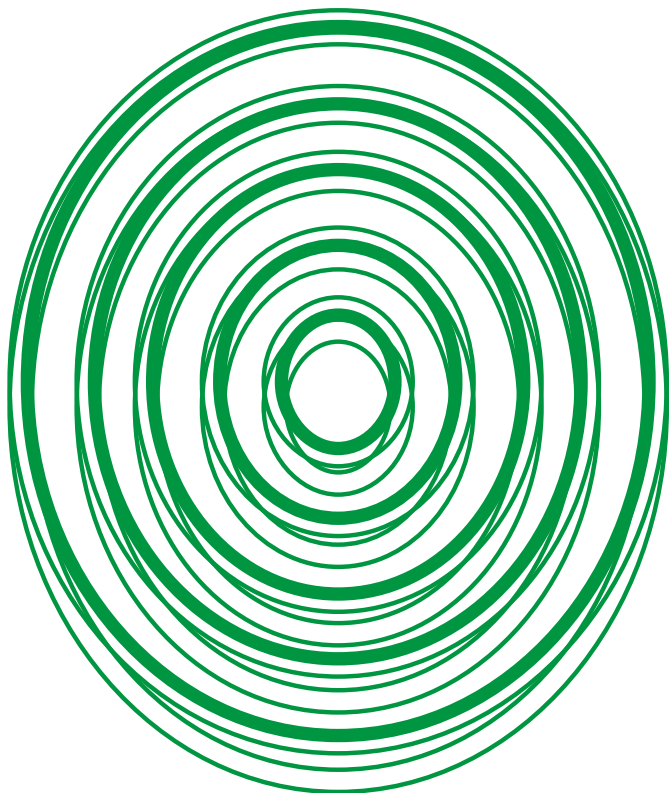


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Mimesis

 Praxis

Aisthesis



A Constellation and Its Heritage

University
of Hildesheim

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DFG Research
Training Group 2477
“Aesthetic Practice”

Kulturcampus
Domäne Marienburg,
Aula im Hohen Haus

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Abstracts

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Stop Faking Justice, Start Making It!
On Justice, Theatre and Mimesis

“Legal justice is not ideal justice. It is a legally unjust justice”, argues French playwright Hélène Cixous who argues that justice (*dikē*) is “always out of joint”. To this legal conception of justice, theater makers oppose a rival conception of justice that I call “dramatic justice”. Conceived as a performance, dramatic justice mostly aims to show the shortcomings of legal justice while fostering reflection on what “perfect justice” should look like. Therefore, staging tribunals, trials and crimes on stage involve controversial questions about justice, theater and mimesis. What does a dramatization of (in)justice look like and what is its aesthetic? How to (re)present on stage the unrepresentable related to violence and trauma? What are the strategies of staging (in)justice and what unintended (mis)(re)presentations of the victims can they run?

Through a cross-cultural analysis of three theatrical productions conceived in different contexts and languages, I will try to deconstruct the traps of faking justice instead of making it. The three selected theatrical productions tackle the question of coming to terms with the past in the sense of Adorno’s “Aufarbeitung” introduced in his essay “What does coming to Terms with the past mean? (published in 1959). A rather complex question that the Belgian collective: Groupov intended to answer through the performance *Rwanda 94* conceived as “an attempt at symbolic reparation to the dead for the use of the living”. While, in her artistic statement, the Egyptian director Laila Soliman, claims that her play *Zig Zig* brings a historical moment to life as a tool to challenge colonial narratives. Based on documents stored in the British Foreign Office archives since there are no documents in Arabic, *Zig Zig* is a re-enactment of Nazlat al Shobak’s investigation about the mass rape of Egyptian peasant women by British soldiers during the British occupation of Egypt. Finally, *Five Easy Pieces* by Swiss director Milo Rau, tackles a traumatic and taboo episode in the national history of Belgium, through the reconstruction of the paedophile rapist and murderer Marc Dutroux case.

Three staging strategies and three different approaches to the mimesis of atrocity on stage which deserve an in-depth comparison to grasp the multiple challenges of staging (in)justice. For it goes without saying that the beauty of a play and the emotional reactions it stirs up are as much ethical as poetical and that the problem of justice is intimately related to the aesthetics of theatrical production.

Mimesis and Fictional Horror.

How can there be genuine emotive responses to horror movies that allows the audiences to find pleasure in what by nature is distressful and unpleasant? In trying to resolve the perplexing emotive reaction termed as “paradox of horror,” Noël Carroll presents his “thought theory” as an alternative to the hypothesis of the requirement of belief, claiming that we can be moved by the content of thoughts entertained while belief state is not required for justified emotive response, to clarify the paradox of horror. I will show how Carroll’s thought theory is actually close to Aristotle’s ideas of mimesis, holding that mimesis has the potential of posting both a representational tracing of emotion in the art work and, at the same time, the communication of that emotion to the audience. I will argue that it is this double sense of mimesis in Aristotle’s terms that allows of the pleasure of fictional horror.

Nonsense as Parody of Sense — Reflections on Nonsense Poetry

In his 1942 essay *Music of Poetry*, T.S. Eliot describes Edward Lear's nonsense poems as 'a parody of sense'. By example of a famous poem by Lewis Carrol, *Jabberwocky*, I want to show that this is an apt description of nonsense poetry in the tradition of Lear and Carrol. Nonsense poetry evokes the *feeling* of something making sense, while at the same time subverting this experience by playing different levels of language against each other. In this way it breaks the transparency and efficacy of ordinary language activity and brings the event of language, the peculiar effect of sense itself to the foreground. It is a *mimesis* of sense with a twist—a parody of sense—that has a reflexive power without needing to posit this reflection thetically. Its effect is therefore different from that of senselessness or absurdity, where we feel the aching absence of sense.

Hannah Feiler

Memories of a Future Past.

Notes on Pre-Enactments at the Intersection of Arts and Politics

Political theorist Oliver Marchart assumes that artistic practices, such as dance, need to create similarity between them and the structural conditions of what he calls the conditions of “minimal politics”(collectivity, organization, strategy, the bodily blockade of streams of circulation, conflictuality). By doing this, one might create what he calls a pre-enactment: artistic performances being considered as anticipation of political events. Thus, under distinct circumstances, dance can be regarded as forward-looking remembrance—a connection that I will elaborate on in the lecture. Based on Marchart’s reflections, I will look for structural similarities and differences in terms of the possible generation of political moments and the particular temporal structure between the performances “How long is now”by Tel Aviv based performance research body *Public Movement* and “Un violador en tu camino/A rapist in your way”by the Chilean performance collective *Las Tesis*.

Imitation of Nature in Images without Images.
The Idea of Mimesis in Film

Mimesis is certainly a guiding principle in European aesthetics. Reconstructing, first, the meaning of this principle requires a perspective informed by intellectual history and theories of modernity. Such a reconstruction refers to the trope of mimesis as “imitation of nature,” which dates back to antiquity and has had a lasting influence in the history of aesthetics. In the era of German idealism and Romanticism—that is, with the philosophical paradigm shift of modernity—it is replaced with a trope of creativity and innovation. The distinction between empirical, objectified nature (*natura naturata*) and productive nature (*natura naturans*) proves intellectually and aesthetically momentous in this context.— The second step of this lecture concerns the question of what conclusions we can draw from this with regard to a specific aesthetic medium, namely film, and it receives an equally surprising and inspiring answer with the help of Theodor W. Adorno. In addition to successfully helping to rehabilitate the concept of mimesis, Adorno offers film a self-transcendent naturalism, or, an aesthetics of imageless images. In this sense he confirms the modern, romantic epistemic structure of creativity with its slogan: ‘From imitation to imagination! From imitation of nature to its creation!’

Andreas Hetzel

Aisthesis—Mimesis—Praxis.
An Aristotelian Constellation

Modern Philosophical aesthetics, which seeks to understand the specificity of art and the beautiful, gets its name by referring to the Aristotelian concept of *aisthesis*. It defines itself as a discipline dedicated to clarify the perceptual conditions of the beautiful and of art. One of the paradoxes aesthetics history is that Aristotle himself addressed art primarily in the context of two other concepts, *mimesis* and *praxis*. In his *Poetics*, he defines the work of art as a *mimesis praxeon*, a practice of imitating a practice. In my paper I try to understand what *mimesis praxeon* might mean by way of reading passages from the *Poetics*. To prepare this, I first address the famous description of Achilles' shield in Homer's *Iliad* (XVIII, 468ff.), which I read as an early theorization of art as a practice of imitating a practice. In a further step, I ask what theoretical potentials would arise from an attempt to reformulate philosophical aesthetics praxeologically, starting from Aristotle.

What Does Plato Expect from Mimesis?.

In Plato's *Sophist*, the mimetic art (μιμητική) is divided into two: one is the art of likeness-making (εἰκαστική) which represents the true proportions of the originals, while the other is the art of appearance-making (φανταστική) which produces only seeming appearances. (*Sophist* 235d1-236c8) When the characters in the dialogue reach an agreement about truth and falsehood (260a5-c10), they define the sophist as an imitator belonging to the second kind of *mimesis*, namely the appearance-making. (260c11-268d5) This kind of *mimesis* produces false appearances, or so-called "man-made dreams." (*Sophist* 266c7-9; cf. Gombrich 2002 [1960]: 8) Conversely, Plato expects something true from the first kind of *mimesis*.

How can we expect anything "true" in *mimesis*? The example of the false appearance-making given in the *Sophist* is a large statue which appears beautiful when it is seen from a fixed viewpoint. (235e5-236a6) The better kind of *mimesis* must be different. In this paper, I will compare the passages on *mimesis* in the *Cratylus*, *Republic* and *Sophist*, to argue that Plato's ideal *mimesis* is conditional on whether it makes the viewer free from fixed viewpoints. Being free from fixed viewpoints, instead of replacing a fixed viewpoint by another, enables the viewer to see in and beyond a certain perspective, and to see "what is true" (τὸ ἀληθές, 236a4) represented in *mimesis*.

C. Lynne Hong/洪嘉琳

Room for Possibilities:
A Spatial Account in the Cook Ding Passage

The modern scholarship of the Cook Ding passage has put most attention on Cook Ding's performance, be it physical or aesthetic. I am more interested, however, in a spatial account of this passage, particularly the connection between 'dao 道/ Course,' 'jian 間/empty space,' and 'youdi 餘地/enough room' in the statement of '以无厚入有間,恢恢乎其於遊刃必有餘地矣/ [when] what has no thickness enters into an empty space, it is vast and open, with more than enough room for the play of the blade.' (ICS 3/8/8; Ziporyn's translation, 2020). The intent of this presentation is twofold. First, to unravel a cognitive pattern underlying concepts such as 'dao/course,' 'empty space' and 'enough room.' Second, to show that this spatial dimension not only connects several crucial *Zhuangzi* concepts but also highlights *Zhuangzi*'s practical message of finding room for action where it would appear there is none.

Calligraphy Art in Taiwan (Online)

Because words are the carrier of culture, they embody the diverse thinking contained in their culture. Chinese character, as a Hieroglyph, mostly originates from vision, which makes calligraphy present the effect of visual art, so it is called “Common Origin of Calligraphy and Painting”. The presentation will explore the truth of the times presented by the art of calligraphy itself. It is explained by the effective history (Wirkungsgeschichte) of Western Gadamer and the philosophical theory of Oriental Zhuangzi’s “hsiaoyaoyou”. Gadamer pointed out that true historical thinking must consider both its own historicity and the historicity of others. In other words, hermeneutics must present the reality of history in its own understanding, that is, in this interpretive relationship there exists both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding. On the other hand, for Gadamer, understanding (Verstehen) is interpretation (Auslegung) and application (Applicatio). Zhuangzi’s “hsiaoyaoyou” pointed out that only when the human soul is freed from the shackles of “power”, “wealth” and “fame and fortune” can people’s spiritual activities be in a state of freedom. It also uses the calligraphy works of two contemporary Taiwanese calligraphers Chen, Ding-Ci and Dong, Yang-Zih as examples to illustrate. By a real fusing of horizons (Horizontverschmelzung) to Eastern and Western philosophical theories, this paper presents the contemporary truths of Taiwan’s contemporary calligraphy art: openness, diversity, tolerance, respect for tradition, and free innovation.

Lars Leeten

‘Look at It like This!’
Mimetic Capacity and the Practice of Seeing

The contribution examines the significance of mimetic behavior for sensual perception, focusing on vision as an example. A connection between mimesis and seeing emerges if one assumes that visual perception cannot be interpreted in categories of representation alone, but must be understood as a practice that belongs to a certain way of dealing with the world. The question of how something can be seen or should be seen then refers directly to a form of behavior; the way of seeing is at the same time a behavior towards the world. It follows that the acquisition of ways of seeing is closely related to the acquisition of ways of behaving and thus to the mimetic capacity of human beings. Drawing on themes from Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology and Wittgenstein’s late work, this paper aims to explore this connection in more detail. The starting point are remarks by Wittgenstein that revolve around the phrase ‘Look at it like this!’ and address the way in which a practice of seeing can be communicated to other persons.

Theresa Mayer

Splitting Mimesis

In one of his late texts, the German philologist and literary scholar Werner Hamacher described Orestes' washing scene as pivotal to Aristotelian poetics. It is, how he claims, not so much the unity of praxis, but the unity in which praxis shows itself as mis-practice, that enables the dramatical process, meaning that praxis as much as *aisthesis* has to be regarded as marked with a rupture and caught up in a split. In his example shows how the washing of Orestes—which is in fact nothing but a ruse to save his life—is the visible imitation within the imitation which leads to the saving katharsis. Following this idea, that the uncovering and splitting of the mimesis is a vital part of the poetical practice, this talk is going to focus on the contemporary novel (or prose experiment) *Taxi* by Cemile Sahin. In this novel the imitation does not arrive at the end but is the very starting point of the narrative: a woman trains a stranger—the narrator himself—to double as her lost son. The talk will focus particularly on the intersections of and conflicts between the narration done by the imitator/double and the narration by practice done by the mother.

Simone Niehoff

Dangerous, Contagious, Subversive.
Why Plato Was Afraid of Mimesis and We Should Still Be Today.

In Plato's hierarchical, rigid, stratified, 'ideal' state there is no room for mimesis. There must be no representations of socially undesirable behaviour which would quasi automatically corrupt their malleable audiences. Painting, epic poetry, and theatre are condemned as deceptions and lies. Hymns of praise to God and the government are permitted exclusively. If deception is considered useful, then only from above, never from below. Reading Plato against the grain with contemporary eyes, his vehemence in banishing mimetic practices renders his project fragile and open to attack. Mimesis, on the other hand, appears resistant, dangerous, and subversive.

The notion of subversive mimesis is reflected in activist theory and the strategies of the fake and the hoax: Leftist interventionist campaigns from the communication guerrilla to the Yes Men or the Peng!Collective have relied on creating uncertainty, deception, and satire. But since fake news became a buzzword, since the rise of Trump and the memetic warfare of the Alt-right, since the global increase in disinformation and conspiracy theories, the moral legitimacy of activist fakes has been damaged—playful laughtivism has lost its edge. The dangerous potential of the mimetic becomes tangible in its ambivalence. While organisations such as Peng!Collective experiment with utopian-transparent fakes no longer aiming primarily at tricking recipients, recent protests seem to favour unambiguous strategies, such as the blockades, sabotages, and occupations of the climate movement.

Moments of Mimesis Using the Example of #MeToo.

The term mimesis has a repetition inscribed. Repetition is not understood in the sense of automatic repetition, routine, or conformity to a model. Mimetic moments, as I would like to grasp them in my lecture, are characterized by their repetitive character and can be described as a production of similarities, but also variations and differences, whereby each repetition produces a shift. Mimesis means imitation and at the same time preservation of difference. The #MeToo movement will be used as an example to show how mimesis operates in this field of tension. It will be examined which repetitive, reproducing, imitating and perhaps also transforming mechanisms of mimesis become visible in the saying “me too”. Here, #MeToo is described as a practice of solidarity that is performed repetitively. Posting #MeToo is understood as a performative act of speaking or writing and thus, according to Judith Butler, as a constantly repeating and citing practice. By saying “me too”, different things can be meant: someone has been raped, catcalled, or sexually harassed in the workplace. The point is not to question or analyze the intent of the individual. Rather, it is to examine what similarities and differences are repeated and recited in the mimetic moments. The saying “me too” remains the same, but the respective experiences and the voices behind them that make themselves audible and visible are always different. With each repetition, a shift of meanings takes place, a difference becomes visible, and thus a potential is opened to create a space of possibility of visibility through a mimetic practice, as an appropriating, repetitive, resistant, and self-questioning practice.

Eva Schürmann

Peculiarities of Aesthetic Experience.

On the 'Paradox of Fiction' and Other Reception-Aesthetic Inconsistencies

The sympathetic and negative emotions triggered in and by aesthetic experiences are among the enduring explanatory needs of reception aesthetics. Kant may have found a plausible formula for the intellectual pleasure of Art works in the free play of the powers of imagination. But it is probably too intellectualistic and oblivious to emotion to explain the aesthetic experience of music or immersive films. In English-language aesthetics, it has been discussed for decades as the paradox of fiction, that we actually feel afraid in horror films, for example, even though we know that there is no real danger at all? The lecture seeks answers to this questions in the intentionality of the mind and the imagination.

Aesthetic Freedom in Kant and Zhuangzi

For the past two decades, a lot of ink has been spilled over the comparative studies on Kant's and Zhuangzi's aesthetics. Their concepts of freedom and nature seem quite distinct at first glance, but if we take a closer look, they resonate with each other in a subtle way. I will discuss how Kant's free play (*freies Spiel*) differs from Zhuangzi's wandering (遊) and how they can complement each other in human pursuit of aesthetic freedom.