

A Symposium with Hubert Damisch (Amsterdam, 28-29 May 09)

Eric de Bruyn

Call for Papers

Dialogues with Others: A Symposium with Hubert Damisch
University of Amsterdam, 28-29 May 2009

Scholars are invited to present papers in which they reflect upon Hubert Damisch's ideas in relation to their own research. The contributions will be followed by a panel discussion enabling Hubert Damisch to respond to these interpretations of his thought.

Hubert Damisch (former director of studies, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris) is one of the foremost contemporary art historians and theorists. The author of numerous essays and books that range across periods from the Renaissance to the present, his writing includes studies on painting, photography, film, literature and architecture. In a series of groundbreaking works such as *Théorie du /nuage/*: Pour une histoire de la peinture (1972), *Ruptures/cultures* (1976), *Fenêtre jaune cadmium, ou les dessous de la peinture* (1984), *L'Origine de la perspective* (1987), *Le Jugement de Paris* (1992), *Skyline: La ville Narcisse* (1996), *Un Souvenir d'enfance par Piero della Francesca* (1997), *La Dénivelée: A l'épreuve de la photographie* (2001), *La Peinture en écharpe: Delacroix, la photographie* (2001), and most recently *Ciné Fil* (2008), Damisch works "at the seams between different forms and substances of expression", while drawing upon the multiple field of aesthetics, philosophy, mathematics, semiotics and psychoanalysis. The aim of this conference is to bring together contributions from scholars of various disciplinary backgrounds that develop a dialogue with different aspects of Damisch's work and thought.

The guiding principle of Damisch's work is the conception of the work of art as a 'theoretical model'; that is, the capacity of art to invent paradigmatic structures, such as perspective, which operate on a both technical and perceptual level. To conceive of the work of art as a theoretical object, as Damisch proposes we do, is not to claim that the work of art simply illustrates a theory; after all, perspective appeared well in advance of its formalization by science. Rather, the careful expose of such theoretical models must lead to a critical revision of

the categories and narratives that structure the history of art. Damisch's notion of 'thickness' [épaisseur], for instance, performs this critical work within the modernist field of aesthetics. Damisch's excavation of the 'undersides' of painting, which was initiated by a series of key essays on, among others, Pollock, Dubuffet, and Mondrian that are assembled in *Fenêtre jaune cadmium*, has influenced more recent discussions of the informe as a counter-modernist strategy.

Without doubt Damisch's writing has a profound impact on the manner in which we may conceive of interdisciplinary research. Offering an alternative to the approach of cultural studies or visual studies, Damisch has argued that the 'paradigm' or 'theoretical object' of art, while remaining attentive to the material specificity of artistic practice, necessarily transverse various cultural domains. And, again and again, Damisch's work returns to what is perhaps its core question: "is there a mode of philosophizing that would require working as close to art as possible, working along with it and together with its works?"

The conference aims to explore some of the challenges that Damisch has posed to the writing of (art) history. Contributors may concentrate on his dialogue with diverse fields of knowledge (psychoanalysis, phenomenology, structuralism) and media (art, film, photography, architecture) in order to assess the contribution of Damisch to an interdisciplinary study and criticism of cultural history. We are particularly interested in contributions that will address his more recent interventions in the fields of architecture (*Skyline*), photography (*La Dénivelée*, *La Peinture en écharpe*), and cinema (*Ciné Fil*).

Please send your proposal (no more than 300 words) for a 20-minute paper and a short biography to Sophie Berrebi (berrebi@uva.nl) or Eric de Bruyn (E.C.H.de.Bruyn@rug.nl). Please include 'Damisch' in the subject-heading of your email.

Deadline: 16 March 2009

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