

THE PARASITIC

A One-Day Graduate Conference at McGill University - April 26, 2012 - Montréal, QC

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Department of Art History and Communication Studies at McGill University is pleased to announce this year's graduate conference, "The Parasitic". The conference will be held at the Department of Art History and Communication Studies at McGill University on Thursday, April 26, 2012. Graduate students at the M.A. or Ph.D. level from all disciplines are invited to submit abstracts for **presentations of twenty minutes**. Participation in the conference provides an opportunity to present scholarly research, meet graduate students from a variety of different fields, and benefit from engaged discussions as well as valuable responses to papers.

This year's symposium will explore the parasitic as object of cultural fascination, metaphor, and methodology in both contemporary and historical contexts. We seek to expand common conceptions of the parasite both to acknowledge its negative connotations and to explore its positive, productive, or innovative potential. As an organism, the parasite itself has enjoyed an illustrious history as the subject of cinema and visual culture, comics and literature, science and medicine. In addition to these histories, the Parasitic *as concept* may prove useful for opening new discussion across the humanities, interrupting and rerouting established channels of critical thought.

The word "parasite" inspires fear of contagion, infestation, and disease. Parasitic metaphors pervade discourse and discussion relating to medicine, agriculture, media, politics, and the social sphere, and find expression in the arts, popular culture, and literature. Typically perceived as the agent of incursion or invasion, dependent upon a healthy body or functional system, the parasite establishes a dichotomous relationship with its support: the host feeds the carrier. But as Michel Serres characterizes it in his 1982 book, *Le Parasite* (The Parasite), the parasite is a quintessentially relational figure. Host and carrier are drawn into a relationship of consumption, complicity, and coercion that upsets the balance of power and underscores the ontological instability of their characterization. Despite its negative connotations, then, how might the parasite be theorized as a positive or productive process, as a potential catalyst for non-reversible systemic change? Rather than viewing the host as innocent victim of the carrier's colonization, could the parasitic be conceived as a subversive strategy or mobilizing manoeuvre for the overturning of problematic power structures? As a tactic, can the parasitic offer a means to share space or combine forces between two typically opposed individuals, ideas, or institutions? In the history of art, for example, the accepted practice of appropriation by unknown or under-valued artists has often contributed to their advancement by instigating a complex relay between host and carrier, encouraging a re-interpretation of their relationship.

We propose that engaging the parasitic can re-animate discourse concerning the problematics of power, from Hegel's master/slave dialectic, to feminism and queer studies' opposition to patriarchy, to the project of decolonization, and beyond. It can also address the increasing interdisciplinarity of academia and contribute to the advancement of institutional critique. The parasitic is politically employed when individuals infiltrate or align themselves with a party in order to advance their own concerns. Could political parasitism result in revolution? The political and social spheres are shifting and widening with the introduction of new communications media that grant access to previously unheard individuals and individual concerns. In what ways could such actions be perceived as parasitic?

As an interdisciplinary conference, we invite submissions from various fields that engage or explore the parasitic in the visual arts and popular culture, media and communications, local and global relations, and institutional and cultural critique. Suggested paper topics include but are not limited to:

- Parasitism as a subversive strategy in art practice, media, communications, etc.
- The potential and limitations of the parasitic as metaphor or methodology
- Medical histories of parasites, epidemics, and disease; parasitism within the visual culture of medicine
- Engagements with parasites in BioArt and other intersections between art, science, technology, and the body
- Parasitism as a modality of artistic practice, performance, and institutional critique
- Appropriation as artistic practice (e.g. the historical avant-garde, postmodern or conceptual art practice)
- Appropriation and theft in media and communications (pirate radio stations, the “stealing” of bandwidth and or music files, etc.)
- Recent and historical revolutions and political protest (“Arab Spring,” Occupy Wall Street, Wikileaks, etc.)
- Political parasitism during wartime (such as double agents, guerrilla warfare, resistance movements, etc.); parasites as agents of bioterrorism
- The parasitic in politics and other power dynamics, such as colonization, exploitation, and assimilation; as well as in globalization, economics, and international relations
- The parasite in horror and suspense films and literature (zombies, outbreaks, invasion, contamination, and possession)
- The parasitic as a way of rethinking issues of relationality and relational contexts
- The potential parasitism between and across disciplines (e.g. art and science or the “parasitic” interdisciplinarity of visual and performance studies)

Papers in both English and French are welcome.

Please email abstracts for submission of **no more than 300 words**, accompanied by a **short biography or CV**, to ahcsconference@gmail.com by **January 30, 2012**. Successful participants will be notified by **February 27, 2012**.

Please send any other inquiries to: ahcsconference@gmail.com

For more information about the conference please refer to our website:
www.ahcsgradconference.com

Keynote Speaker: TBA

AHCS Conference Organizing Committee:

Reilley Bishop-Stall (Art History)
Sylvie Boisjoli (Art History)
Natalie Bussey (Art History)
Lotfi Gouigah (Communication Studies)
Sara Kowalski (Art History)