This seems like a typical move from the Beckett who insisted on policing the greyscale of his drama. ‘Too much colour’, he told the actor Billie Whitelaw, over and over, as she rehearsed *Footfalls.* Grey, or ‘Light black. From pole to pole’, is of course everywhere in Beckett’s later work, but although there has been some significant research on Beckett’s relationship to and with colour, the grey so firmly associated with Beckett’s aesthetic – from the tableaux of the plays to his iconic personal image -- has less frequently been linked to the author’s particular interest in the temporality of waiting. This paper sets out to determine what might be meant by ‘grey time’ in Beckett’s work. It traces out a time that is resolutely not a twilight or the famous *l’heure bleue* stretch of gloaming between night and day; it is rather, I argue, a historically specific, postwar articulation of temporality in which waiting is denuded of its ‘for’ – its purpose, its project, its ‘colour’. By showing how and why certain aspects of grey time speak clearly to Beckett’s ashen historical period, I also want to suggest which parts of Beckett’s temporality remain, lingering and enduring within our current waiting times.

**Bio:** Laura Salisbury is Professor of Modern Literature and Medical Humanities at the University of Exeter. She has published widely on modern and contemporary literature and on the relationship between literary modernism and neuroscientific conceptions of language. She is co-PI on the Wellcome-funded Collaborative Award ‘Waiting Times’ and is also a PI in Exeter’s Wellcome Trust Centre for the Cultures and Environments of Health. As part of her work on ‘Waiting Times’, she is writing a cultural history of waiting in modernity. Within the Wellcome Centre, she is leading a Beacon project on the constitution and mobilisation of facts within health decision making.

**The ’Grey-Point’: Deleuze on Klee**
Kamini Vellodi, Art History and Philosophy, University of Edinburgh

Taking off from Klee’s 1938 painting, *The Grey Man and the Coast,* this paper explores Klee’s concept of the ‘grey point’ and its role in Deleuze’s philosophy of art. In his Bauhaus lectures, Klee develops the notion of the grey point as a cosmogenetic moment of painting.
The hinge between chaos and order, the mid-point of all colour (including black and white), as well as the transition between point and line, grey plays a pivotal role in pictorial genesis. Klee is a major presence in Deleuze’s late writings on art, and in a few fleeting remarks in *Logic of Sensation* and *A Thousand Plateaus* he affirms Klee’s conception of grey as the ‘chaos-germ’ that unlocks dimensions of sensation and inaugurates new registers of experience. Through a close reading of these passages, I argue for the importance of the grey-point in Deleuze’s constructivist philosophy of art. I demonstrate the function of the grey point in Deleuze’s critique of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology (and in turn, Merleau-Ponty’s seminal, and post-Heideggerian, reading of Klee in his 1964 *Eye and Mind*). As a differentiator that functions in the interstices between tone and colours, grey catastrophises the transcendental and primordial unity of the sensible with the ‘cosmic’ forces of the ‘outside’, acting as a vector for a transcendental constructivism aligned with what might be called a ‘haptic modernism’. Touching on a constellation of notions - rhythm, the diagram, haptic and the abstract line - and exploring how these function in *The Grey man and the Coast*, I unpack this conceptual terrain whilst indicating a few ways the concept of the grey-point may open new lines of articulation for art history.

**Bio:** Dr Kamini Vellodi is Lecturer at Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh. She has a PhD in Philosophy from the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy, Middlesex University, and degrees in Fine Art: Painting from the Royal College of Art and Chelsea College of Art, London. Her research interests lie at the interstices of continental philosophy, art historiography and theories of art history and she has published articles in journals including *Art History, Word and Image, Parrhesia, Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* and Deleuze Studies. Her book, ‘Tintoretto’s Difference. Deleuze, Diagrammatics and Art History’ will be published in Autumn 2018 with Bloomsbury Academic press.

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**Against the Grey: Working with Density and Detail in Contemporary Musical Composition**

Wieland Hoban, composer and translator, Frankfurt

In the absence of clear tonal languages, contemporary composers are forced to find other frames of reference in order to give meaning and context to their music. Some concentrate more on establishing such a frame within the specific characteristics of the musical material, while others incorporate conceptual or discursive content as an additional layer (though the two are not mutually exclusive). In the case of a music that works with high levels of musical density, flux and detail, one of the greatest risks is that for all its finely-honed music-immanent attributes and structural architecture, the overall result of so much simultaneous and/or successive information is more a grey monotony than a kaleidoscopic multiplicity, a situation where subtle differentiations are ultimately lost in indifference. Looking both at obviously dense, polyphonic music and more reduced, static sound worlds, I will discuss different approaches to questions of manifest and latent complexity.

**Bio:** Wieland Hoban was born in London. He studied composition with Isabel Mundry, Hans Zender and Gerhard Müller-Hornbach at the Frankfurt Academy of Music and Performing Arts. His music is performed internationally; he has worked with such groups as Ensemble SurPlus, ensemble recherche, hand werk, KNM Berlin, Ensemble Mosaik, Champ d’Action, Stadler Quartet, Kairos Quartet and soloists including Ian Pace (piano), Carin Levine (flute), Arne DeForce (cello) and Diego Castro Magaš (guitar). In addition to his compositional work he is a translator (German-English) in the fields of music, philosophy and literature, e.g. of
several books by Theodor W. Adorno, Peter Sloterdijk and Alexander Kluge, as well as numerous essays for collections and journals; he has also published his own analyses and other theoretical writings. He has worked as an interpreter at the Darmstadt International Summer Course for New Music since 2000 and at the Donaueschingen Festival since 2011. In his music, he strives to achieve a multi-layered quality that reflects the ever-changing flow of our perceptions and consciousness, while pointing to something that lies beyond these and can only be hinted at.

**Monochrome aesthetic. On philosophy’s belatedness**

Ingvild Torsen, Philosophy, IFIKK, University of Oslo

Hegel’s characterization of philosophy as painting “gray in gray” is meant to capture the belatedness of philosophy, articulating in thought a phenomenon that is already past by the time philosophy comprehends it. In this sense, the presence of the philosophical discipline of aesthetics is a sign that art has come to end. This paper seeks to question Hegel’s understanding of the temporal relation between art and philosophy, by considering the philosophical meaning of the art that follows aesthetics. Contrary to Hegel’s insistence, philosophy’s gray painting is not merely backwards-looking, but sets an agenda for the art of the next two centuries after Hegel. I suggest that the monochrome is a way of understanding philosophy’s influence on art.

**Bio:** Ingvild Torsen is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Oslo. She works in aesthetics and the philosophy of Heidegger, primarily as the latter relates to predecessors in the Kantian tradition. She has published on Heidegger’s relationship to the aesthetics of Kant and Hegel, and her current research focuses on aesthetic normativity in the same tradition. Her work has been published in journals such as *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* and *The British Journal of Aesthetics*.

**An Obituary on Living Stones**

Per Sigurd Styve, Art History, IFIKK, University of Oslo

Grisaille painting has a long history with diverse traditions, but in the high Renaissance it developed into a distinct genre, a touchstone of *dimostrazioni* of artistic skills. Remarkably, when it first re-occurred in the second half of the 15th century in the lower zone, the *dado* or *zoccolo* of monumental chapel decorations, the motifs depicted were largely from Greek and Roman antique mythology or secular history. The paper proposes that the particular placement of the grisaille on the dado and its media specificity acted as interrelated conditions of possibilities for this historically radical introduction of pagan and profane motifs in Christian contexts.

Drawing on Hans Blumenberg’s notion of how modern ideas, such as that of progression, took form in terms of “reoccupations” of established medieval “positions,” I argue that the seemingly sudden rupture of tradition with the entrance of the authentic (non-moralized) *all’antica* grisaille happened in terms of a “re-occupation” of a medieval visual schema. The particular symbolic values generally assigned to the materials imitated (or used) suggest why in the medieval tradition the figures in imitated grey reliefs are placed adjacent to the beholder as they frequently relate stones’ worldly nature and realm, such as scenes emphasizing Christ’s human nature or personifications of the soul’s moral struggles towards condemnation or salvation. The significant symbolic meaning of the stone’s supporting functions is played out in
representations of apostles and prophets as persistent foundations of the Church; Augustine had already described the Apostles as *lapidis vivi*, living stones, a metaphor that survived through the Middle Ages.

When the Renaissance artistic ideal of *imitazione del vero* (or *della natura*) allocated the specific task to grisaille painting of imitating figures carved in stones, as opposed to illusions of life, it placed new limits on the work that had to be respected in order to be convincing as representations of past personages transformed from one state of existence to another, from live to past live and from sculpture to imitation of sculpture. Rather than enlivened figures on a transitional level of reality, now grisaille painting aimed at being convincing as real “dead” reliefs protruding into the physical space of the beholder. As the grisaille tradition of *lapidis vivi* - animated figures ascribed independent lives - reaches a peak in 15th century Netherlandish painting, in Italy it transformed completely into what in the medieval exegesis was considered its direct opposite: *lapidis mortui*, the dead stones of pagan idols.

**Bio:** Per Sigurd Styve is associate professor in art history at the Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas at the University of Oslo, Norway where he is a member of the research groups *Temporal Experiments: Literary, Aesthetic and Social Modes of Thinking and Living Time*, and *Nordic Network for Renaissance Studies*. Among his primary areas of research, teaching and publication are concepts of time and space in early modern paintings, the relationship between optics and pictorial representation, theoretical-hermenutical conditions in the study of early modern art. Currently he is working on a book project on the relationship between changes in system of thought and representation of knowledge in Renaissance mural decorations.

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**Out of the Polar Night: Climate Phantasms and the Image of Ice**

Amanda Boetzkes, Art History, University of Guelph, Canada

This paper will consider how images of ice bear the gray phantasms of climate change. In his challenging account of the phantasm, Rodolphe Gasché considers how phantasmic images become *katabole* within scientific knowledge, slumbering material elements that rise up from the “nocturnal pit” over which science suspends itself. The *katabole* cathects the scientific orientation even as it muddies the coherence of its fabric. With this operation in mind, I will address the aesthetic renderings of ice in the blind spot between scientific and Inuit knowledge of climate change. This blind spot, however is a specifically gray political zone. That is to say, it occupies a site at which the prostheses of knowledge collapse under the weight of political imperatives, producing a zone of indistinction and indecision. The phantasmic image of ice binds and divides climate between its own atmospheric condition and its rendering as a global perspective.

For Gasché, the phantasm of science is diaphanous, a luminosity from the night of unconsciousness. It is an excess that threads itself through knowledge like an energy current, eliciting the expenditure of its underpinnings. This formulation resonates with the contemporary visual field in which ice is mediated between a scientific assemblage that attempts to suspend its eye above climate by assuming a geological spatio-temporal positioning, and Inuit epistemology borne of a culturally and geographically sited position. What phantasms come from this contact, and how are they constitutive of the aesthetics of climate change? I will consider this question in relation to artworks by Canadian Inuit artists.
Annie Pootoogook, Tim Pitsiulak, Zacharias Kanuk, and Danish artist Pia Arke alongside mediatized and affectively-charged scientific images of glacial melt. I will suggest that the phantasmatic that arise in and through the image of ice mobilize the temporality of an end of the world that has already taken place. Thus, the phantasm binds political ecology to colonial trauma, capitalist deterritorialization and the unworlding effects of globalization. Importantly, this binding takes place through lapses in causality, in the retroaction of systemic feedback loops that perturb climate science. The climate phantasm therefore crosses the epistemological and ontological study of ice.


Surface: On gray as the Melancholy of Silence in Hammershøy

Bente Larsen, Art History, IFIKK, University of Oslo

In 1972 in his *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno determined radical negation as the only precondition of authenticity and survival of art. At the same time as he emphasizes art as doomed to impoverishment to the brink of silence the element of attraction and sensuousness remains essential to art: “There is more joy in dissonance than in consonance” and “Negation may reverse into pleasure not into affirmation”. In 2006 Jean-Luc Nancy together with Federico Ferrari published a short book on skin, *NUS SOMMES. (La Peau des images)*. In the book the two writers explore the relationship between truth and the skin, focusing on both the motive of the naked or the nude in different images and on the image itself as skin, as a place in which the truth “right at the skin is only true in being exposed, in being offered without reserve but also without revelation.” What the nude reveals, according to the two writers, is that there is nothing to be revealed other than revelation itself. In this distinction from its object, art signify that there is nothing to be signified, art reveals that there is nothing to be revealed. To both Adorno and Nancy art is not a simulacrum which protects us from loss, it is rather the revelation of loss, and to both sensuousness and melancholy form an aesthetics of art. In my talk I shall discuss this element of withdrawl from the outer world of art focusing on the use of surface and the reductive use of color scheme into almost gray in Hammershöys paintings from early 1900 on the one hand and a totally different strategy in the use of gray and surface in Gerhard Richters gray paintings, *Grau*, mostly done in the 1970’s.

Bio: Bente Larsen is a professor of Art History, Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas, Oslo University. She has published extensively on continental aesthetics and visual art from early 1800 till today. Recent works include, "Fragment and Laughter: The Art of Thomas Schütte", in Mathilda Olof-Ors (ed.) *Thomas Schütte. United Enemies*, Moderna Museet, Koenig Books, London (2016), "The Infinity of water Lilies: On Monet's Late Paintings", in Gordon McMullan & Sam Smiles
Grey is (not) Grey. Some Considerations on an Ethics of Attentiveness

Hana Gründler, Art History and Philosophy, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz / Max-Planck-Institut

In Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Remarks on Colour* we find several passages, in which the Austrian philosopher discusses the almost invisible differences between grey and white, while also addressing how minimal changes of light might transform our way of perceiving colours, things and spaces. This attentiveness to the most subtle details – often hidden to a first, superficial glance – was a fundamental feature not only of Wittgenstein’s work as an architect, but also of his later philosophy in general. Indeed, from the 1930ies on Wittgenstein stressed repeatedly that philosophers should not think, but rather look at things in a nuanced way in order to finally see their differences. Departing from a close analysis of the Palais Stonborough-Wittgenstein, but also of artworks such as Ingres’ *Odalisque in Grisaille* or Gerhard Richter’s *Grau* and *Acht Grau* as well as from a thorough reading of selected art theoretical and philosophical reflections on the monochrome, in this paper I seek to investigate the manifold transitions from the unseen to the seen, from indifference to subtle differentiation. Connected to this, I shall critically reflect upon the possibilities of an ethics of detail or of attentiveness, showing that at a closer look grey is (not) always grey.

*Bio*: Hana Gründler is Permanent Senior Research Scholar and principal investigator of the “Ethics and Architecture”-project at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz / Max-Planck-Institut. In her PhD entitled *Die Dunkelheit der Episteme. Zur Kunst des aufmerksam Sehens* (to be published in October 2018) she investigated the complex dialectics between ethics, seeing and art. Currently she is writing her habilitation treatise “(Retr)Action”. Body, Secret and Resistance in Czechoslovakian Art, Literature and Philosophy from 1968 to 1989. Beside her focus on the relationship between art and philosophy, she has worked extensively on the history and concept of drawing, as well as on art historiographical and theoretical questions. Her list of publications includes a monograph on the visual and artistic vocabulary in Wittgenstein’s late philosophy, several articles on the epistemic dimension of drawing, the prehistory of the sublime as well as on Levinas and art.

**Barthes’ Tendencies: On Radical Indifference, Adiaphora, and Tone on Tone**

Aron Vinegar, Art History, IIFIKK, University of Oslo

An attentive reading of Roland Barthes’ three lecture courses and seminars held at the Collège de France between 1977 and his death in 1980, as well as other cognate works from around this time, show an obsessive interest in French verbs and nouns derived from the Latin stem “ten” such as tenir, tendant vers, ténacité, ténuité, exténuer, étendre, maintenir. These are the figures—the stances, postures, and bearings—that sustain the force of his late work and embody its ethos. These tenuous yet tenacious gestures are crucial for the way Barthes opens up a way of inhabiting nuance that is neither a hermeneutics, nor a phenomenology, or even a semiology, but rather an intractable and intransitive aesthetics of indifference. I will put these thoughts through their paces by focusing on a section in Barthes’ lecture course *The Neutral*,
where he engages with the grisaille outer panels from Hieronymous Bosch’s winged triptych, *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (c. 1490-1500).

**Bio:** Aron Vinegar is Professor of Art History in the Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas at the University of Oslo, Norway. His main areas of interest and publication include: modern architecture, design, and the built environment; the intersections of art history, visual studies, theory, and aesthetics; and philosophical approaches to art and architecture. These domains of inquiry are driven by two intersecting constellations of concern: habit and the ‘unthought’, and issues of suspended judgment and ontological indifference. Vinegar is the author of *I AM A MONUMENT: On Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008), *Heidegger and the Work of Art History* (Ashgate Press, 2014, with Amanda Boetzkes), *Relearning from Las Vegas* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, with Michael Golec), as well as articles and book chapters. He is now completing a book entitled *Inhabitations: On the Aesthetics of Habit*. At the University of Oslo, he is a member of the research group, *Temporal Experiments: Literary, Aesthetic and Social Modes of Thinking and Living Time*. 