

## **AAH 2007 Conference Preview**

### **Papers by Courtauld Institute postgraduates**

**Research Forum South Room, Courtauld Institute of Art**

3-6pm, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2007

**ABSTRACTS**

#### ***Gender and Childhood in the Soviet East: Painting the Stereotype*** **Aliya Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen**

From model pioneer to future cotton farmer the images of childhood during the Soviet era reappeared with logical consistency. A Russian girl in a red scarf reads the new decree of the Party; an Asian girl in red scarf walks across the fields towards her utopian future. In recent examinations of the Soviet art including large exhibition projects, issues as wide-ranging as labour, womanhood, and personality cult were examined in depth. However both the attitudes to the East and to childhood, even though extremely evident remain unchallenged. Not surprisingly then, the majority of images involving children, especially young girls appear in works that are supposed to represent the realities in the Central Asian republics. One such work even received the Stalin prize. With the arrival of Socialist Realism in Soviet Union, art gained an immediate political role; what place, then, was reserved for the image of youth within this tightly-surveyed structure? In relation to the Soviet East, images of children became a prime medium of expression – this was neither a speculation on the condition of childhood in the area at the time, nor was it an expression of sentimentality. Socialist Realist paintings of children can be viewed both as anachronistic art works, or as charged, albeit anachronistically unreliable, documents of the contested era.

#### ***'Boys, however, are to be disciplined in everything by everyone'. The evidence of images of children's education in the twelfth century*** **Laura Cleaver**

Philippe Ariès' contention that the Middle Ages had no conception of childhood was based in part on what he perceived to be a lack of images of children. As historians have subsequently explored, however, comments such as that of St Benedict, cited above, reveal that childhood was a contemporary concept, and was defined in stages linked to physical and intellectual development. This is particularly evident in images of education (material overlooked by Ariès). In images in metalwork, sculpture, manuscripts and glass from the long twelfth century the activities and behaviour of both children and teachers can be seen to vary depending on the pupils' maturity. The discipline of the rod, for example, is generally only associated with the youngest children, who are usually students of grammar. Moreover, many boys appear as stereotypes of good or bad behaviour, serving as exemplars and echoing medieval debates about nature and nurture in children's development. Application of corporal punishment as discipline is presented as an aid to all children's moral and intellectual progress, yet the treatment of beatings in art emphasises different elements to textual accounts. In particular, children are commonly shown receiving punishment partially or fully naked. Variations in this iconography suggest that such nakedness was intended to humiliate, particularly in the rare cases when it is applied to older children, though it was not embarrassing to the medieval audience. Images of such beatings were also related to the visual tradition of semi-clad monks receiving discipline and to scenes of martyrdom.

***More than a schoolgirl crush: Amy Adler and the adolescent fan***  
**Catherine Grant**

A schoolgirl crush: a mixture of desire, identification and aggression, played out in fantasy. A combination of narcissistic, heterosexual and homosexual desire, the intense identification with the object of desire undoes the paradigms of 'mature' heterosexuality. In the work of American artist Amy Adler, this adolescent position is appropriated and reworked in her hybrid photographed drawings. Depicting a range of adolescent and child characters, including the artist as a young woman, Adler's portraits explore the ways in which identity is filtered through celebrity culture, with her own images becoming part of a seductive, androgynous cast that include a young River Phoenix and a series of unnamed, nubile female stars taken from magazines, billboards and CD covers.

In this work Adler enacts the adolescent fan copying a photograph of his or her idol as perfectly as possible, an act of ownership that inscribes the fan's desire into the image. However, as Adler re-enacts this process, she maintains a distance, the adult performing the adolescent who attempts to possess or perhaps become the object of desire through the act of drawing. This paper explores the potential of the adolescent position for thinking through modes of desiring and identification that are often dismissed as 'immature' or 'feminine', undermining the stability of binary definitions of both sexuality and gender. In thinking through the aggression and seduction presented in Adler's work, the adolescent fan provides a structure for thinking about female desire that allows it to be more than a schoolgirl crush.

***The Parting Cheer: drawing out emotions in images of Victorian emigration***  
**Pat Hardy**

This paper will examine the artistic response to the extensive emigration from Britain which took place in the mid-Victorian period, focusing specifically on a major genre scene painted by Henry Nelson O'Neil, *The Parting Cheer*, 1861. This painting portrays an emigrant ship departing for an overseas colony in a panoramic scene containing numerous figures, the majority of which convey grief and despair at the departure.

The representation of trauma in *The Parting Cheer* (and its effect on the formulation of the visual memory of emigration) is assessed in this paper by drawing upon contemporary responses to the painting and by reference to nineteenth-century debates relating to emigration to the colonies at that time, including emigrants' own accounts of their feelings about the experience of emigration. Such responses are compared not only to paintings on emigration produced in the 1860s but also to another work by O'Neil called *Eastward Ho! August 1857*, 1858, on the departure of soldiers to the Indian Mutiny.

By positioning *The Parting Cheer* within an interpretative framework relating to the presentation of identities of gender, class and ethnicity in scenes of emigration, it appears that its display of emotional intensity diverged from the approach of other mid-century narratives of emigration. Many paintings representing emigration scenes appeared to subordinate a display of naturalistic scenes of emotion to a controlled response to the experience. This subordination has its roots, I argue, in an ideology which favoured colonial emigration and opens out wider cultural meanings than traditional narratives of mid-Victorian scenes of emigration have presented.

***The Student Movement of May 1968: Activist Photography, Self-Reflection and Antinomies***  
**Antigoni Memou**

This paper discusses the photographic representation of the French movement in the students' newspapers that were published and disseminated during the events of May 1968. The discussion draws upon unpublished material extracted from *The Bibliothèque d' Histoire Sociale Du XXe Siecle* (Université Paris I- Pantheon Sorbonne), and more specifically, the newspapers *Avant Garde Jeunesse*, *Lutte Socialiste*, *Servir Le Peuple* and *Barricades*. The paper argues that the imagery that dominated these publications focused on young students' protests, occupations of the universities, as well as their conflicts with the police. This imagery reflected the students' critique of the modern commodity culture, the traditional organizational forms of the labor movement, the bureaucratic and hierarchic university structures, and the authoritarian nature of the State. This dominant imagery revealed the contradictions, failings and antinomies of the movement as well. These photographs reproduced stereotypical ideas about revolutionary thought and practice, such as the perception of the revolution being just an event, a moment of conflict to seize the power and not a process or continuous struggle. Furthermore, the paper stresses that the absence of imagery that portrays workers striking and occupying factories – which were available in the trade union publications – reveals the failure of the student movement to connect with the workers' movement. Thus, the use of these photographs represented the contradictory character of the movement, which was a moment of both insubordination and subordination to the reified relations of capital.

***Beyond Resolution: Thomas Ruff's Pixelated 'Jpeg' Photographs of 9/11***  
**Rachel Wells**

Abstract not available online.

***Coytel's Libertine Children: challenging ways of looking in eighteenth-century France***  
**Hannah Williams**

A strange picture of partially naked children masquerading in contemporary adult fashions, Charles-Antoine Coytel's painting of *Children Playing at the Toilette* (1728) poses a challenge to the art historian. Not only does it present a contested image of the child as a sexually cognisant agent, requiring the modern viewer to take into account the historical specificity of the concept of childhood, this unconventional painting also hampers the task of analysis in other ways. With the absence of any similar painted representations, the work does not fit neatly within the visual traditions of early eighteenth-century France, and a lack of documentary evidence relating to its commission further frustrates the investigation. How then can we interpret the content of such a unique image and understand the meanings it may have conveyed for its eighteenth-century viewers?

In this paper, I suggest an interdisciplinary approach to analysing this painting that explores the work's subject matter and aesthetic language in relation to the discourse of *libertinage*, an aristocratic philosophy usually associated with literary studies. This paper offers a framework for understanding the shifting relationship between pleasure and moral critique that characterises this unusual work. While emphasising the value of an art historical approach that engages with both interdisciplinary material and methods of analysis, I am primarily concerned with understanding the distinct contribution to cultural discourse that is made by the visual – explored here through an attention to the processes of viewing, the work's shifting audiences and the concomitant semantic mobility of the image.

