

## Introduction

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One of the recent turns in the humanities and arts research is the switch from a focus on art as a static, representational thing to art as an active actor within a larger network of agential objects. What unites these approaches is that they all suggest that art is something that does things. Such a perspective explodes the notion of art, opening it up to a broad range of practices, where art participates in society instead of merely reflecting society. Art is thus not only a cultural field à la Pierre Bourdieu (1993) but also a range of practices intent on engaging our senses and sensibilities. Where earlier aesthetic and cultural research focused on matters of meaning, signi-

fication, and hermeneutics, this special issue asks questions of aesthetic, materiality, agency, performativity, sensation, and feeling. Not as a matter of rejecting earlier findings but simply as an attempt to explore the “other side” of the experience of art.

We must account for the intensity of art, otherwise we can only explain part of our aesthetic experience. This argument is found in critics as diverse as Brian Massumi (2002), Charles Altieri (2003), and Sianne Ngai (2007). They draw on philosophers such as Alfred North Whitehead, Henri Bergson, and Gilles Deleuze, who have argued that much of our perception is not cognitive but intuitive; we connect to the world through our senses. Cognition and feeling are not distinct but articulated together; their relation changes depending on the specific artwork. Similarly, our bodies are porous to the world around us. Through sensory perception the world reaches into our bodies, just as our bodies extend through the environment.

By exploring the sensory experience of art, we can also understand the intersection of art, culture, and politics in ways that go beyond issues of representation. Art becomes a doorway to new experiences, new sensations, and new modes of thought: consider, for instance, the uncanny spatial feelings we get from Robert Rauschenberg's *Skulls* or the difficult music of Karlheinz Stockhausen. This process-oriented approach clarifies the need for art by showing art's transformative potential. Art is one of the most vital aspects to the becoming of life; the way that we understand life and our lives are organized by works of art. Works of art filter our perception, whether by obscuring areas of life or by claiming new territories.

This focus extends through current approaches such as affect studies, performativity studies, and speculative aesthetics, revealing that thought, act, and creativity cannot be separated. Such a perspective is also evident in (new) materialist or actor-network approaches to art, exemplified in critics such as Rita Felski (2008), Timothy Morton (2009), Eileen A. Joy (2013), and others. Art is never isolated from other actors and art's materials have their own forms of agency. Once again, simply by extending agency to actants other than humans, nothing is taken away from human beings. The fact remains that there are far more components to the networks of art and that objects, not only subjects, have agency. By investigating the agential impact of artworks, we gain a fuller understanding of how art works.

The essays in this issue speak to these concerns in various ways. In 'Computation as Medium', Elizabeth Jochum and Lance Putnam investigate how new technologies are transforming the relations between art work and audience. In a similar vein, Steen Ledet Christiansen points out that technologies of musical reproduction shape what we hear and how we hear it in 'Sounds of Futures Past'. And yet, as he shows, older technologies may continue to manifest themselves in the form of "ghost effects". Matter thus seems to be distinct and yet very hard to separate from mediation.

Related issues crop up in the medium of literature. Beate Schirrmacher's analyses works by Günther Grass and Elfriede Jelinek in 'Disturbing the Metaphor', pointing out that both authors not only draw on metaphors in their works, but also materialize metaphors in distinct ways. The performative aspects of language are also picked up by Jens Kirk in 'Changing Your Vision for Good' in his discussion of Robert MacFarlane's *Landmarks* as a striking example of the "post-pastoral" genre. Why are you attuned to one piece of art and not to another that might seem to be quite similar? This issue is picked up by Kim Møller in his discussion of experiences of looking at paintings in 'Experiencing a Painting', combining phenomenology with neuroscience.

There is a related interest in combining humanistic and scientific frameworks in Anders Bonde and Birger Larsen's essay 'Studying the Aesthetics of Images and Advertising Films', which combines semiotic analysis with physiological measurement of audience response. In her analysis of Christian Lollike's play *Living Dead* of a contemporary Danish in 'Dissolving Europe?', Birgit Eriksson draws explicit connections between aesthetic feelings and obstructed agency. Liani Lochner also tackles the relations between affect and language in 'What Literature Can Do', where she draws on Derek Attridge's ideas about the singularity of literature to reflect on her response to Zoe Wicomb's *October*, while Jodie Childers deals with the creativity of four individuals incarcerated in mental asylums during the early part of the twentieth century in 'Making Art as Resistance'. Katalin Halasz's essay 'On Affecting White Women' blends an account of a video performance with some broader reflections on the relations between art and sociology, a topic broached slightly differently by Frederik Tygstrup, who outlines the democratic potentials of art in his "The Work of

Art.” Finally, Rita Felski provides a response to the issue’s articles in the postscript ‘How is an Art Work an Agent?’

## References

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