Shapes of Knowledge

Form, Art, and Ideas in Early Modern Europe

October 8th, 2015
5:00pm: Cocktail Reception
6:00pm: Keynote Address by Erika Naginski, Professor of Architectural History, Graduate School of Design, Harvard University
Elysian
2806 Clearwater St. (90039)

October 9th, 2015
Conference
9:30 am - 4:30 pm
University of Southern California
Doheny Memorial Library
Room 240
Keynote Lecture
October 8, 2015
Elysian, 2806 Clearwater St., Los Angeles CA 90039

6:00-7:30 p.m
Erika Naginski, Harvard University

Conference
October 9, 2015
USC, Doheny Memorial Library, Room 240

9:30-9:45 a.m.
Welcome and Opening Remarks

THE PROVOCATIONS OF FORM
9:45-10:25 a.m.
Thomas Habinek, USC
“The Pictograms of Optatian Porphyry: A View from Late Antiquity”

10:25-11:05 a.m.
Jessica Rosenberg, University of Miami
“Martin Lister’s Moving Pictures: Form and Fluidity in the Historiae Conchyliorum”

11:05-11:25 a.m.
Discussion

11:25-11:35 a.m.
Break

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT
11:35 a.m.-12:15 p.m.
Melissa Lo, Huntington Library
“Twists of Realism: Cartesianism naer het leven in Wolferd Senguerd’s Philosophia naturalis (1680)”

12:15-12:55 p.m.
Iris Moon, Pratt Institute
“Chiromancy and the Science of Mourning in Aubert-Henri-Joseph Parent’s Limewood Relief of Louis XVI”
12:55-1:15 p.m.
Discussion

1:15-2:45 p.m.
Lunch

FORMAL MATTERS
2:45-3:25
Hector Reyes, USC
“Stoic Physics at l’Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture”

3:25-4:05
Natania Meeker, USC
“Présentez-vous sous mon image: Pleasure, Gender, and Materialism in Eighteenth-Century France”

4:05-4:30
Discussion and Closing Remarks

Co-organized by Melissa Lo, Dibner Assistant Curator, History of Science, Medicine & Technology at Huntington Library and Hector Reyes, Assistant Professor of Teaching, Department of Art History, University of Southern California.

This conference is generously sponsored by the Department of Art History at USC, with additional support from Office of the Dean of USC Dornsife and the Department of Classics.

- Please RSVP to shapesofknowledge@gmail.com by October 3rd for lunch. Please make sure to note any food restrictions.

- Abstracts and more information about this conference can be found at: https://web-app.usc.edu/web/ecal/event/detail/917833?calendar_id=128
Abstracts

Erika Naginski, Harvard University (with Eldra Walker)
On the Colonial Origins of Architecture: Building the “Maison rustique” in Cayenne, French Guiana

The “State of Nature,” which emerged as a central tenet in the social philosophies of the 17th and 18th centuries contemplating the pre-civilizational struggle for existence, was marked by conflicting views: against the “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short” life of natural man described in Hobbes’s Leviathan (1651) stood the “noble savage” evoked in Dryden’s Conquest of Granada (1672). How this intellectual legacy influenced those who enlisted, after 1750, naturalized discourses to explain the origins of architecture is hardly straightforward, for architects and connoisseurs alike tended to embrace the “soft” primitivism espoused by Shaftesbury, Rousseau, and 18th-century sentimentalism more generally. Indeed, the presumption of humanity’s innate benevolence helped to shape Enlightenment discourses on architecture’s origins in habitation.

We set another kind of proposal against canonical examples such as Laugier’s “rustic hut” (which discovered architecture’s first model in tree trunks and branches) or Chambers’s “primitive buildings” (which drew from the Vitruvian narrative of the creation of shelter): that is, the structures described in J.-A. Bruletout de Préfontaine’s La Maison rustique, à l’usage des habitans de la partie de la France équinoxiale, connue sous le nom de Cayenne (1763). The book details the establishment of plantations in the colony of French Guiana based on a slave economy, the use of local materials, and the labor of indigenous populations. The term “maison rustique” traditionally designated farm buildings and agricultural compounds (from Estienne and Liebaut’s L’agriculture et maison rustique (1586) to Liger’s Oeconomie générale de la campagne, ou nouvelle maison rustique (1700), for instance). Yet our example, which eerily rehearses natural man’s search for shelter and civilization, stages another genealogy of architectural origins—one that is bound to race, colonialism, and Enlightenment accounts of the civilizational process.

Thomas Habinek, USC
The Pictograms of Optatian Porphyry: A View from Late Antiquity

The pictographic poetry of Optatian Porphyry (early fourth century CE) raises basic epistemological and ontological questions concerning identity, boundedness, and causation of material entities. Created at a moment of physical, political, and religious transformation of the Roman world (foundation of Constantinople, creation of new dynasty, conversion of emperor and Council of Nicaea), Optatian’s artifacts crystallize and transmit an emergent cosmology not quite graspable by any single perceptual or communicative mode. As such, they are of interest for understanding the historical period of their production, while also providing an alternative perspective on key issues in Early Modern studies.
Jessica Rosenberg, University of Miami

Martin Lister’s Moving Pictures: Form and Fluidity in the *Historiae Conchyliorum*

Martin Lister revised his *Historiae Conchyliorum* over the course of decades, reordering, rearranging, and transforming the copperplates that comprised the massive natural historical compendium of shells. With no typescript, and very little text on the engravings themselves, the work is driven by the visual matter of the pages and the plates. As such, the combination of mobility and stability that characterizes the *Historiae* challenges our understanding of how natural knowledge circulated in early modern Europe. As engravings, these images exemplify some of the fixity that Elizabeth Eisenstein has ascribed to the agency of print. Yet, in Lister’s gathering of figured shells, the content of the engravings (both text and image), as well as their arrangement in particular bound copies, is remarkably fluid. Focusing on a single, heavily-annotated copy of the *Historiae*, this paper explores the form and matter of the work and of its circulation. Tracing the relationship between materiality and mobility across time (and across the different substrates of print, engraving, and manuscript) – as well as within the miscellaneity of the work itself – directs our attention to the provocations that a project like Lister’s can pose to our understanding of what a book is and the kinds of knowledge it makes possible.

Melissa Lo, Huntington Library

Twists of Realism: Cartesianism *naer het leven* in Wolferd Senguerd’s *Philosophia naturalis* (1680)

My subject is a most peculiar etching from *Philosophia naturalis*, a scholastic primer published by Leiden professor Wolferd Senguerd in 1680. Ostensibly a still life, the picture replaced the genre’s usual objects (vases of carnations and tulips, half-peeled lemons, etc.) with alien forms: the three types of celestial matter featured in Descartes’s still-contentious physics. Since its first appearance in 1637, charges of deception had plagued the philosophy’s reception in Holland. I argue that this illustration was an attempt to repackage one of the new physics’ most deceptive elements; it sought to reify Descartes’s imaginative machinations through the art of describing and its attendant empiricisms. But in so doing, the etching also offered an account of the pliability, circa 1680, of Dutch realism. The result was a paradoxical moment for the truths of imaging *naer het leven*, and the natural knowledge that such pictures could claim.

Iris Moon, Pratt Institute

Chiromancy and the Science of Mourning in Aubert-Henri-Joseph Parent’s Limewood Relief of Louis XVI

My talk concerns a commemorative limewood panel of Louis XVI carved by the French architect and sculptor Aubert-Henri-Joseph Parent (1753-1835), and what it might tell us about the epistemology of mourning. In other words, in what ways did the difficulty of knowing how to grieve the Bourbon monarch precipitate broader shifts in psychology, such as those described in
Laure Murat’s recent study of Revolutionary politics and the history of madness? Parent’s small carving dates to his period of self-exile in Switzerland in 1795 and features a low-relief profile portrait of the king on a medallion and a large lily stalk looming above. Also found in the crowded oval panel is a tomb with the inscription “mors immortalitas” and a sacrificial lamb perched upon a crown and two coats of arms. Beyond the strange shifts in scale, what is particularly unusual about this carved object is the way mourning figures twice, both in the visible relief by Parent and in the obscured poem hidden on the back. Written by Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741-1801), the philosopher and creator of physiognomy, the poem is dedicated Franziska von Württemberg and is a meditation on the tomb of the murdered king. Beyond tracing the circuitous movements between presence and absence, obverse and reverse, through which this double-sided object constitutes the work of mourning, I also consider how the panel/poem depends upon a linear economy that refigures chiromancy as a form of knowledge. Described by Michael Baxandall as the “reading of the lines of disposition and experience on any natural object by means rather similar to that of reading the lines on a hand,” chiromancy was an ancient method of divining the future. Yet in its unexpected and untimely appearance in this panel produced at the frontiers of the Early Modern and the Enlightenment, we can start to see how both the limewood carver’s material-specific technique of cutting towards hidden forms and Lavater’s method of revealing inner character from outer expression inadvertently shaped a modern science of mourning.

Hector Reyes, USC
Stoic Physics at l’Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture

The branch of Stoic philosophy called “physics” was devoted to studying the relationship between substance, visual phenomena, and causality. Stoic physics had a robust, if largely unrecognized afterlife, especially in the field traditionally called “aesthetics.” This paper examines how Stoic physics underpinned orthodox art theory and practice at the French Academy of Painting and Sculpture in the 1660’s and 1670’s. In the first part of my paper, I analyze Charles Le Brun’s Academic lecture on Poussin’s Ecstasy of Saint Paul (1670) in relationship to Stoic physics. In the second part of my paper, I discuss Charles de la Fosse’s Assumption of the Virgin (1670’s) and Philippe de Champaigne’s interpretation of Titian’s Entombment (1667). I argue that the debates about “line” and “color” that supposedly divided the early Academy might be thought of as more unified and more coherent when viewed through the lens of Stoic physical thought. Painters who adopted the physical worldview of the Stoics did not translate ideas into form; they understood ideas as subsisting within form. Although limited in chronological and cultural scope, these three case studies illustrate form’s capacity to generate and to carry knowledge in the early modern period.
The 1751 edition of John Toland’s *Pantheisticon* reads: “From that Motion and Intellect that constitute the Force and Harmony of the Infinite Whole, innumerable Species of Things arise, every Individual of which is both a Matter and Form to itself, Form being nothing else than a Disposition of Parts in each Body” (vol. IV, p. 16). If form is “nothing else than a Disposition of Parts,” what form does pleasure take? This question preoccupies a wide range of thinkers in eighteenth-century France, just as it preoccupies contemporary critics of the period. The answer is often the body of a woman, or, at least, a body disposed as a woman’s is or might be. The gendered image is one important site where pleasure as a disposition of parts—or form—comes to matter.

In this talk, I will examine the way in which three eighteenth-century women writers—Emilie du Châtelet (1706-1749), Françoise de Graffigny (1695-1758) and Madeleine de Puisieux (1720-1798)—apostrophize pleasure in its images as part of a response to neo-Epicurean and “new materialist” theories of pleasure-as-form. These writers, attentive to the problem of gender, engage with materialism as a philosophy in which the image disposes of or animates the body in particular ways at particular times. They develop a theory of gender as image in which art—including literature, “spectacle,” and theater—plays a key role in the transmission of particular dispositions of the body, a feminine materialism that is often disavowed or denigrated, post-Enlightenment.