

Bern, 25 October 2011

Lay Summary for SNF Project Sinergia:

The Interior: Art, Space, and Performance (Early Modern to Postmodern)

Aims of the research project

Our project investigates pre-modern, modern, and postmodern “interiors” and their complex relationships with exterior spaces. At the project’s core is an understanding of space as dynamic and alterable, generated through human agency. We are particularly interested in interiors that oscillate(d) between private and public, as well as in spaces whose boundaries were or are permeable, shifting between the interior and the exterior world. Our main aim is twofold: *first*, we will study and compile a corpus of concepts and interpretative frameworks for the “interior” across specific media and cultural-historical contexts; and *second*, we will use this material to develop new avenues of inquiry within the fields of art history, history of architecture, history of design, theatre history, and cultural history.

Background

Over the last two decades notions of the “interior” have become destabilized and problematic, especially within theatre, the fine arts, architecture, and critical theory, and this has fostered reformulations of traditional concepts of inside vs. outside, public vs. private, and reality vs. representation. We consider interior spaces, in terms of both actual spaces and their artistic representations, as hybrid and heterogeneous constructions that offer new methodological frameworks for historically situating aesthetic and social phenomena. Compared to most previous literature on interior spaces, which has focused either on specific time periods or on the interior as a genre of painting, the scope of our research project is much larger. Emphasizing the interactions of spaces, lifestyles, artistic practices, and forms of representation from early modern to postmodern times, our work brings new perspectives and approaches to a subject at the intersection of various disciplinary realms.

Methods and significance

Our approach is informed by both the “performative turn” and the “spatial turn” within scholarly discourses, for which the reception of and responses to Michel Foucault’s essay *Des espaces autres* and Henri Lefebvre’s *La production de l’espace* have been of major importance. A study of the multiple relationships between art, space, and performance is particularly suitable for a collaborative research project that engages historians of art, architecture, theatre as well as textiles and costumes. Although the six subprojects are guided by different historical perspectives and methodologies, they all share an interest in investigating issues of hybridity, imagination,

identity, gender, and participation in relation to interior spaces. Through its focus on the “interior” as both the subject of and a theoretical framework for research, this project will bring to light new historical evidence and insights, and it will also motivate new approaches within the individual investigators’ areas of research.

Subprojects

(A) *The Stage as Scena Mundi: Narration, Performance and Imagination* (Prof. Dr. Peter W. Marx). This subproject focuses on the concept of the staged scene as an imaginative interior space, exploring the narrative and performative potentials of theatrical spaces. The scene is thereby considered as amalgamating physical space with elements of cultural memory in order to create a projection of the (exterior) world. This contribution furthermore integrates spatial theories specific to theatre studies into our broader research project.

(B) *The Art and Visual Culture of Solitude: Interiority and Interior Spaces in Post-Tridentine Europe* (Prof. Dr. Christine Göttler). Intended as a contribution to our understanding of “interiority” and “interior spaces” after the Council of Trent, this subproject focuses on the ways in which the abstract and ubiquitous space of prayer was conceived, imagined, represented, and actually built in the early modern Catholic world. Interior spaces dedicated to the cultivation of the religious self functioned as “anachronic” sites in that they referred to and recreated distant origins and identities – linking the dawn of Christianity to the present age of religious reform.

(C) *“Mit köstlichen tapetzereyen und anderer herrlicher zier” – Interiors for Court Festivals and Ceremonies* (Prof. Dr. Birgitt Borkopp-Restle). This subproject analyses ephemeral interior constructions and object ensembles that were used during court ceremonies and festivities from the early modern period until the eighteenth century. Most of these were compound spaces, combining objects from different periods and regions. The subproject will elucidate the construction and furnishing of such transitory interiors with a view towards the complex messages they conveyed within formalized sequences of events.

(D) *Anagrammatic Spaces: Interiors in Contemporary Art* (Prof. Dr. Peter J. Schneemann). This subproject deals with contemporary art installations that evoke or reference concrete sites of social interaction. Despite their artificiality and isolation from everyday experience, these heterogeneous constructions have the potential to work as sites of social interaction and to create social significance. Research questions concern the functions and meanings of these installations as well as the viewer’s role as performer within them.

(E) *Constructions of the Feminine Interior* (Prof. Dr. Norberto Gramaccini). This subproject investigates painted interiors from the seventeenth through the early twentieth century as gendered fictions; they are considered as representing or reflecting dominant constructs of feminine behavior as filtered through the eye of the male viewer and artist. The subproject will highlight shifts in the relationship between the interior and exterior worlds and in conceptions of femininity and masculinity.

(F) *Heterotopian Spaces: Public, Semi-public and Non-public Interiors in Contemporary Architecture, 1970–2010* (Prof. Dr. Bernd Nicolai in collaboration with Asst. Prof. Dr. Wendy Shaw). In this subproject interior spaces are understood as both constituents and representations of the present exterior world. Public interior spaces, such as airports and museums, are treated as documents of cultural, social, and aesthetic changes during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This subproject will make a substantial contribution to the study of the modern and postmodern concepts of the interior.