



SFB 1391 Andere Ästhetik, Tagung vom 25.–27.11.2021:

„Die Ambiguität des Scheins. Dynamiken ästhetischer Praxis in der Vormoderne“

CRC 1391 Different Aesthetics, Conference 25–27 November 2021:

“The Ambiguity of Appearance: Dynamics of Aesthetic Practice in the Premodern”

The SFB *Andere Ästhetik* studies texts, images and objects from the premodern period of Europe, in order to determine how they reflect their aesthetic status. In so doing, the SFB presupposes that the aesthetic cannot be sought on the level of representation alone or be anachronistically tied to the precepts of aesthetic autonomy. Rather, our focus of study is the extent to which the aesthetic of premodern artefacts arises from the specific tension between technical ‘constructedness’ and social practice, between the inner logic of the form and the functional reliance on contemporary norms and value systems. Premodern artefacts, according to this thesis, cannot avoid this doubled connection to the ‘autological’ dimension on the one hand and the ‘heterological’ one on the other. They express themselves through this connection and gain their aesthetic ‘energy’ from their navigation of the attendant axiological or historico-pragmatic circumstances.

The planned conference will examine this approach by means of a central theme of aesthetic discussion: the tension between appearance and semblance. The point of departure is the polyvalence of the term ‘Schein’ (‘Appearance’), which encompasses essentially three meanings: (a) appearance as luminescence (*splendor, lumen*); (b) appearance as being visible, e.g. evidence, visibility (*apparentia*); (c) appearance as mere appearance, as deception (*illusio*) (cf. Santel 1992: 1230). The related concepts of ‘appearance’ and ‘appearing’ have been relevant to the understanding of aesthetics since antiquity, which is recognizable in the term *evidentia*; in the term *phantasia*, which appears first in Plato and is systematized by Aristotle (Watson 1988); in the discussion about *lux* and *lumen* (Perpeet 1977, Hill-Coates 2003) or *claritas* (Eco 1991, Beierwaltes 2013) in medieval contexts; and still perceptible even in Hegel’s definition of beauty as ‘sinnlichem Scheinen der Idee’ (Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik, 1820-29; cf. also Seel 2000). Beginning with the three meanings of ‘appearance,’ the conference will center around the phenomenon of the ambiguous and historically quite variable valuations of appearance. The main question is thus: under which cultural-historical conditions, in which concrete forms, and with which consequences are aesthetic configurations perceived and evaluated as sensible and ‘luminous’ appearance, and when as dissimulating, deceptive semblances?

This question allows the conference to concentrate on three goals: first, the targeted pursuit of the relations between the autological and heterological dimension of the artefacts, which is a primary concern of the SFB. Then, on the one hand, the terminology of ‘coming into appearance’ evokes the concrete appearance of the artefact itself, its design, its materiality, its structure, i.e. that which comprises its production in the autological dimension. On the other hand, the pretext of ‘coming into appearance’ also generally invites axiological questions of veracity, reality, or authenticity. The determination whether an artefact makes something ‘real’ visible or only appears to do so relies in actuality upon the field of heterological relations, i.e. upon historically variable epistemological, theological, or social norms and references. These historically differing references and norms must be understood and treated in their dynamic relation to the appearance of the artefact. By establishing in this way one of the most precarious as well as most productive tensions—especially in the Christian frame—a

tension, which frames aesthetic debate within the premodern period, the conference seeks, as its second goal, to reveal the governing 'coordinates' of a premodern aesthetic. Concentration on the main question should ultimately make it possible to bring the concepts of a historically and disciplinarily diverse tableau into a closely integrated dialogue.

Contributions should thus focus on the following points: 1. the ambiguity of appearance, as well as the relation between appearance and semblance; 2. questions of mediation by transcendent truth/insight, divine epiphany, or secular adaptation. 3. As regards topic selection, concrete relations (semantics, representations) of phenomena such as brilliance, light, appearance, as well as illusion, deception, blinding, are preferred, in order to facilitate comparisons between case studies under a paradigmatic perspective.

Some suggestions for fields of inquiry, which however in no way delimit the possible spectrum, are given below.

Mediation of transcendent experience: In the Christian realm, the concept of an appearance, which is clear in the sense of holiness but not absolutely unambiguous, develops under Neoplatonic influence (Lobsien 2007, Beierwaltes 2014): the devil is able to disguise himself and give himself the appearance of godliness and truth (Muchembled 2000). In this way, the light loses its biblical univocality. This ambiguity unsettles primarily vision, but eventually every sense of perception (Köbele/Notz 2019). This uncertainty spreads itself through every sort of artistic representation, even (and especially) that of the dissemination of transcendent truth or of the divine light. It remains to be studied how, under the suspicion of potential deception or even heresy, the interaction with artefacts or artistic composition itself develops a dynamic that protects, emphasizes and deploys the inner logic of the (material) composition and in this way becomes a medium for transcendent experience (Köbele 1993, Haas 1999, Fricke 2007, Schellewald 2012), e.g. in the context of the didactic dissemination of mystical experience within a convent (Suerbaum 2009) or the "state of grace of the prayer image" (Krüger 2018: 59).

Images of gods, God, the holy: The problem of artistic reproduction of divinities can be boiled down to questions of meaning, legitimacy and the capacity to depict images (Goldhill 1994, Zanker 2004, Squire 2010). The numerous poetic texts of the Hellenistic period which represent images of gods serve as an example. These texts juxtapose the popular religious conception of anthropomorphic gods that are experienced as present in their cult images (Scheer 2000) with the philosophical debate over an abstract, transcendent conception vs. a material conception of divinity. To what extent does the heterological discourse intervene in the customary conventions of representation by exposing the tension between the illusory presence of a god in his or her image and the doubt thereupon (cf. Platt 2002)? To what extent does the question of depicting divinity ignite a competition between different artistic media, as when during the early Christian Middle Ages pictorial representation is treated as deeply suspect, unable to capture the true appearance of God through its visual semblance, leading to the period of intense iconoclasm in the 8th century (Thümmel 1991), while verbal, literary composition is trusted to preserve the distinction between appearance and semblance?

Radiance and reflection in secular (con-)texts: Light metaphors and their rhetoric had an early fascination even in secular depictions, which often elevated individuals through charismatically if not theomorphic means. Reliance on metaphors of light and reflection is in this way greatly expanded since the Hellenistic period in, for example, the praise and visual representation of aristocrats and elites. λάμποντι Ἡλίου δίκην - "who shines equal to the sun," so runs the inscription on the base of the porphyry column of Constantine the Great (4th cent. CE), as the literary sources report. The statue that once stood atop the column wore a sun-crown and showed the emperor in the image of the sun god Sol/Helios. The veneration of an aristocrat as a charismatic figure, to which godlike characteristics could be attributed (Bergmann 1998; Peppel 2003), as this example shows, is also often accompanied by the critical issue of hubris, especially in the eyes of Christianity and its own occasionally competing metaphorical field of light and appearance. In medieval Christian contexts, the ambiguity of appearance becomes virtually the main concern even in secular depictions (cf. e.g. Lechtermann/Wandhoff 2008, Haubrichs 2009), as regards not only aristocrats, but also savior figures, religiously charged places, or allegorical subjects that have their own share of religious splendor. Even here one must ask

how both social and artistic worth is negotiated according to aesthetic figures of reflection, or even how the legitimacy of the aesthetic representation itself takes part in this negotiation.

Diabolical Illusions: Deliberate play with appearance, the demonstration of its capacity for temptation, and explicit reflection on its dangers—especially as related to secular topics (Müller 2006), but not excluding religious topics (Reudenbach 2002)—persists through various epochs, media, and spaces. It would thus be especially stimulating to explore when moralistic writings, such as the demonological treatises of the 15th through 17th centuries CE, sharply reject forms of delusion, visual deception, or *phantasmata*, but also formulate a “grammar” of illusion *ex negativo*; when they construct aesthetic representations upon these very effects, which they theoretically condemn; or when the devil or disreputable sorcerers become artists, whether in *Historia von D. Johann Fausten* or in French *tragi-comédies pastorales*. Here at last the question arises, where, how, and in turn under which heterological conditions the junctions between legitimate (aesthetic) appearance and diabolical Illusion become uncertain (Clark 2007, Dickhaut 2016, Gronemyer 2004).

Contributions which pursue the following themes are welcome: 1. On the level of artefacts and sources (autological dimension): where, how, and with which function is the question of appearance (presence of truth, visibility of ideas, appearance of divinity, positive illusion) and semblance (dissimulation, deception, diabolical deceit, ‘mere’ appearance) handled in the respective sources? How is the relationship between appearance and semblance defined and configured (allusion, overlapping, contrast)? 2. On the contextual level (heterological dimension): in which ways or from which positions are the relations of appearance or semblance moderated, evaluated, and/or conceptualized? What roll do social norms or discourses of epistemic or theological provenance play? 3. And finally: Which dynamics arise from the struggle over the legitimacy of appearance and semblance? How do the various representations, evaluations or strategies of legitimation become opportunities for aesthetic productivity and reflection?

We are happy to see theoretical contributions on the terminology and the phenomenon of the ambiguity of appearance in various eras, as well as studies on the historical semantics of the lexical field. Above all, however, we ask for case studies which develop the discussion about appearance and semblance from specific, individual artefacts. The kind of sources—in accord with the research program of the SFB — can thus be quite variable: beside celebrated artworks, everyday objects or performative acts might find interest as sources, as well as sources in contexts of functional mediation or pure commentary, epistemic writings, or ritual processes.

For more information on the SFB, please see our homepage. We would appreciate it, if you refer to our SFB program in your deliberations, in order to permit an interface in this regard between the presentations. <https://uni-tuebingen.de/en/research/core-research/collaborative-research-centers/crc-different-aesthetics/>

Contributions in German and English are welcome. Publication of the contributions is intended. Because we must schedule the conference far later than originally planned due to the pandemic, and thus strain our mandated publication timeline, we ask therefore, that the contributions to the conference be ready for print, in order that contributors can send us the completed chapters with edits in accord with conference discussion by the middle of December. We apologize for the inconvenience of this tight schedule, which assures nevertheless an even more productive discussion.

Please give us notice before 1 July 2020, whether you will participate in the conference. Abstracts of approx. 15-20 lines for a presentation of 30 minutes are requested until August 2, 2021.

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