



Aesthetic Practice in Studies of Cultures

4th Annual Conference of the Kulturwissenschaftliche Gesellschaft (KWG)

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University of Hildesheim

Kulturcampus Domäne Marienburg

Call for Papers

The idea of aesthetic practice is used as an open concept, in the productive sense, in Studies of Cultures (*Kulturwissenschaft/en*).

Unlike in 'aesthetic education' where, since Schiller, the focus has been on the formation of the human being as a whole, and in 'aesthetic experience' where the concept of experience leads to a strong emphasis on (subjective) perception, the expression 'aesthetic practice' makes a form of action the centre of attention. This must be distinguished both from rational and from ethical forms of action. What the adjective *aesthetic* describes here is a way of acting in which spaces of creative play, performative-expressive movements and bodily situatedness as experienced through the senses are central. This means that aesthetic practice is not restricted to the traditional arts but includes a range of object fields, from medial forms of expression via everyday practices and design to popular culture. There is thus a distinction between the term aesthetic practice and other approaches, for example focusing on 'symbolic practice' in Bourdieu's sense, which is associated with habitus, or on 'reappropriation practices' of cultural products as investigated by Cultural Studies, since it does not mean a narrow concentration on social-structural factors; rather, the focus is on the specific qualitative features of action in relation to an aesthetic form and aesthetic forming. Simultaneously, aesthetic practices are of course dependent on technical-material, institutional, organizational, economic, political, and other frameworks, or are closely interrelated with these frameworks. Aesthetic practice reacts to such frameworks, and often transforms or goes beyond them. **The first thematic focus of this year's conference is therefore the question of the criteria that make a practice an aesthetic practice.** One of

our assumptions is that there is no way to decide *a priori* what makes something an aesthetic practice; each emphatic form is a new example of aesthetic practice.

At the same time, in recent years aesthetic practice in the narrower sense of artistic practice has become a more important methodological concern in Studies of Cultures. This is because the arts and their production are now playing a central role in a reorientation of the production of knowledge in universities that is also being promoted as a matter of academic politics.

Using the keyword 'artistic research', it is argued that we also need to understand the production of art as a research process. This involves the justified assumption that the aesthetic practice of art and its production goes beyond the bounds of convention, or re-examines and extends convention in its creative spaces. Not propositional knowledge and conceptual history determine aesthetic-artistic practice as a form of action, but rather situative resonances and evidence evoked by the senses that take actors beyond the boundaries set by their own frameworks. The conference will therefore address more recent concepts of artistic research. These approaches have become a concern of Studies of Cultures in the sense that they constitute an innovative epistemic practice, and they also describe an ideal that exists on both sides in different forms: science would like to become 'enchanted theory' by means of art, and art would like to become an 'exact practice' by means of science. **The second theme of the conference therefore concerns the question of the immanent conditions, possibilities and limits of the epistemic overlap between aesthetic-artistic practice and research in Studies of Cultures.**

There is another aspect that is relevant to the Studies of Cultures perspective on aesthetic practice. It is quite clear that scholars working in Studies of Cultures themselves sometimes engage in the field of aesthetic practices as actors, and to that extent they are (co-)shapers of parts of the aesthetic practice to be analyzed. Needless to say, this not only provides scholars with opportunities but also gives rise to problems. It is far from clear whether, and if so how, the increased self-referentiality inherent in this kind of convergence can be dealt with, in terms of method, via a differentiation between someone's role as a scholar and as an artist. Nevertheless: here we have aesthetic practice not only as the *object* of research, but also sometimes and under certain conditions becoming a research *method* in Studies of Cultures. One can illustrate this by looking at how the traditional arts are observed. If one carries out research on, for example, the theatre, as someone who has never participated in the process of rehearsals, most of one's attention will be directed towards the performance and the text associated with it. But if one participates in the rehearsal process or the staging of the play and thus evokes different possibilities for observation and experience, one's perspective on

the object will change considerably. The theater, and the arts in general, become visible as specific aesthetic experimental arrangements. Without circumventing propositional knowledge, aesthetic practice places other guiding differences, and methodological reflection on them, at the centre of its concerns. **The third theme of the conference is therefore the suggestion that we should interrogate aesthetic practice itself as a research method in Studies of Cultures.** In order to advance this perspective, the Hildesheim conference will for the first time offer workshops where the aesthetic practice of Studies of Cultures can be approached performatively.

We welcome proposals (max. 300 words in German or English) addressing these three themes in the form of panels, individual papers, and workshops, to reach us by **30 April 2018**, at kwg18@uni-hildesheim.de.

Information on registration, travel, and accommodation is available at <https://uni-hildesheim.de/kulturpraxis/kwg18/>

The initial draft program will be published by the end of May.