A Farewell to Critique? (Copenhagen, 25-27 Oct 2018)

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Session: A Farewell to Critique? Reconsidering Critique as Art Historical Method

Session convenors:

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Since the advent of so-called New Art History, critique has been an omnipresent as well as welcomed part of the discipline. Critical perspectives on traditions and methods proved previous discourses of objectivity and neutrality to be inherently ideological. This new, critical art history enabled methodological approaches that questioned taken-for-granted assumptions of the discipline. Further, it brought attention to underlying social and structural aspects of art production and opened up new, exciting avenues of knowledge. In hindsight, thinking critically has resulted in some of the most ground-breaking research over the last few decades.

But when did thinking critically become the only way of thinking? Within the humanities, critique has turned into a default-mode, near synonymous with what is regarded as good research. This situation has of late come under scrutiny, most notably by Bruno Latour and Rita Felski. While Latour has argued that critique simply has “run out of steam” (Latour 2004), Felski stresses the importance of regarding critique as one method amongst others. In The Limits of Critique (2015) Felski argues that critique—like all methods—comes with its own tropes, narratives and blind spots. What, exactly, are we doing while engaging in critique? What is the cost of habitually “reading against the grain”? Of continually deconstructing, denaturalizing and demystifying the world as we know it? What could we do otherwise? Felski does not offer a ready-to-use methodological alternative to critique—her concern is to examine what we do when we engage in critique and to challenge the view that it is the only game in town.

The aim of this session is to invite a discussion on critique in art history. We invite paper proposals that may include, but are not limited to, replies to the following questions:

- What are the challenges and/or benefits of critique and post-critique?

- What, specifically, would post critical methods look like within Art History?

- What are the geographical and cultural variations when it comes to the historiography as well as present state of critique?

- In addition to research practices, the academic profession involves teaching, participating in seminars and conferences, writing proposals and supervising students and junior researchers; can the discussion of post-critique be useful in developing these practices in some ways?

Please submit your proposal via a form on the conference website, http://nordik2018.org/, where you will need to fill in personal information, an abstract no more than 1800 characters, a brief c.v. of no more than 360 characters, and full contact information by March 23 2018, the latest.

Reference:
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