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Aesthetic Dividuations

Summary

The project is based on the insight that cultural and aesthetic articulations in the arts of today as far as they strive for global visibility are necessarily embedded in intercultural and mediatized exchanges, in processes of formal appropriation and recombination, of allusion and parody. In order to highlight their manifold and even contradictory character, they can be called dividuated articulations, according to a term used by Gilles Deleuze, incessantly recombining and transforming their aesthetic elements while nevertheless providing a singular expression. This characterization of time based art productions seems to be even more true in times of globalized art languages, mediatized intercultural and aesthetic exchanges, mutual perceptions and appropriations. "African" aesthetic production may be considered even more dividuated due to the often criticized extraversion, i.e. orientation of "Africa" towards the "West", but also because of its involuntary (post)colonial dependencies on "Western" aesthetic norms and concepts, genres and formats, conditions of production and distribution. This observation goes along with the opposite one, namely that "African" artworks do become more and more self-assured in our times deciding themselves on their specific dividuations, criticizing or parodying their dependencies.

In our researches we want to explore the dividual character of actual art practices, of film, video and music works and of art exhibitions, biennials and film festivals located on the "African continent". By so doing we want to provide an outline of the general shifts in doing art today situated between locality and globality, between "African" traditions and (post)colonial interdependences.

Methods

Our aim is to develop a more adequate analysis and description of the diversified theoretical and aesthetic achievements thanks to an ameliorated and enriching philosophical vocabulary. Since the concept of dividuation embraces as well the idea of cultural entanglements and inner diversity of artworks as of their aesthetic particularity and specific coherence, it is most useful to highlight these different characteristics at the same time. In addition, it can demonstrate that the evaluation of philosophical and artistic statements depends on the chosen perspective and its framing, on the elements put into consideration, and on macro- or micrological approaches. The project's 'method' therefore consists of conceptual work

as well as of the exploration of dividual aesthetic and media practices in the interspace between "Europe", "Africa", and the world.

Key Questions

We try to extend, to actualize and concretize the descriptions of the interdependence of aesthetic articulations today. While, on the one hand, it seems obvious that no artistic practice can be understood as fully independent and individual, unless the desire is to situate it explicitly in a restricted local tradition, it is also evident that the enthusiasm for media globalization and for critical references to traditions of the global North has decreased. "African" artists refer to their continent and its creative potential with a new pride as can be observed at the last art biennials as well as numerous productions in audio-visual media on the "African continent". On the other hand they are aware that all art practices today are results of adaptations and variations of aesthetic languages from elsewhere.

In this sense, we reflect aesthetic practices in "Africa", the "African diaspora", and beyond, focusing on the ambivalent attitude of composite-cultural participation and aesthetic hybridization, of philosophical and artistic appropriations and inventive recombinations, where we engage with repetitive and deviant, standardized and singularized procedures of dividuation.

Contribution to the Cluster's Agenda

The project is directly linked to the Cluster's concepts of relationality and multiplicity by using the key philosophical concept of dividuation. Hence, it is pushing further the idea of interference of aesthetic and artistic articulations and of personal subjectivizations within the globalized world.

Aesthetic and artistic dividuation are discussed mainly through the angle of mediality. As media philosophy tells us, all forms of cultural production are decisively shaped by a respective medium: they only come into being through that very medium (mediality). Due to this mediation, aesthetic productions can and do permanently change throughout history, constantly adopting to the material and technical resources at disposal in a state of flux.

Thus, our understanding of dividuation introduces a materialist turn in "African Studies". It implies a radical privileg-

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ing of the material world, explicitly not reducing it to mind, language, or discourse. However, in contrast to traditional phenomenological approaches, our 'dividuated materialism' focusses not on appearance for a consciousness, but on the matter of the world in its interiority: the multiple matters of intensities, flows, and affects. Of course, the big challenge here is to not fall back into a naïve empiricist stance that 'materializes' the immaterial, even subjectivity, as a positive given in the 'objective' world. In tradition of critical materialism and the Cluster's emphasis on reflexivity we believe that there can never be the position of an external observer relationally disconnected from the world and its objects; rather, it is always already mediated.

Further Links / Key References

Ott, Michaela, 2018. *Dividuations: Theories of Participation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

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