Spring School "The Power of Immersion" (Berlin, 9–13 Apr 18)

Berlin, Freie Universität Berlin, SFB Affective Societies, Apr 9–13, 2018
Deadline: Feb 28, 2018

Theresa Schütz, Freie Universität

CALL FOR PARTICIPATION
“The Power of Immersion: Performance – Affect – Politics”

We are pleased to announce the 1st International Spring School on “The Power of Immersion: Performance – Affect – Politics”, organized by Rainer Mühlhoff (philosophy) and Theresa Schütz (theatre and performance studies) from the Collaborative Research Centre “Affective Societies” of the Freie Universität Berlin. In an intensive one-week workshop, we will discuss the multi-layered phenomenon of immersion, currently evident both as an aesthetic strategy and a power technique in many areas of contemporary western societies.

SCOPE:
The promise (or phantasm) of “total immersion”, as a certain form of dense involvement in a local environment, is currently seeing a revival in various fields from art and media culture to consumer or corporate life worlds. In media and film studies, immersion describes a mode of reception given by full absorption of the individual into a virtual sphere, combined with the feeling of a blurred threshold between mediating device and mediated content. Recent developments in VR and augmented reality technology have been pushing towards a synchronization of intermodal interfaces and qualities of perception, blending reality and digital spaces into each other. Shopping mall environments, theme parks, escape room games and night clubs also try to capture their consumers by means of immersive synesthetic and visceral stimulations.
In everyday life settings such as corporate work places, a variety of techniques has also been emerging that might be called immersive: a full-blown discourse in Human Resource Management is shaping a new form of governing employees by absorbing their personal skills, emotions and psychic dispositions as productive forces (teamwork, real time “employee engagement”, designed “corporate cultures”).
Going beyond the current research on immersion in cultural and media studies, it is the idea of our Spring School to study different phenomena of immersion specifically as techniques of power and control. “Immersive power” modulates individuals by selective intensification of their affective potentials in social dynamics, nudging their actions and perceptions in certain directions. The architectural and atmospheric design of new work places in modern network capitalism, teamwork and the diversity paradigm in contemporary Human Resource Management, as well as contemporary immersive theatre productions may all be seen under this common aspect. They are immersive techniques of extricating human potentials within a neo-liberal framework. By shifting patterns of gendered and racialized exclusions from discourse to more ephemeral affective

dynamics, new forms of domination and subordination emerge in immersive environments, masking power structures behind trends such as “co-working” culture, “experience industry” and “diversity management”.
On the other hand, immersive experiences in theatre and performance could also be seen as a strategy of criticizing the subtle patterns of modulation, subjectivation and structural violence in everyday interactive scenarios. To the involved subject, they make visible how one’s own behaviour and reactions to an intensive affective situation are co-shaped by myriad traces of embodied norms and exclusions, hierarchical interactions, traumata, resentments and cultural dispositions. Immersive theatre provides an immediately bodily sensation and awareness of one’s specific sensitivities resulting from affective subjectivation. Based on this, the artistic “real--world-simulations” of the Danish-Austrian performance duo SIGNA, for instance, can be seen as experimental social and political spaces where subjects can learn about their own triggers and traumata and about possible strategies to intervene in (staged) situations of structural discrimination, sexual harassment, gender inequality and practices of physical and psychological violence.
In order to develop a power-critical, alternative view on immersion, it is the goal of this interdisciplinary Spring School to describe the phenomenon of immersion specifically in a framework of affect theory and subjectivation. We will then discuss the explicit and implicit operational modality of immersive settings with respect to aspects such as governmental power, normativity and exclusion on the one hand, and its critique on the other.

TOPICS:
Affect Theory, Reception Theory, Subjectivation, Aesthetics and Politics of Immersive Theatre, Philosophy of Social Science, Governmentality, Power Techniques

CONFIRMED LECTURERS (in alphabetical order):
From the fields of theatre and performance studies, philosophy, affect theory and design practice we’re happy to announce contributions by:

Dr. Adam Alston (University of Surrey, Guildford)
Mathew Arthur (Vancouver)
Dr. Eva Holling (Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen)
Dr. Robert Lepenies (Centre for Advanced Studies Justitia Amplificata, FU Berlin)
Dr. Gregory J. Seigworth (Millersville University of Pennsylvania)

ORGANIZERS
The Spring School is an initiative of researchers Rainer Mühlhoff (philosophy) and Theresa Schütz (theatre and performance studies), at the Collaborative Research Centre “Affective Societies” at Freie Universität Berlin.
The research centre is an interdisciplinary framework studying the fundamental relevance of emotional and affective processes to social and political life, with a special focus on migration and intercultural phenomena. The main goal of our interdisciplinary exchange is the development of a suitable relational and dynamic conception of affect and its empirical operationalization. The centre involves eleven disciplines, including cultural studies, art history, sociology, political science, anthropology and philosophy (see www.sfb-affective-societies.de).

PRACTICAL INFORMATION
The Spring School invites applications from students on advanced Masters and Ph.D. levels of all

relevant disciplines (typically between philosophy and performance studies). Courses will be held in English and take place at the Berlin-Dahlem campus of the Freie Universität Berlin. The one-week programme consists of daily lectures contributed by the invited guest lecturers as well as by the organizers (morning sessions), discussion groups (afternoon sessions), and two performance visits (evening sessions). There will also be space to present a selection of participants' research projects. The number of participants is limited to 35.
Participation is free of charge. Accommodation and travel arrangements have to be organized and paid individually. The programme starts Monday 9 April at 10am, and ends Friday 13 April at 6pm.
Candidates are requested to apply to participate by 28 February 2018 by sending a short motivation letter (300 words), an abstract of their current research project or interests (400 words), and a CV. Decisions will be communicated by 6 March 2018.

Please send your application to powerofimmersion2018@gmail.com.
For further information please contact schuetz.theresa@fu-berlin.de or rainer.muehlhoff@fu-berlin.de.

Reference:
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