

International Conference (CRC 1391 'Different Aesthetics')

Negotiating the Aesthetic. Norms and Practices in the Pre-modern Period

Tübingen, 11-13 November 2021

The Tübingen-based Collaborative Research Centre (CRC) 1391 'Different Aesthetics' examines aesthetic phenomena from the pre-modern period. The premise we hereby draw on is not an emphatic conception of art in the sense of aesthetic autonomy; rather, we assume that pre-modern artefacts are to be placed within a dynamic field of tension between autological and heterological dimension. By autological dimension, we mean the inner logic of artistic processes and techniques inherent in the artefacts, their often implicit knowledge of forms or artistic traditions. Conversely, the heterological dimension focusses on the artefacts' functional embeddedness within the pragmatic and historical logic of everyday life and the logic of discourses or within social practices. By analysing the dynamic processes of negotiation between the two dimensions, we aim to find coordinates of a pre-modern aesthetic self-conception. As coordinates which were especially influential over a longer period of time, the cross-sectional topics of the Collaborative Research Centre have identified different key aspects – usually arranged in conceptual pairs – from which they hope to gain particular insight. The conference is meant to continue and deepen this interdisciplinary dialogue of the cross-sectional topic 'Norm and Diversity' within a deliberately broad field of disciplines ranging from e.g. literary studies, linguistics, art, history, sociology, musicology, theology and philosophy to the field of *Digital Humanities*.

As guiding approach for the conference discussions, we have decided that norms should be analysed not only regarding the inner logic of artistic processes and techniques, but that their dynamic interplay with the pragmatic and historical logic of everyday life, with the social function of acts and artefacts should also be taken into account. Therefore, the central point of discussion is not so much norm and deviation only in relation to artefacts, a phenomenon which has been thoroughly researched. Rather, we aim to shed light on the dynamic situation of aesthetic negotiations and negotiations on the aesthetic taking place at the same time. Although formulations of norms aim at universal applicability, firstly there is a plurality of norms which confront each other, and secondly, the norms' claim to validity is reflected upon by a manifold practice and is thus repeatedly put up for discussion. In this way, the conference would like to answer to the narrative that pre-modern artefacts are grounded in normative conceptions, which is still highly influential in research but does not take sufficient notice of the counterpart of diversity.

Our preliminary considerations in advance of the conference have amounted to four lines of inquiry or observation which may provide some orientation for submitting conference proposals:

1) Implicit and explicit norms

The central issue in this first cluster is the question of whether the **field of tension** between autological and heterological dimension **can produce norms** and if so **in what way**. The questions in which domains of the pre-modern age there are norms which are actually spelt out, how explicit they are and how one can discern norms which remain implicit constitute a

crucial, even typical field of research on the pre-modern period. The act of approaching this field from the point of view that developments of norms are complex processes of negotiation between autological and heterological dimension promises to deliver new insights.

Suggestions for research questions: How do explicit norms relate to implicit ones? What does it mean when aesthetic norms are formulated in an aesthetic way? Do the artefacts themselves comply with the norms they advocate? How do description and prescription lead to the formation of a canon? How can the underlying norms be deduced from artefacts, namely by means of quantitative and formal methods? Why does compliance with norms result in aesthetic pleasure for the recipients? In what way is it precisely the violation of a norm which opens up a space for reflecting on aesthetic composition? How do norms relate to actual practice and how are norms implemented in a heterological perspective?

2) The dynamics of norm and diversity

The second line of inquiry focusses on the **processes themselves** and thus takes up the crucial question of how the dynamics of norm and diversity/plurality unfold and how this can be used to lay down 'rules of the game' for changes in norms. By the term "diversity", we mean diversity concerning concrete manifestations in aesthetic acts and artefacts as well as in political and social actions and practices. Thus, diversity can be applied to and detected in many different fields: in linguistic practice, in writings on linguistic theory, in poetic as well as visual artefacts, but also in political, social and economic practices.

Suggestions for research questions: How can individual manifestations which are created outside of (prescriptive) norms or even deliberately against them result in a latency? Can this latency, via repetition and reflection, lead to a new normal which consequently produces an explicit norm, initially understood descriptively? Or are the dynamics of norm and diversity usually connected to a cyclical development? Could this cycle take the following form: First, deviation from the selected norm which is the ideal considered as aesthetic standard is criticized, then more and more interest is taken in diversity (e.g. in variants in application), whereafter the new variants are tolerated (as they are often seen as means of emancipation from a norm) and finally accepted?

3) Aesthetic norm(s) in social practice

The third line of observation is centred on the questions of **how norms are interconnected on the autological and the heterological dimension** and how norms are integrated **in social and political practice**. Norms have a constitutive function for the building of traditions and a community. They result from a joint effort towards an understanding and can thus convey a sense of belonging, even if – or rather precisely because – they often operate with exclusion, negation and rejection. In language, literature, music or visual arts, for example, norms function to build identity, and points of intersection or similar manners of functioning can be observed. First and foremost, norms are characterized by their stability; however, they are constantly reflected upon and also transformed by manifestations in the actual aesthetic, political and social practice.

Suggestions for research questions: In what way do political and social norms influence representational conventions, and how do the latter in turn affect or substantiate aesthetic norms? How do norms become accessible when there are changes in politics and society? What impact do phenomena of reproduction, re-textualization and re-medialization have on this? How explicit or implicit are references to norms in acts and artefacts? What form does the relationship between norms which are only locally valid and universal norms take? In which scenarios are creations developed without referring to a fixed norm, but rather under the specific conditions of an aesthetic practice, which do then, however, set standards themselves?

4) Methodology and modelling of norm and diversity

The fourth cluster is concerned with **methodological issues** which are raised especially, albeit not only, in the field of *Digital Humanities*. Even quantitatively and formally, diversity and deviation can only be made visible by presupposing a norm. This affects the way of modelling when dealing with digital collections, as deviations can only be represented (in a *Digital Humanities* model, meaning in a norm) if the possibility of deviations is already provided for when creating the model.

Suggestions for research questions: What does the relationship between norm and diversity, which is, as outlined above, characterized by tensions, mean for a formal modelling of aesthetic artefacts, such as is needed in editing or archiving projects? Which *best practices* can be set out for creating models which are adaptable enough to take into account diversity (which can be co-existent or might not appear until the future), but despite this heightened flexibility are still manageable and maintainable in *Digital Humanities* applications? Can nontrivial models be formally or automatically deduced from (collections of) artefacts? What could a methodologically sound differentiation between a deviation from a norm and an actual violation of the norm look like? How can a clear dividing line between these two alternatives be identified and validated?

Please send your proposals for talks or alternative forms of presentations (panel discussions, poster sessions, etc.) to sarah.dessi@uni-tuebingen.de and sandra.linden@uni-tuebingen.de (please send everything to both addresses) by 31 March 2021, along with an informative abstract (max. 300 words, in German or English) and a short CV in a PDF file.

The contributions will be published in a conference volume. If permitted by the coronavirus pandemic, the conference will be held as a face-to-face event with appropriate hygienic precautions, or else it will be a hybrid event. As conference team, we will try our best to respond to the wishes and needs of the conference's participants.