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Dissertation Review

Jasmin Schaitl

Perceiving Touch – Being in the Present – Training the Mind through Artistic Practices. Haptic Awareness in Performative Practices

Doctoral thesis in the field of arts in the discipline of fine arts and art conservation
at the Doctoral School of the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław

Artistic work

I have known Jasmin Schaitl personally since inviting her to collaborate in the German-Danish BRISE°2 Performance Art Festival Flensburg/Aabenraa in 2014. Already by then, her artistic contribution was influenced by a meditative and minimalistic approach to performance, as her long-durational piece in an industrial building showed.

Her exploration of theoretical relationships is based on her installation entitled „reciprocity“ which has been exhibited three times, at the Altán Klamovka Gallery in 2021, at the City Gallery of Blansko in 2022 and during the cultural week in Zhoř (Krakovev) in 2023. The installation consists of a wire sculpture hanging in the exhibition space, a table with materials on it (metal wire, pliers, paper and pencils), and written instructions on what to do with them. In later exhibitions, items from previous presentations as well as paper and video works will also be on display.

"reciprocity" is conceived as a processual participatory work of art that creates an atmospheric density in the varying exhibitions, inviting the viewing public to contemplate and actively engage physically and mentally. Jasmin creates an open environment in which visitors to the exhibition can view the metal sculpture and its shadows, and at the same time actively immerse themselves in memories at their own discretion. Ultimately, the choice of a positive "joyful memory", which she defines as the "central aim" of her artistic work, and the accompanying two-handed shaping of a metal wire triggers a materialised

expression of what has been experienced in order to anchor the relived experience in a lasting way. The resulting objects that the visitors produce will be integrated into the installation.

The performative and participatory installation impresses with its reduction to a minimalist aesthetic setting and offers space and freedom of choice for individual realisation within the given framework.

Jasmin's artistic-research approach deals with the activation of one's own ability to act and with the question of how performative tasks involving the sense of touch can contribute to maintaining concentration. She draws attention to the interweaving of mindful thinking of a joyful memory and the simultaneous use of one's own hands to transform the perceived impressions into a specifically shaped "line" by bending a metal wire. With her decision to combine thought and memory processes with practical activity, Jasmin enables deeper self-perception and access to physically anchored memories.

Jasmin defines herself as an "artist as facilitator" who offers methods "that can train the mind through artistic, performative practices"; thus, expanding her artistic approach towards the creation of experiential spaces for well-being and agency. As she herself emphasises, her installations aim to turn viewers into active participants and thus initiate processes of self-empowerment.

Jasmin's endeavour to withdraw as an active performer in order to leave the "performance" to the individual viewers in her so-called "*Performance for the Mind*" seems questionable, however, as she continues to "guide" the audience through pre-recorded spoken or written instructions. This maintains her presence despite her physical absence.

In the field of tension between fleeting memories and "archiving", Jasmin's decision to have the aluminium sculpture "lines of thought" pressed into a cuboid in a waste press and to integrate it into subsequent exhibitions seems to me to be somewhat ambivalent and in contrast to the fragile fleetingness of the collected memory impressions. Even if the pressed object is aesthetically pleasing, looking at the cube would raise questions about the necessity of permanent conservation instead of the desired lingering in joyful remembrance.

Description of the work (written part)

In her dissertation, Jasmin explores the intertwining of touch, memory and mindfulness with instruments of a performative and participatory approach as an artistic practice. She draws on a variety of tangible and intangible methods and practices relating to touch and mindfulness.

Based on her personal biography, Jasmin vividly presents the stages of her artistic development process and provides insights into the gradual creation of the artistic work "reciprocity" presented here.

In relation to the physical and mental experiences of the exhibition visitors, Jasmin addresses a wide range of topics relating to body, mind, thought and memory, which she explores in subsequent chapters. She examines the connections between touch and sensation, including memory and the potential for imagination, by first analysing "how artistic practice enables sensory perception" and providing definitions of the terminology used.

After an introduction to the sense of touch, her discussion of mindfulness methods in the context of cognitive neuroscience and psychology leads to a detailed discussion about neuroplasticity. She touches on a theory of "forgetting" in order to delve deeper into the understanding of memory processes as a vital "act of remembering" (Ingold).

Theoretical references are woven into the text, such that the structure within the chapters sometimes seems lost, making it challenging to follow thematic focal points and sudden leaps of thought.

Jasmin incorporates therapeutic approaches such as MBSR (mindfulness-based stress reduction technique) into her artistic research, which helps to "train the mind and heighten awareness", and talks about relevant anatomical details of the brain to access emotions and empathy through the lens of imagination.

In addition to references to artists who have inspired her, Jasmin provides in chapter 2 insights into her earlier work, in which she often used thread as a material, with the "line" acting as a metaphor for "time". In various long-duration performances, visitors could observe Jasmin repeating individual movements over hours in a meditative state, leaving behind fragile traces of the slowed-down process, e.g. three-dimensional "footprints".

In her performances, Jasmin has the gift of creating open spaces for experiencing a shared space-time together with the participants, in which the participants can reflect on their own thoughts. Jasmin defines the subsequent handover of a tactile memento to the participants as a significant change in her artwork, but surprisingly asks the participants to leave behind their own creations in "reciprocity".

Jasmin and Matej Frank's intention to capture fleeting moments of encounter in the form of drawings and the decision to show these in exhibitions leads to reflections on questions of collecting and archiving. Jasmin's own reflections reveal an ambivalence when it comes to condensing the fleeting experience of "time" into a tangible "physicality of past time". It is possible that addressing theories of "archiving", which is a central aspect of "reciprocity", could have provided clarification.

Overall, it is noticeable that the sensory, physical and haptic reference and the inclusion of the "felt sense" repeatedly take a back seat to the thought processes "in the head". The possible overcoming of the "body-mind split" in the artistic realisation through the inclusion of the sense of touch is hinted at the end. The immersion in the investigation of touch and haptics in collaboration with Teresa Silon foreshadows a promising deepening of the aspects of feeling and the "felt sense" in Jasmin's future artistic research practices.

Jasmin's exploratory research practice and extensive investigations into related theory powerfully demonstrate her ongoing artistic development in well-being and self-care. Exploring the connections between touch and sensation, including memory and the potential of imagination, she provides an in-depth analysis of "how artistic practice enables sensory perception" in her written part.

Following my analysis of her dissertation and taking into account her creative work as well as her professional practice in the field of art, I highly recommend that Jasmin be awarded an academic Ph.D. title in the field of art, in the discipline of visual arts and art conservation.



Dr. Elke Mark