Call for Papers

Annual Conference for the CRC 1391 *Different Aesthetics*

Canonisation and Revision.
Historical Processes in the Formation of Aesthetic Authority

Tübingen, 4-6 July 2024

The CRC 1391 *Different Aesthetics* examines aesthetic acts and artefacts of the pre-modern era, equally in relation to the autological dimension, concerning inherited knowledge of form and design, and the heterological dimension, concerning social practice. According to this approach, the texts, images and objects move as flexible agents between the demands of technical-artistic autology and on one hand and the logic of pragmatic-historical discourse and function on the other. This twofold orientation of aesthetic phenomena has been described many times but has usually been modelled in a hierarchical or binary rating structure. The *Different Aesthetics* program does not only aim to critically question these dichotomies which are based primarily on assumptions of aesthetic autonomy, and to instead focalise the dynamic tension and the processes of transformation between autological and heterological layers constituting the aesthetic status of the acts and artefacts. Moreover, it aims to review and reappraise the general and research-specific historical backgrounds that have led to the establishment and the further continuation of such hierarchies up to the present day.

This reappraisal - highly necessary in terms of research history - is the goal of the first annual conference for the CRC's second funding phase. With its theme "Canonisation and Revision" the conference profits from current controversial disputes about traditional canons which have taken place in various contexts. The sustained relevance of canon debates is not only apparent in university-based academic discourse, but also in internet forums and blogs, and in public museum practices which increasingly make efforts to overcome rigid topographical and chronological classifications of schools and/or eras of art. The collective basis of these discussions and endeavours, beginning with postcolonial critiques of traditional evaluation criteria and the associated mechanisms for exclusion (among other critiques), is a discomfort with assumptions of aesthetic autonomy and the related issues with canons that usually date back to the 19th century. In this context, the conference aims to highlight the fact that standardisation and canonisation processes in academic history have a considerable potential to prevent other models from gaining authority and other criteria from being recognised. This potential for suppression often results from varying interests and separates practice from theory.

The interdisciplinary conference will dedicate three central focal points of (de-)canonisation to the working out of these complex connections and dynamics. These points are usually discussed separately - if they are discussed at all. Firstly, the focus will be on different types of pre-modern reception, critique, reproduction and theorisation of art which served as a basis to either ascribe or deny authority and value to certain acts and artefacts at the time of their creation. Secondly, the processes of canon formation since the 18th century, some of which followed these precedents and others of which were redrafted, will be considered along with their significant interplay with the academic history of increasingly institutionalised disciplines. Finally, the third focal point is concerned with the scholarly (self-)reflection and (self-)orientation of academic practice, as this will reveal academia's relationship to the traditions of the 18th and 19th centuries as well as to

contemporary cultural discourse and debate. The goal is to uncover - from a diachronic perspective - the historical implications as well as the basic structures and methods of standardisation that have contributed to the establishment or deconstruction of canons and their associated marginalisations. Accompanying this is an analysis of the reasons for recurring discontinuities and gaps between the perception of the texts, images and objects at the time of their creation and later evaluations which may be bound to principles of aesthetic autonomy and/or national or nationalistic intentions.

Beginning with these considerations, the conference will span eras and genres in its resolute inquiry into the correlations and the historical rapprochement of the processes connected with these three focal points, but also into the differences and the historical consequences for academia. It will also inquire into the media of canon formation/revision and the strategies of inclusion and exclusion these have carried with them. In doing so, the conference will pursue the thesis that work on canons has been done within various cultural-historical contexts in terms of consolidation and stabilisation, critique and modification, ruptures and denial, and has stood in reciprocal relation to various shapes and levels of identity formation. This dynamic, as shall be demonstrated in the first focal point, has by no means only been a characteristic of the modern era, but rather also had a lasting impact on aesthetic practice and theory in the pre-modern era. For instance, in Alexandrian philology we see tragedians, poets and orators (in the Pergamene canon) emerge as authoritative archetypes early on, with these archetypes becoming binding models (*exempla*) of *imitatio* (or of *aemulatio* and *superatio*) not only for school and rhetoric classes, but also for poetry. These patterns then later become the very basis of rhetoric and poetics in antiquity and, by extension, for an understanding of 'art' (*ars*) that relies on *praecepta* and especially on the imitation of authoritative models (*auctores imitandi*). This rhetorical system of production goes on to define traditions for centuries, while at the same time frequently being creatively appropriated, adjusted and updated, but also criticised and challenged by alternative concepts. In this process, various schools develop, rivalries and disputes emerge (cf. Pliny's artist anecdotes, medieval catalogues of poets, the stylistic competition of *claritas* vs. *obscuritas*; *ars antiqua* and *ars nova* in medieval music, among others), but there is also exclusion and marginalisation. In the aesthetic debates of the pre-modern era, competing canons continuously stimulate critique and poetics (e.g. in reference to authors: Virgil vs. Homer, Ariosto vs. Virgil, Horace vs. Aristotle), and their semantics evolve in reference to artistic and aesthetic concepts (such as *disegno* vs. *colore* or different forms of the *paragone*) - each evolution bearing its own potential for suppression. With 18th century aesthetics, canons were no longer grounded on the principle of creative *imitatio*, but rather on the originality of the 'Genius'. This inevitably led to further conversations, marginalisations and to some extent pluralisation, such as in *Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns* (Herder's Shakespeare vs. his Sophocles). Even after 1800, the dialectic of canonisation and revision as well as the dynamic of valuation, re-evaluation and devaluation continue without interruption, though the validity of canons as a basis for production is increasingly questioned (cf. e.g. the discourse on epigones in the arts).

The second focal point of canonisation and revision concerns 18th and especially 19th century views on the pre-modern era, from the academic-historical perspective of the developing academic disciplines. Basic principles and categories associated with aesthetic autonomy (genius, creation, invention, freedom from utilitarian purpose, self-reference, self-sufficiency, unity and so on) play a key role in the valuations of pre-modern aesthetic testimonies carried out in this context. Art forms such as occasional poetry, didactic texts, ephemeral architecture, processions, spa and table music, cannot be in integrated into the newly superior concept of aesthetic autonomy and are devalued and largely removed from view. From a classical aesthetic perspective, which would describe a work of art as something 'complete in itself' (Karl Philipp Moritz), all heterological embeddedness must appear as a limitation or even a criterion for the exclusion of art. This means, however, that pre-modern acts and artefacts that are often more clearly recognisable through purpose, function and discourse symbiosis are reduced to products of an artistic practice that is perceived as 'pre-autonomous' and therefore inferior. Adding to this, there was the appropriation of art for national self-reassurance in the 19th century, which was disturbed by the intercultural and transcultural

dimension of pre-modern art and literature manifested in translation, adaptation, bilingualism and cultural transfer.

Beginning with this twofold historical perspective, the third focal point of the event aims to use selected examples to highlight the modern construction parameters for the establishment of aesthetic authority, canons and renewed marginalisation as a decisive part of contemporary research practices. This is done in order to increase sensitivity for the cultural-historic dynamics of selection, standardisation and stratification of art up to the present day, as well as for the consequences of these processes which are observable even outside canon-based research. This confrontation with canon formation, canons and the revision of canons is particularly relevant for the self-conception of the humanities, given the fact that the European higher education reforms (among other things) have made the question of the continuation of old canons and the configuration of new canons an integral part of teaching and research practices, but have done so without always sufficiently taking the associated historical implications into account.

In continuation of previous reflections on canon formation in the humanities, the conference aims to connect the three aforementioned 'focal points' of the canon debate to one another. Through comparison, it aims to inquire into affirming as well as dissenting positions, revaluations and especially mechanisms of suppression within reception history. Finally, it aims to reveal the effects of the canon formations of the 18th and 19th centuries - particularly those based on assumptions of aesthetic autonomy - on research practices up to the present day. In these endeavours, the following content-based aspects and inquiries are of particular interest:

— Which artistic, cultural-historical, societal and political presuppositions have determined or promoted the formation of canons, the attribution and denial of authority, and the establishment of aesthetic evaluation models in the pre-modern era?

— In what ways did the respective canons and their implicit or explicit mechanisms of exclusion develop within the field of tension between technical-artistic inner logic (autological dimension) and social practice (heterological dimension)? What role did power systems, production and reception, intercultural exchanges, national specificities, bourgeois culture, etc. play in this formation?

— Which concrete media and genres (visual, literary, etc.) have communicated and negotiated the attribution and denial of authority and, by extension, the aesthetic norms and canons since antiquity?

— Which historical strategies of the attribution of authority and of the critique or rejection of various aesthetic acts and artefacts can be identified based on different objects of investigation? Which topoi and terms help establish, consolidate and direct evaluations (cf. terms such as 'pure', 'grandiloquence', 'ugly')? To what concurrent theoretical (artistic or literary), distinctive and identity-forming discourse can strategies of recognition and marginalisation be attributed? Which classification and standardisation structures can be consolidated through the revelatory potential of these strategies?

— What system-forming effects did and do canonical conceptions have on the notion of aesthetics (which has become increasingly fixed since the 18th century) and on the teaching and research emphases of the individual academic disciplines since their institutionalisation?

— To what extent can a decidedly interdisciplinary perspective revise or amend inherited, subject-specific assessment patterns? To what extent may we call into question the validity and necessity of canons in the various disciplines by focusing on pre-modern aesthetic acts and artefacts and on the way in which they reflect critically on norms and cultural identities?

For more information on the CRC 1391 please visit our homepage. We appreciate references to our CRC program in your reflections, as these can serve as points of convergence between lectures.

https://uni-tuebingen.de/en/research/core-research/collaborative-research-centers/crc-different-aesthetics/

Publication of the submissions is intended.