

Negativity and Celebration of the Surface (Berlin, 4-5 Jul 14)

Berlin, Jul 4-05, 2014

Registration deadline: Jun 26, 2014

Leena Petersen

Workshop:

Negativity and Celebration of the Surface

July 4th/5th 2014

Humboldt University Berlin, Institute of Cultural Studies

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Negativity occurs, if positivity is negated. As a modern concept, it represents itself in rather subversive literature. Simultaneously and in correspondence with 19th century's aniconistic bias, in German Jewish aesthetics, an epistemological approach was established which considered the negative, image-less facet of appearance in order to illuminate an understanding of the world. The shift from materiality to negativity is contrasted by a concurrent positive approach towards concreteness. Following the introduction of a methodology in-between visual and language-based epistemologies, the proposed workshop plans to go over to describe the emergence of distinctive aniconism and negativity in the 19th century, as brought to the fore by e.g. Hermann Cohen and later by the early Frankfurt School. The latter form of negativity suggests that comprehension has thus to be thought beyond the concrete picture of history, namely in critical relation towards the past. This tendency is supposedly followed by e.g. "languages of the unsayable" after the Shoah in more recent theory.

The literary negativity discussed in the first part of the workshop will be contrasted with modern and contemporary literature, theory and art using the surface of reality and its materiality (e.g. Liza Lou, Aim Deuelle Luski). Even though this approach might imply the danger of aestheticising and meaninglessness, it can point towards a deep interest into history, as represented by the consideration of contemporary examples. Thereby, the form of "the paradoxes that complicate the relation between language and the world, and find a precise form of representation capable of expressing the irreducible nature of historical and linguistic reality" (Lüschi) will be considered next to its possible subversive potential. Thereby, potential strategies of how the surface might be able to reproduce a critique of reality beyond pure aestheticising will be discussed.

Program:

Friday, 4th of July

13.30 Opening Remarks

13.45 – 15.30 (chair: Leena Petersen, HU Berlin)

Martin Tremml (ZFL Berlin): Historicising Negativity. From the Bible to the Frankfurt School

Alice Buschmeier (ZJS Berlin): Critique of the Image in Participatory Art and Jewish Thought. A Contribution to Contemporary Art Theory from Rosenzweig's Star of Redemption

15.30 – 15.45 Break

15.45 – 17.15 (chair: N.N.)

Hana Gründler (Max Planck Institute for Arthistory, Florence): "Les usures de l'être". Face, Surface and the Unfinished in the Work of Emmanuel Levinas

Tavi Meraud (Yale German Department): Surface Tension: Membranal Realities of Cinema and Video Art

Saturday, 5th of July

10.00 – 11.30 (chair: Yumin Li, HU Berlin)

Sebastian Truskolaski (Goldsmiths College London): Adorno and Theology

Sami Khatib (FU Berlin): A Non Nullified Nothingness Walter Benjamin and the Messianic

11.30 – 11.45 break

11.45 – 13.15 (chair: Hannah Abdullah, LSE, London)

Caroline Adler (HU Berlin): Iconoclasm/Iconoclasm

Nitzan Lebovic (Lehigh, NY State): Aim Deüelle Lüschi's Photography: The Politics of the Surface

13.15 – 14.30 lunch break

14.30 – 16.00 (chair: Sami Khatib, FU Berlin)

Leena Petersen (HU Berlin): On Poetic Negativity in Paul Celan

Rafael Dernbach (Cambridge): The Touch of Fragile Indexes ? Material Testimonies of Genocide in Nostalgia de la Luz and Drancy Avenir

16.00 – 16.15 break

16.15 – 17.00 Concluding Discussion

Free admission and everyone welcome, but seating is limited. Please register by 26th of June (leena.petersen[at]hu-berlin.de).

CONF: Negativity and Celebration of the Surface (Berlin, 4-5 Jul 14). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 13, 2014 (accessed Apr 29, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/8007>>.