Fluid Materials in Art & Science (Vienna, 27-28 Sep 13)

University of Applied Arts Vienna, Sep 27–28, 2013
Deadline: Apr 30, 2013

Liquid Things

Call for Papers

Flows (Un)bound: Fluid Materials in Artistic and Scientific Practices

Materials, and fluid materials in particular, exert a significant influence on the formation of those artistic and scientific practices within which they are employed and explored. They possess a certain agency that very often thwarts and escapes the original designs and intended goals of researchers and artists. As a result, they have great bearing on our modes of thinking and our imagination. Thus, fluid materials possess the capacity to shape knowledge in a substantial way. Or do they? And if they actually do, how do they wield their influence, how do they actively pose problems within scientific and artistic processes, why should their agency be problematic at all, and to what extent could they retain a systematical resistance towards all attempts of control?

In the last decades, the material culture of both “laboratory life” and studio practice has been increasingly studied. The main focus being the technical and material conditions of art and science such as spatial settings, apparatuses, machines, tools, but also the daily actions and routines, tacit as well as practical knowledge, manual dexterity, bodily gestures, group interactions, networks etc. Studies in this research area made quite clear that these material conditions are not just inevitable circumstances or frameworks within which scientific and creative processes simply ‘take place’. Instead, they have shown that the epistemic and artistic outcomes (i.e. knowledge, concepts, theories, art works) are crucially shaped and defined by the material conditions and contexts of the processes that produced them. Such insights are pivotal departure points of the symposium Flows (Un)bound: Fluid Materials in Artistic and Scientific Practices.

However, we pursue a slightly different approach: We encourage to

focus on investigations into materials that possess some sort of fluid properties and behaviour, and to raise questions about whether and how these materials play a formative part in the shaping of the methods, strategies and practices of their scientific or artistic exploration. Thus, we propose a shift from the technical and material conditions of production to fluid materials as objects of research in both artistic and scientific experiments. This perspective may allow insights into how the dynamic and vibrant performance of these materials mobilised mental and imaginative processes.

The period under consideration is limited to 1900 until today. We are particularly interested in the impact dynamic, transitive and flowing materials have on research practices in art and science. How do they contribute to the thought processes and what effects do they have on epistemic or aesthetic insights? Furthermore, we welcome papers that take a closer look at the (specific) agency of fluid materials, or critically discuss whether 'material agency' exists at all? Our focus is by no means restricted to notions of "auto-poiesis" or "self-activity". Instead, we invite studies which examine some sort of 'productive resistance' that fluid substances and dynamic materials retain within artistic and scientific practices. Since fluid materials are (under most circumstances) malleable, easy to deform and yield pressure, it is obvious that 'resistance' in our context is not synonymous with solidness or rigidness. The 'productive resistance' we are looking for rather points to certain traits and behaviours that make fluid materials difficult to master in the systems tailored for their exploration; a kind of pertinacity which causes 'unanticipatable' events, reactions, and flows. At stake is something that escapes intentions or expectations and, thereby, forces artists and scientists either to regulate and contain fluid materials in different ways or to accept and embrace the new possibilities and potentials opened up by these materials. We are equally interested in papers studying attempts to control and bind material flows within scientific or artistic settings, and papers discussing practices that welcome unbound material flows as aesthetically or epistemically productive. The 'productive resistance' may even affect the framework of common knowledge in so far as it could oppose established modes of intelligibility and traditional ways of reasoning. If this proves true, do we, then, need some sort of "epistemology of the fluid" as companion to an "epistemology of the concrete" (Rheinberger)? Last but not least, the intricate relations between 'the fluid' and 'the concrete', their intermixtures as well as the transition from one state to another are issues also within the scope of the symposium.

General information about the symposium
The symposium will consist of two distinct, yet closely related parts:

1) a public part with two or three keynote lectures delivered by internationally renowned historians of science and art;
2) a workshop in which the selected papers of the invited participants will be discussed. The symposium is conceived as a kind of preparation or 'rehearsal' that shall culminate in an edited volume on the topic and issues of fluid materials as outlined above. Applicants should be willing to contribute to the publication in form of an essay about the subject of their accepted proposal. The PEEK-Project LIQUID THINGS will take over accommodation costs (entirely) and travelling expenses (up to a reasonable amount) for all invited participants.

Requirements
Abstracts (max. 500 words) in English together with a short CV (max. 300 words) should be submitted as an email attachment (PDF) and sent to: info@liquidthings.net
Deadline: April 30th, 2013. We will advise all proposers of accepted papers within four weeks of the deadline.

LIQUID THINGS, Art Research on Active and Transitive Materials - http://www.liquidthings.net
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