Dialogical Imaginations (Eichstätt, 4-10 April 16)

Eichstätt, Bayern, Apr 4–10, 2016
Deadline: Jan 25, 2016

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In the name of the master's program "Aisthesis: Art and Literary Culture – Discourses and Methodologies from a Historical Perspective," encouraged by the Elite Network of Bavaria and of the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, we invite PhD students, postdocs and advanced researchers to apply to participate in the project

Dialogical Imaginations:
Debating Aisthesis as Social Perception, Biopolitics, and New Ideas of Humanism

and to present a paper (20 minutes) at a research atelier scheduled for the week of April 4 to 10, 2016.

1. The topic

Some remarks about the keywords may justify the choice of the topic:

"Aisthesis" means perception. We would like to extend the range of its meaning to include societies' capacities to perceive their own conditions and dispositions – those concerning their inner structures and their external, cultural, and natural contexts. A sociological interrogation of self-conceptions of individuals within societies and of societies within the contexts they envisage is, thus, important for this project. However, "Aisthesis" is also an element in the word "aesthetics." Literary and visual studies have an important role in discussing the topic: artists constantly – often critically or subversively – confront societies with the ways they conceptualize themselves, and with the disciplines and regimes regulating the human condition within them.

Dialogical humanism is an issue that has recently stimulated some debate, and we think that it can be even more relevant in academic, interdisciplinary debates concerning current challenges. We certainly do not want to return to normative models of humanity or to dogmatic claims of timeless validity. For the past couple of years, our period has been marked by debates around the post-human, biopolitics, and an increasing awareness of crisis and of global interdependence. Previously, the concept of humanism had been criticized, for good reasons, by Foucault and by philosophers such as Judith Butler. If the organizers aim to return to humanism, a reevaluation of the dialogical character of humanism is our starting point. In dialogical humanism, man, instead of being defined by a system of norms, is an argument – in the final instance, an inscrutable, inexhaustible argument.

Biopolitics is a keyword for describing the dangers of the collapse of the public sphere, staged

media democracy substituting for real participation, the exclusion of entire groups of people from the realm of justice and law, and attempts to attribute opportunities for life and freedom directly to individuals instead of negotiating them in genuine political spaces. The aim of this project is to historically reconstruct dialogical humanism while at the same time proposing it as an antidote to biopolitics.

By imagination, we refer to the figurations, topoi and sterotypes, visualizations, and constellations underlying social ways of world making. Instead of focusing on individual or "private" imaginations, we consider the imaginary – from the documentary to the fictional - as created in various communal spheres and as resulting from epistemological practices. Instead of analyzing images and pictures in terms of ontology or anthropology, we attempt to inscribe them into the practices they are part of – from mimesis to memory cultures, from social to political constructions, from accounts of actuality to heterotopic or utopic scenarios.

2. The institutional framework and the perspectives of the project

The project is the first step in creating a forum for postgraduate and advanced research in the humanities at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt. The university wants to guarantee a framework for international and interdisciplinary discussions and for research training. It is meant to be a place for dialogue about actual social, ethical, and political challenges and about responses to them in the arts and literature – grounded in the discourse and institutional cultures of various academic disciplines, religions, and denominations.

At the same time, the project is the final major activity of an interdisciplinary MA program entitled "Aisthesis" and funded, until September 2016, by the Elite Network of Bavaria. One of the purposes of the public funding of "Aisthesis" was to encourage the universities participating in this inter-university curriculum (Augsburg, LMU Munich, and Regensburg) to create the structures and to build up the networks necessary for improving the training in advanced studies. The project "Dialogical Imaginations" is both a conclusion of the program, which after ten years of activity and excellent evaluations has reached the maximum period for public support, and an opening toward the foundation, in Eichstätt, of an International Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Humanism.

As Michael F. Zimmermann has directed the MA program "Aisthesis" for the last ten years, he has been charged by the presidium of the Catholic University with organizing a project that will prepare the grounds for the creation of new institutional settings. The Elite Network of Bavaria will generously fund this effort. The International Consortium on Art History / Réseau International pour la Formation à la Recherche en Histoire de l'Art (proartibus.net) lends its support to the project, and the convener is a co-founder of this network.

3. The team and the convener

Fosca Mariani Zini, a professor at the University of Lille, will enrich the forum by encouraging contributions to the key issues of classical humanism. Ms. Zini is a Cicero specialist, and she has also published on topics such as credibility and confidence in Roman humanism and on the premises of argumentation in the history of logic from Aristotle to Leibniz. As a philosopher, she is interested in dialogical structures within logics, for example in the practices of syllogism.

Gernot Müller, a classical philologist and vice president for international relations at the Catholic University, where he is also a member of the “Aisthesis” teaching team, studies the dialogical situations essential not only for the Socratic approach and the various Neoplatonic movements, but also for Hellenistic, Roman, and Renaissance humanisms.

The critical negotiation of space and place in American culture and literature is Kerstin Schmidt’s special area of expertise. Also a member of the “Aisthesis” teaching team, Ms. Schmidt is an Americanist by training and has worked on the literature and culture of the Black diaspora, the idea of the human in American and Canadian documentary photography and architecture, and the resurgent interest in literary humanism in twenty-first-century American fiction. She will contribute comparative perspectives on literary debates about biopolitics, the post-human, and digital humanism.

The sociologist Robert Schmidt, interested in a sociology of practices, works within the framework of post-empiricist and praxeological theorizing inspired by Wittgenstein’s later philosophy. His special areas of expertise are contemporary epistemic cultures of knowledge in various organizations and the performative and affective cultures of protest and contestation that became prominent in the recent social movements of places from Zuccotti Park in Manhattan, Tahrir Square in Cairo, Puerta del Sol in Madrid, Taksim Square in Istanbul, to the Maidan Movement in Ukraine.

Michael F. Zimmermann is an art historian interested in nineteenth- and twentieth-century theories of vision and media such as the illustrated press. He studies “seeing” in classical avant-garde poetology as related to physiological optics (Helmholtz, Mach) and philosophy (Bergson, the Gestalt psychologists, Wittgenstein, Benjamin, pragmatists such as Brandom), and tries to combine analytical and pragmatist picture theory with French theory. He is also interested in mass-produced images; in colonialism, tourism, and landscape; and in typologies of man, people’s psychology, and racism.

4. Forms of organization

The project will consist of a series of platforms.

1. The main platform will be an international and interdisciplinary research atelier scheduled for the week of April 4 to 10, 2016. By “research atelier,” we mean a conference uniting established specialists from the various fields of the humanities and international graduate students chosen by their replies to this call for papers. Free from any hierarchy, they will come together for discussions around topics such as dialogue in humanisms from antiquity to the Renaissance; humanism and the formation of the public sphere; dialogical humanism in philosophy and theology; arguments in favor of and against humanism during the twentieth century (Heidegger vs. Sartre, Clifford vs. Said, Butler vs. Nussbaum, the Foucault debate, et al.); political bodies and the post-human; biopolitics and literary, artistic, or ethnic responses to it; and more. The organizers will decide about sections only after having received the proposals for interventions. The event will take place in a baroque seminar building in the historical city of Eichstätt.

2. The second platform is a three-day workshop uniting academic teachers with masters and PhD students. Scheduled for April 18 to 20, 2016, it will be organized in the castle of Hirschberg near

Eichstätt, marked by the refined rococo style of its rooms. In this workshop, papers presenting broader perspectives of the general topic will be discussed with students from “Aisthesis” and PhD students from the universities that participate in this curriculum (Augsburg, LMU Munich, and Regensburg).

3. The third platform has a virtual character. It is a collection of bibliographic information, texts, and comments concerning the general topic and its various aspects. This material will be available on the learning platform ILIAS used by the Catholic University. Participants will be invited to actively contribute to the bibliography, the choice of texts, and the comments. The material will be useful for further discussions.

4. The fourth platform is the publication of the contributions in English by an internationally active publisher. The publication will be prepared before the research atelier, so that it can be discussed during the event. Professional copy-editing in English is guaranteed as a service for authors who are not native English speakers.

You are invited to send your application (especially to contribute to the research atelier, April 4 to 10, 2016) to Michael F. Zimmermann, professor of art history (to the email address: dialogical-imaginations@ku.de). The deadline for applications (abstract of 300 words, short CV, both in a single pdf) is Monday, January 25, 2016. Travel and accommodation expenses will be covered.

Reference:

CFP: Dialogical Imaginations (Eichstätt, 4-10 April 16). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 14, 2016 (accessed Oct 29, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/11960>.