

Dr K: Perception in modern culture

Uppsala Stadsteater, Uppsala, Sweden. 8 March – 17 May 2008

Dr K is a project dealing with different thematic approaches to the relation *Man-Perception-Culture*. The starting point is the story of Raudive's attempts to break the boundaries between the living and the dead. Each performance begins with a theatre play of approximately one hour, where four actors work with Raudive's methods of communicating with the dead through tape-recordings.

With this narrative as an initiation, we create an eight-week programme including a multitude of visiting artists, philosophers, workshops, seminars, film showings, etc. The programme will be arranged in collaboration with a number of different institutions and departments, e.g. The Royal University of Fine Arts in Stockholm and Uppsala University. Apart from the theatre stage we intend to communicate the process through other media, such as local television (TV-TV in Copenhagen) and the Internet.

The perspectives vary, but also intertwine throughout the process. Our aim is to create a space of accumulation and exchange based on knowledge, experiences and interpretations on the subject of human perception. With the intention of keeping the process in a continuous change, each night will present a unique selection of guests and co-producers sharing and discussing thoughts, theories, experiences and impressions. The only restriction is the theatre closing time at 11:00 pm

The following is examples of how we approach the different themes.

Representation

We begin the period with a basic, underlying theme, i.e. *Representation*. How is the world as we perceive it related to the true, inherent nature of things? What is the difference between "being-a-woman" and "being-called-a-woman"? Is there such a thing as "das Ding an sich" – the thing-in-itself – beyond the subject? (The opposite, "*Is there a subject?*" is as relevant; yet we try to save this question at issue for the forthcoming theme of "Identity/Institution".)

Representation is also quintessential in the world of theatre; as the signs we use, the stories we tell or the "masks" we create to live through experiences inaccessible or undesirable in the "real" world. Hence we find it natural to open our work at Uppsala Stadsteater with a thorough exposition of this matter – the significance of signs and representation in human perception of reality.

Initiation

Communication is possible only with our common access to language and signs, as is linguistic and semiotic exchange possible only with common access to the codes we use to define the world as signs. The initiation-theme focus on these codes, but also on strategies in dispose of creating the attention needed to expose the reality described in and with the codes.

If the purpose of the Crusades and the search of the Holy Grail only were to find *the* actual cup, it would for ever have been considered a historical failure. Most alchemists never succeeded in their attempts to make gold, but discovered many other interesting facts on the way.

This, to be able to give something the attention needed to discover “what should not be”, is a big scarcity in our times. Of certain interest in Raudive’s work is therefore his creating of a manual for tuning and enhancing one’s perception; as an “Initiation - direction for use”.

Sound

The most tangible theme headlines, Sound and Image, proceed from the dialectics between vision and hearing – the two fundamental organs of perception in Western culture. Word-image as state of opposition is often pivotal throughout history: Which of the two sensory organs perceive/recreate the most truthful idea of the material, as well as the spiritual reality? This week is devoted on different approaches to our acoustic relation to the world.

Essential in Raudive’s theory is that the voices of the dead can not affect the sound waves acoustically, but only communicate through electro-magnetic waves. Thus, for us to be able to hear them speak, we need to convert the electro-magnetic waves into sound waves with the tape recorder.

According to Raudive, you need to listen to the recordings 10-15 times before you can discern the voices from the general tape hiss. Then, if we listen more carefully in different situations – what else could we hear? Each day we are exposed to a large quantity of sound, containing all sorts of information. We sort it by putting the majority of it aside, just to be able to handle the world around us. What kind of “hidden” values and ideologies are to find in the priorities made? What is worth hearing, and which information disappears in to non-existence?

Image

*You shall not make for yourself a carved image –
any likeness of anything that is in heaven above,
or that is in the earth beneath,
or that is in the water under the earth.*

This is the original second commandment, although, in both Lutheran and Catholic tradition it has been deleted. Instead the tenth commandment is divided in two, whereupon “your neighbour’s house” and “your neighbour’s wife” (and slave and donkey) now has commandments of their own. It is of course impossible to come to any certain conclusions regarding the intentions or significance of this fact, but the change of focus is inevitable; from a defence from human depiction of the divine, to an increased protection of our private property.

Today, when the clash of East and West has its epicentre somewhere between Muhammad caricatures and the fatwa, we tend to forget the historical and theological implications of this question, also from a European perspective. Depiction of the worldly, as well as the divine, has often been an essential and charged issue, not least in the conflict between East and West Rome. This course of events, known as the Iconoclasm, involves the different attitudes towards images of God, and is manifested in the split between the Orthodox and the Catholic churches, which gave rise to Europe as we know it today.

In *Critique of Cynical Reason* German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk works out the concept of ideology as a “false conscious”, on the thesis of cynicism as being the dominating function of ideology. The cynical subject is fully aware of the distance between reality and the “ideological

mask,” but nevertheless he holds to the mask. Could images represent the equivalent aesthetical disguise, as the paradox construction of an “enlightened false conscious”?

We know Europe is not the centre of the world, but still, in maps we find the continent in the middle, as always since the days of Colonialism. Is this because of practical circumstances, like if it would be an enormous undertake to have the whole world “re-learning”? On the contrary, could this be a strategy, in which we communicate both our values and political colour, as a refusal to “re-learn”?

This week is devoted on different approaches to the image as signifying practice; politically, but also socially and emotional – what colour is number 5, and what taste has the colour red?

Identity/Institution

An initial agreement in our work with Dr K. is that we not take so much interest in whether or not he actually succeeded in communicating with the dead. Most important is the search for a “manual” which helps to sharpen one’s perceptivity enough to observe parts of reality usually overlooked. And where Raudive considers the recorded conversations to prove an intact identity after death, we find, in his work, more the potential of a perception of the world, possible only *beyond* our identities.

This week’s work revolve round the relation between the individual subject and the institutions of society; material institutions – schools, prisons and art institutions – as well as more social forms of institutions, such as democracy and culture.

The theme can be approached from two different angles. 1. What kind of subjects/identities and/or processes of subjectivation are being shaped when the individual confronts the institutions of our time? 2. The significance of such concepts as autonomy, identity/subject and representativity are more and more questioned. How will institutions like democracy and representative parliamentarianism face this future?

Theology/Economics

Is it the blood of Christ we drink during the Communion? Is a Picasso worth a billion? Were Pontus Hultén’s “licensed” imitations of the Warhol Brillo-boxes worth more, before a Swedish newspaper uncovered a story exposing them as having been produced to late, i.e. after the expiration of the “licence”?

Until the 14th century the spiritual/divine was still in close relation to the material/human. The natural and the supernatural were still explained as two aspects of the same reality, and not as two different truths, separated and on each side of what is considered “real”. Since the Renaissance and the secularization of the world, a mercantile economy grew forth, changing from barter with the actual value of commodities, to capitalism’s trade with the expected value of products and trademarks. This economic change occurred simultaneously as theology gradually separated The Father/God from the Son/the humans. We find this an interesting fact and investigate possible relations. Or is it just a random parallelism?

We will also look at the original meaning of the religious understanding of *revelation*; *lat. revelatio*, i.e. disclosure. Can reality be examined through scientific means exclusively? Or is there some knowledge that can be achieved only through “divine intervention” – i.e. a revelation? What is a revelation? Can it be analysed, and can you tell a “true” from a “false” revelation?

Economics/Media

The inspiration for the theme of this week comes from the following quote of Giorgio Agamben analyzing the French film-maker Guy Debord and his theory on *The Society of the Spectacle*:

Capitalism in its final form, he [Debord] argued, – radicalizing the Marxian analysis of the fetishistic character of commodities [...] – presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles, in which all that was directly lived is distanced in a representation. The spectacle does not simply coincide, however, with the sphere of images or with what we call today the media: It is “a social relation among people, mediated by images,” the expropriation and the alienation of human sociality itself. [...] The spectacle is nothing but the pure form of separation: When the real world is transformed into an image and images become real, the practical power of humans is separated from itself and presented as a world unto itself. In the figure of this world separated and organized by the media, in which the forms of the State and the economy are interwoven, the mercantile economy attains the status of absolute and irresponsible sovereignty over all social life. [...] It can now manipulate collective perception and take control of social memory and social communication, transforming them into a single spectacular commodity where everything can be called into question except the spectacle itself, which, as such, says nothing but, “What appears is good, what is good appears.”

Agamben, G. (1993) *The Coming Community*.
University of Minnesota Press. p. 78-79.

Time/Retro

This theme headline originates from the idea of seeing death/resurrection as *retro*, or as a possibility of a new thinking.

The week is thought to function as a kind of summary; an adaptation and evaluation of the whole process, added a reinterpretation of previous events of the process. It is like a sampling of our own work. Whilst searching for new comprehension, we are doing a recreation of the process, only this time as a representation of itself.

This we have never tried before.

Anders Paulin/Joachim Hamou