

Milieus of Minutiae

Contextualizing the Small in Science, Philosophy, and Literature

23 -24 May 2019

Organized by Elizabeth Brogden, Christiane Frey, Ulla Haselstein

In English

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were replete with large-scale projects and interests: the rise of the most colossal modern literary form, the novel; the craze for panorama; the pursuit of imperial ambitions by both European and American powers. At the same time, however, interest in minutiae proliferated on both sides of the Atlantic, as histories of the microscope and the micrological have revealed. The molecular and infinitesimal gained new importance in philosophy, mathematics, the natural sciences, medicine, and literature, as new technologies gradually rendered the 'invisible world' available to human observation. In tandem with this development, the notion of *milieu* became increasingly prevalent, as instantiated most prominently by the concept of the ecological niche in evolutionary biology. The question of how organisms interact with their milieus emerged as a new area of inquiry across a range of fields; the minuscule beings and objects that had hitherto attracted interest mainly because of their newly discovered individuality were now scrutinized with growing intensity in their environmental context.

This conference brings together scholarly work that addresses these two cultural-epistemological developments: first, the role of minutiae, as manifested in all kinds of diminutive units or categories (for instance: the *animalcula*, the infinitesimal, the minor, the particular, the seemingly irrelevant, the typographic detail, the cellular, the clue); and, secondly, the interaction between these tiny phenomena and their surroundings. *Milieus of Minutiae* explores the ways in which what is subvisible or easily overlooked is situated in philosophy, cultural production, and scientific experimentation from early modernity through the twentieth century, with a view toward the contemporary moment. Medieval thought granted discrete being to that which is otherwise considered negligible and only relational—a status later held by both the minor and the milieu—and this conference constellates approaches that restore ontological viability to both of these categories between premodern and contemporary thought. At the same time, it explores the historical dimensions of a micrology of knowledge and aesthetics, reflecting on the objectivity, supra-metonymy, and epistemological value of these units across a wide range of cultural, intellectual, environmental, social, and material milieus.

With Elizabeth Brogden, Natalia Cecire, Tita Chico, Anne Eusterschulte, Christiane Frey, Amelia Groom, Daniel Liu, Roger Maioli, Marlon Miguel, Nikolai Preuschoff, Malte Fabian Rauch, Pauline Selbig, John H. Smith, Elisa Tamarkin, Michelle Ty, Elena Vogman, and Cynthia Wall

Keynotes by Marianne Schuller and Hans-Jörg Rheinberger

Programme

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Thursday, 23 May 2019

Morning Coffee

10:00-10:30 Introduction

Elizabeth Brogden, Christiane Frey, Ulla Haselstein

10:30-12:45 Looking Closely

Chair: Ulla Haselstein

Tita Chico. Thinking Small: Or, a Literary History of Scrutiny

Elizabeth Brogden. Clew-less Fiction: Narrative Detail Beyond Realism

Elisa Tamarkin. Regarding Irrelevance

Lunch Break

14:00-16:15 Diminutive Aesthetics

Chair: Mareike Schildmann

Pauline Selbig. Minor Milieus: Benjamin's Mode of Writing

Nikolai Preuschoff. The Minute in Robert Walser's Novel *The Tanners*

Marlon Miguel & Elena Vogman. *Le Moindre Geste*: Cinema and Milieu after Fernand Deligny

Coffee

16:45-18:15 Trivia{1} Matter{s}

Chair: Christiane Frey

Cynthia Wall. 'of a PARENTHESIS'

Roger Maioli. The Rise of the Novel and the Knowledge of Particulars

Refreshments

19:00 Keynote

Marianne Schuller. Nanoästhetik: Zur imaginativen Kraft des Kleinen / Nanoaesthetics: On the Imaginative Power of the Small

Friday, 24 May 2019

Morning Coffee

10:00-12:15 Mere Milieus

Chair: Claudia Peppel

Amelia Groom. Partially Submerged Ruins

Malte Fabian Rauch. Counter Cartography: Agamben – Debord – On Kawara

Michelle Ty. *Umwelt* and the Color Line

Lunch Break

13:45-16:00 Minimal Relations

Chair: Arnd Wedemeyer

John H. Smith. The Calculus of the Psycho-Physical Difference

Anne Eusterschulte. Interactions between Metaphysical, Physical and Literary Minutiae:

From Giordano Bruno to James Joyce

Christiane Frey. Encapsulated Minima: Duns Scotus, Leibniz, Ruyer

Coffee

16:30-18:00 Micro-Worlds Magnified

Chair: Elizabeth Brogden

Natalia Cecire. Shelled Life: Sexuality and Subjectivity at the Level of the Cell

Daniel Liu. Positivism vs. Molecular Imagination after the Abbe Diffraction Limit, 1874–1939

Refreshments

19:00 Keynote

Hans-Jörg Rheinberger. Experimental Environments: ‘Micrologies of Knowledge’

An ICI Berlin Event in cooperation with the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and the Freie Universität Berlin, generously supported by the Thyssen Foundation