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APPEARANCE

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It. *Apparenza*; Fr. *Apparence (Aspect)*; Germ. *Erscheinung (Schein)*; Span. *Apariencia*. In a first approximation, the appearance of an object refers to the way it looks, or, more broadly, the way it is given to our senses. This way of being given can vary. One and the same thing may appear differently depending on the circumstances and the subject of perception. "Appearance" can have a ring of suddenness to it, in the sense that things can appear all of a sudden, and likewise *disappear* again. With these connotations, the concept hosts an ambivalence of deep philosophical impact. On the assumption that our experience of the world is channeled through the senses, all we ever encounter are, strictly speaking, appearances. But this fact harbors the threat of illusion, since we know that our senses are prone to misperception. Any object given to our senses might turn out to be a 'mere' appearance with no real substance. The ambivalence can be traced back to the Greek concept of φαίνόμενον (*phainomenon*), meaning roughly the same as appearance. Along the lines of this ambivalence, appearances play a central role in epistemology and philosophy of perception, on the one hand, and in aesthetics, on the other.

GENERAL SIGNIFICANCE

The epistemological issue of appearance is whether we can gain knowledge about the world from perception. In everyday language, perceptual beliefs count as strong justifications for knowledge claims. But perceptions can be deceptive, and if that is the case, beliefs grounded in them will be unjustified. This skeptical threat has been, and still is, answered in a wide variety of ways (Lyons 2009). The issue of appearance in the theory of perception is to explain the process by virtue of which we perceive content at all. Some authors think of what appears to us as raw 'sense-data', yet to be processed by our minds. Recent enactivist positions, in contrast, emphasize the role of bodily skills in perception. We are not passively exposed to appearances, but actively engaged in the process of perception (Noë 2012).

AESTHETICS AND PHILOSOPHY OF ART

It might seem evident, or even conceptually true, that aesthetics is concerned with appearances in particular. After all, it is the philosophical field dealing with sensory experience: that is simply what αἴσθησις (*aisthesis*) means. Indeed, in its inception in A. G. Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (1750), the new discipline of aesthetics is designed as a theory of the type of knowledge which is derived directly from perception. However, it is I. Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790) that establishes an emphatic idea of appearance to be the particular site of aesthetic perception. In the overall design of Kant's philosophy, appearances mark the intersection between the objective world and our subjective access to it. The site of their appreciation as the appearances they are is our aesthetic attention to beauty, in which we suspend both our theoretical and practical interests. Along these lines, Kant's aesthetics grounds the autonomy of the aesthetic, in general, and the autonomy of art, in particular (Kant 2000). This is why modern understandings of appearance invariably draw, in one way or the other, on Kant's exposition of the concept.

While Kant's aesthetics is concerned with the beautiful in general, his successors soon narrow down the discipline's focus to the (fine) arts (Rancière 2013). G. W. F. Hegel spearheads this turn, dismissing the appreciation of nature as of minor philosophical interest. In his philosophy of art, the structure of the work brings "the idea" to appearance, i.e. the way our capacities of understanding structure the world. Artworks are objects standing out for their sensual appearance, which is precisely their way of showing our relation to the world (Hegel 1975). Following in Hegel's wake, many aestheticians continue to count works of art as paradigmatic aesthetic objects. However, especially in the light of 20th century avant-gardes, this intuition has been contested. A. C. Danto, for instance, argues that artworks do not have to be objects for the senses at all. Instead, art should be defined by its semantic properties (Danto 1981). In this line of thinking, widely embraced in the anglophone tradition of Analytic Philosophy, aesthetics is seen as concerned with the status of art and the language of judgment and interpretation rather than with the sensory structure of works and their experience.

Hegel's legacy, however, remains hugely influential in various branches of Continental Philosophy. In either of those branches works of art, or aesthetic phenomena in general, are explicated as singled out by their sensual appearances. The tradition of phenomenology broadly construed, with proponents such as E. Husserl, M. Heidegger, and M. Merleau-Ponty, takes the appearance of objects, or rather the appearance of the life-world we encounter in experience, as key to their very being. The way things present themselves to us cannot be understood independently of our ways of encountering them. This is why knowledge of the true nature of objects is to be found *precisely by way of* paying (proper) attention to the phenomena: to the way our world appears to us. Works of art, in this tradition, can be understood as demonstrations of our way of experiencing the world (Figal 2015). In Heidegger's quintessential view, the work of art presents itself simultaneously as a thing and an appearance. Thus, it represents a dynamic structure which brings the entanglement of nature and culture to experience (Heidegger 2002).

Likewise, in Th. W. Adorno's aesthetics, art is a dynamic vehicle of truth. However, in Adorno this representation works negatively. The work of art has a dialectical structure, oscillating between *mere appearance* (*Schein*) and the *aesthetic appearance* of a truth beyond the materiality of objects. Embodying this oscillation, artworks invite comprehension as much as they withstand it. In explaining the artwork's appearance, Adorno talks of "apparition," comparing it to a "heavenly vision" (Adorno 1997: 80).

As of the turn of the 21st century, contemporary German aestheticians, notably M. Seel and G. Figal, continue one or the other of these traditions and publish studies explicitly revolving around conceptions of appearance, or appearing, in the arts. Seel particularly draws on Adorno's aesthetics in conceptualizing artworks as occasions of aesthetic experience. They point to the particularities of the here and now, by affording a constant invitation to experience the process of their appearing in the present moment (Seel 2005; 2007). Figal, in his turn, explicitly projects a phenomenological aesthetics, highlighting the connection between a receptive attitude triggered by beautiful objects and the spatial character of artworks' appearing. By his account, there is nothing behind or beyond appearances; they are the site on which we can experience our attunement to the world (Figal 2015).

Authors in the structuralist and post-structuralist tradition like J. Rancière explicate the role of appearance in aesthetics as an indicator for underlying political and ideological currents. Rancière describes the current configuration of aesthetic production and experience as the reign of an "aesthetic regime of the arts," as opposed to former "regimes" organized around ethical or representational functions of art. In his account, the fact that today we conceive of artworks as entities set apart by their appearance is itself dependent upon socio-political configurations and therefore subject to historical change (Rancière 2004; 2013).

OTHER APPROACHES

The issue of resemblance is one of the central challenges of *Picture Theory*. Insofar as pictures depict, it seems to many that they show or reproduce the visual appearance of objects. But similarity is a notoriously vague concept (Goodman 1968), so many contemporary picture theorists seek to explain the appearance of pictures in different terms (Abell, Bantinaki 2010). Of course, the epistemological issue of appearances is reinforced when it comes to pictures. While pictures often serve to represent past configurations of objects, their appearance may just as well not denote at all.

Questions of bodily appearance are central to the emergent field of *Body Aesthetics*. The appreciation of the human body has been largely neglected by philosophical aesthetics in general – with the notable exception of F. Schiller's 1793 essay *On Grace and Dignity* (Schiller 1905) –, but recently invites broader attention (Irvin 2016). The concept of appearance in this sense includes the concept of human beauty, which also attracts increased attention lately. The appearance of a person is often understood as a natural property of their body. Yet critics from the fields of gender, race and disability studies highlight the highly socially construed character of our judgments of bodily appearance.

Various other subdisciplines like Everyday Aesthetics, Environmental Aesthetics, or Commodity Aesthetics, seek to shift the focus of Aesthetics away from the predominance of art, as it has been

established in the 19th century. Discussions in these areas are concerned with aesthetic experiences understood in the broadest sense, as well as, correspondingly, with aesthetic properties of all kinds of (ordinary) objects, constellations of objects, or events. This expansion of the field of investigation involves reflection on the concept of the Aesthetic, or, as some would have it, a return to its original scope. In this sense, said subdisciplines reaffirm aesthetics' principal concern with sensual appearances (Saito 2007; Carlson 2009; Drügh *et al.* 2011).

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