

No Alien

Curtin 939

Panel Chair: Peter Paik

Housten Donham (University of Arizona)

“The Mindless Void: The Antisociality of H. P. Lovecraft”

Lovecraft’s particularly grotesque conservative and reactionary politics should be understood in the context of his life-as-a-loser—which, if nothing else, is at least a somewhat noble (however monstrous) social position in modernity. Lovecraft’s failure should be seen in the light of his turn away from the modern world—an antisocial gesture in that it is not simply *against* the socius, but *away* from it. It represents a stepping outside. “Looking away,” as Rei Terada has explained, can demonstrate the profound limitations of our world as it is. “The world as given leaves a lot to be desired, and we can neither be reconciled to it nor simply accept our lack of reconciliation” (Terada 40). In Lovecraft’s sonnet sequence *Fungi from Yuggoth*, it becomes evident that the author’s “anti-modernity” is both a distinctly modern attitude and a reflection of the author’s interest in “deep time,” a reorganization of temporality that suggests the relative insignificance of both cultural periodization and humanity itself. Lovecraft’s interest in a primordial time before time, the nonhuman age of the “Old Ones,” enacts a Nietzschean eternal return, a daemonic force that consistently carries the speaker and reader back to an origin that is itself a nihilistic endpoint. The eternal return seems reflective of a uniquely Lovecraftian death drive, a repetition compulsion that desires nothing more than the inanimation of life. Lovecraft’s antisociality and his anti-modern aesthetics are not simply reactive, but forge a radical rupture that helps to define civilization as inherently and fatalistically barbaric.

Lovecraft, Howard Philips. *Fungi from Yuggoth. The Ancient Track: The Complete Poetical Works of H.P. Lovecraft*. Ed. Joshi, S.T. Hippocampus Press, 2013. Print.

Terada, Rei. *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction, Kant to Adorno*. Harvard University, 2009. Print.

Anna Mirzayan (Western University)

“Curating the Clone: Unreadable Aesthetics in Sci-Fi Horror”

Alexander Galloway, in his book on Laruelle, describes non-philosophy as “a pure black-or alternately a pure bright-produces a crypto- or non-standard ontology in which nothing is philosophically revealed to anything else. Laruelle labels this a ‘uchromia;’ a non-color or color utopia.” This paper seeks to explore the method by which non-philosophy, through uchromia, opens up the non-space as an ethical zone for contemporary art, with the artist as curator of an aesthetics apart from either affect or concept. Uchromia’s space of rejection is transformed into a void of curation, rather than a locus of creation bound by heteronormative logics of space and time. This distinction will be highlighted through a discussion of the 2015 sci-fi film *Splice* and its main character, the human-animal hybrid DREN. Because DREN is an experiment literally produced in a uterine black-box, her parents become artist-curators, short-circuiting the cycle by which difference is produced through repetition. This opens the possibility for DREN, an experiment produced in a (non)space that is neither philosophical nor aesthetic, to enact a new type of ethical relationship to humanity in the form of xenogenetic instrumentality. Finally, this paper will look at dense, technologically produced works of feminist art like those of Janet Zweig and Katherine Behar, in order to discuss how these are produced through an experimental stance within the non-space which allows the artist to revive art as the construction of new worlds (utopias) with new insurrectionary potential.

A.P. Pettinelli (University of Chicago)

“Towards an Alien Camera: Cephalopodic Aesthetics & the (Non)Human in Parreno’s *Alien Seasons*”

In 2002 French artist Philippe Parreno and virtual theorist Jaron Lanier collaborated on *Alien Seasons* at the Museum of Modern Art of the City of Paris – a project reimagining the human image through the optic of the alien. Lanier offers his problematic via a terrestrial observation: organisms that inhabit an ecology in which they routinely experience (visually) the same objects are likely to evolve with two eyes while primitive organisms of lower-level thought require a greater multitude of raw data to make sense of their world and so require more. Lanier likens this “dumb” thought of the latter creature to our digital age information banks that collect and synthesize millions of satellite and surveillance images to generate algorithms capable of rendering actual landscapes virtual with near absolute accuracy. Through such observations, Lanier and Parreno consider the possibilities of an alien camera – an “all-eyed” tentacled being capable of smelling and tasting the human lived environment. A blueprint for this (post)vision-machine is the giant cuttlefish (*Sepia apama*) of the South Pacific, a creature containing an “image generating” lobe that projects camouflaging images on the surface of its body through the folds of its papillae. The cuttlefish is the animate alien body – an imaging system of the (post)human. What might this non-human vision offer us as an image superseding the human, beyond its animal becomings, towards the becoming-alien?