

Introduction

With support from the German Research Foundation, the Tübingen Collaborative Research Center (CRC) 1391, *Different Aesthetics*, began work in July 2019. Its research plan was prompted by increasing interest in questions of aesthetics. Intense public controversies, in person and in the media, about art's meaning and responsibility, about its rightness or wrongness – or in fact what even deserves the title 'art' – point to a public need for orientation vis-à-vis art and for answers and standards no matter how disparate the occasion may be. These debates present an opportunity for a reevaluation of the aesthetic in light of its societal function and relevance.

But the timeliness of the topic goes well beyond popular debates, nor is it confined to the humanistic disciplines. Paradoxically, in fact, researchers in areas outside the humanities – and thus, as a rule, lacking historically differentiated perspectives – were some of the first to emphasize the omnipresent sociocultural importance of aesthetics and call for an 'aesthetic turn' in their work. In the social sciences, for example, the interdependence of aesthetic and social practices, the political appropriation of art, and the border between aesthetics and epistemology became subjects of discussion. Biologists and neuroscientists have sought empirical evidence of the fundamental artistic disposition of man (as well as of other animals). Research in empirical aesthetics, on the other hand, seeks measurable proof of its effective power.

These various approaches are obviously reactions to the new interest in and need for aesthetics. However, both popular discussion and academic research often explicitly or unconsciously presuppose standards of reception, judgment, and understanding that derive from 18th- and early-19th-century conceptions of an autonomous aesthetics whose influence and canon-setting power survives in many instances, despite various attempts to challenge it. Due to these anachronistic and mostly unreflected adaptations, the question of art's specific capacity in social and anthropological terms tends to be, if not undermined, so marginalized that it threatens to be lost sight of.

It seems all the more urgent to seek and reflect upon alternative aesthetic concepts, practices, and manifestations that approach the question in a 'different' way. The title of our collective research on a *Different Aesthetics* expresses this effort. Our goal is not simply to 'invent' a 'new' aesthetics or a normative counter-narrative to Kant's

postulate of ‘disinterested pleasure,’ but to argue for a decisive change in heuristic perspective. The thesis of our research program is that this change in perspective, which in the end claims comprehensive validity for the history of aesthetics and art, can be especially well explored based on premodern objects, i.e., aesthetic acts and artifacts from *before* the age of philosophical aesthetics. Conversely, our CRC hopes to show that crucial impulses for the discussion of aesthetics up to the present can emanate from an ‘aesthetics *before* aesthetics.’

This is why our research program begins in the premodern period and addresses the socio-anthropological irreducibility of the aesthetic posed by the social-, life-, and neurosciences, and correlates that debate with a fundamental humanistic discussion of how we understand aesthetic processes. This understanding can be systematically extrapolated from the intertwining of the technical and artistic inherent logic of the acts and artifacts with their historical and cultural context. In order to analyze this interaction, the CRC proposes a praxeological model with the central concept of the ‘figure of aesthetic reflection,’ which offers a heuristic instrument to differentiate and describe the dynamic interrelationship of both dimensions. With this instrument, the research collective also creates an interdisciplinary method that can effectively integrate the investigations of individual disciplines.

Thus the goal is both to achieve a reevaluation of the contribution of premodern aesthetic acts and artifacts within historical and systematic aesthetic research and, at the same time, outline relevant aspects of a *Different Aesthetics* that can have a temporally and culturally broad spectrum of applications beyond the premodern era. In sum, the CRC 1391 intends to ground current debates on the relevance of aesthetics with a deep historical perspective. On that foundation, even current questions about art, society, and cultural diversity can be better understood and profitably expanded.

The present volume introduces the research program of the CRC from various angles. The introductory essay provides a detailed description of the program itself and, above all, invites responses, both with different applications and extensions of our research, but also with critical comments. One such response is represented by the essays that follow that introduction. They have been divided into three sections that follow from central categories of differentiation in the research program. A number of contributions were written by principal investigators and researchers in the CRC. The intent was to present a broad panorama of individual projects that would demonstrate the methodological approaches and heuristic potential of the praxeological model. To encourage the most dynamic possible exchanges, it seemed equally important to the volume’s editors to include positions that were and will continue to be developed outside the immediate scope of the research collective and lead to aesthetic questions in their own areas of research. Therefore, scholars from different disciplines outside the CRC were invited to react to the methodological approach of the CRC and develop their own obser-

vational fields, phenomena, and insights in correlation with their own research interests. This has yielded contributions that take up the following central questions: what is the current status of premodern artifacts in their discipline's aesthetic discourse? What approach to a premodern aesthetics makes the most sense within their discipline? And can their discipline make productive use of the CRC's method and heuristic?

As the collected essays show, on the one hand, the approaches and tools of the CRC are tried out, discussed, and assessed in direct disciplinary and interdisciplinary applications for their capacity for heuristic differentiation in understanding premodern aesthetics. On the other hand, some of the contributions already represent adaptations in other fields and conceptual spaces. The various forms of dialogue as well as the correlation with new sources and fields of objects and research are especially significant because one's gaze can be unexpectedly drawn to new focuses within the research program, to challenging new theses, or to overlooked areas in our argumentation. It is precisely these explorative dynamics of debate that the CRC's heuristic wants to promote. The differentiation and continuing development of our approach and the identification of historically sustainable primary aspects of a *Different Aesthetics* can only be achieved in collective scholarly discourse beyond the bounds of the CRC. It is to this collective effort that the research program of the CRC invites participation from other colleagues.

We would therefore especially like to thank the external contributors who agreed to engage in a first round of using the CRC's approach and tools despite the difficulties of travel and communication imposed by the Corona virus.

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