

CATALOG OF SITUATIONS

A Seminar on aesthetics of reception and the topography of aesthetic encounters

Theme

What is an aesthetic experience? What words can we use to describe what happens to us in an aesthetic experience? Based on the assumption that artworks have to be experienced and that experiences are bound to situations, we have to understand the aesthetic experience as a live moment, or in other words: the encounter in space and time between an art work and a beholder, a performance. While we position ourselves towards the artwork, we also position ourselves within an aesthetic space, created by this encounter. Since this encounter can take place in various environments – from museum to living room, from arena to rehearsal space – and can even involve reproductions of art works instead of the actual object, the created space can be manifold. We want to investigate this space and develop strategies to display and discuss the net of relations between artwork, beholder and surrounding.

Background

Since 2008 Jan-Philipp Possmann and David Weber-Krebs have been engaged as artists and theoreticians in a research project on aesthetics of reception, entitled CATALOG OF SITUATIONS. We have been investigating and creating different situations of encounters with artefacts from art history and have been developing strategies to communicate our aesthetic encounters in the format of lecture performances or installations. Through these presentations we aim to not only communicate experiences but to create new deep spaces of encounter and reflexivity.

Approach

In this seminar we want to combine the theoretical and the practical element of artistic research as we have been pursuing them in CATALOG OF SITUATIONS. We propose to engage the students in a critical analysis of aesthetic theory and art history writing as well as in a creative process of developing a language and a formal toolbox for communicating aesthetic experiences as situations. The seminar therefore requires the participants to engage in intense analysis as well as in a creative process of producing new forms.

For this we propose three modules:

1) framework. We want to start by reading some key texts on aesthetics of perception and some examples of personal accounts of aesthetic encounters. The first group of texts will establish the theoretical framework of the seminar and the terminology (such as space, encounter, interaction, relation, experience). The second group of texts and documents will serve as examples of different approaches to understanding and communicating one's own aesthetic experience and the conditions thereof. This will also help to illustrate the difficulties and theoretical implications of such a social approach to aesthetics.

2) analysis. In a second step we propose a close reading of a number of cultural artefacts – visual arts, performance art, film, literature, pop culture and commercial images – that create deep spaces of encounter with the beholders. We will cover a wide range of historical art genres – from religious art from the pre-enlightenment period to contemporary works – as well as art forms. These different cultural fields will be approached from a perspective of theater practice and performance theory, rather than from a pictorial or literary angle. The analysis will include personal experiences as made by the students. This will include an analysis of the social space of the encounter as well as of the poetics of the work. In this second module we plan to ask the students to visit some art exhibitions, theater shows or film screenings outside the seminar. The students will be asked to document, share and discuss their personal experiences and emotions in

connection to these aesthetic encounters.

3) catalog. Thirdly we will present an approach to communicating and discussing aesthetic encounters, mainly in the form of lecture performances. We will discuss this approach and develop concrete formats for a number of experiences, resulting in several short lecture performances or installations. These will form a small catalog of encounters, reflecting the work in this seminar. The catalog will be added on the web platform of CATALOG OF SITUATIONS.

Addressees and Duration

The seminar is best suited for a relatively small group of participants – maximum 15 people – since the close reading and the development of individual presentations will be very difficult to realise in a larger group. The participants can be either artists or theoreticians. They must be undergraduate students or have some working experience in the arts and theatre fields. A personal history of encounters with and an interest in art and art history is required.

The seminar can be realised either in two or three longer blocks or on a regular, monthly or bi-weekly cycle. Depending on the academic structure, we are able to shorten or enlarge the material and time needed. The two first blocks would take the form of analysis and discussions and the third block would be more directed to praxis.

Equipment

We would need a seminar space equipped with a video beamer. For the third module it would be best to have three or four spaces available and some technical support – such as minimal light and audio and video technique.

Literature

Basic texts – to be read (in excerpts) and discussed with the seminar:

- Umberto Eco: *Opera Aperta* (The open work, 1962)
Hartmut Böhme: *Atmosphären. Essays zur neuen Ästhetik*
(Atmospheres, Essays on the new aesthetics, 1995)
Georges Didi-Hubermann: *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde.* (1992)
Brian O'Doherty: *Inside the White Cube* (1986)
John Dewey: *Art as Experience* (1934)
Walter Benjamin: *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*
(The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, 1936)

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