

Gerhard Hofbauer

**"To express in the arts how nature affects".**

Approaches from an updated reflection on Polyesthetics according to Wolfgang Roscher

**The Polyaisthesis Symposium of the International Society for Polyaesthetic Education 2020 aimed to explore the topic in depth by topic-sharpening contributions from different, sector-specific perspectives and to open up a broad horizon of action by means of exemplary interdisciplinary and intermedia artistic contributions.**

**The outcomes will be taken as a basis for the motivation of educational projects in the years 2021/22.**

### **A preliminary remark**

While planning the symposium finally, the world slides into the corona pandemic. A virus, only detectable in its effects, existence-threatening on the human organism, perturbs the entire world order. Massive restrictions on consumption and on mobility have an enormous impact to societies in almost all parts of the world.

Financial poverty, loss of work, social deficits lead to a loss of meaning, spread depression. They reduce self-perception and collective action to the preservation of individual health and try to limit social damage. The mass media counteract this by excavating cultural highlights from their archives, while the productive art scene is increasingly running into a complete lockdown.

The already in the year 2019 fixed symposium theme "Showing how nature touches in the arts" – in the broadest sense of exhilarating and oppressive aspects - suddenly acquires new meaning and significance and is going to be discussed in a more life-relevant context than before.

The International Society for Aesthetic Education decided to hold the symposium based on its conviction, that aesthetic-artistic approach to the world of today and tomorrow – in addition to many operational interventions and procedures – is required generally.

In retrospect, the decision to organise the symposium in a remote location in a small circle of present participants at the end of September 2020, with virtual connection of international members who were prevented from travelling, has proved to be a fortunate stroke of luck, despite the circumstances.

## **The intention of the symposium**

Contributions from art, science and interdisciplinary perspectives shall explore the topic in depth. Artistic presentations are intended to enable aesthetic approaches to the topic. Workshop contributions shall evoke scenarios of real aesthetic experience.

## **Results, the 'working outcome' of the symposium**

The overview of the events shows a variety of approaches to action. Theory-based practical insights provide methodological insights. The interdisciplinary discussions sharpen the view on interrelationships and profile open questions. The dialogues between the sciences and the arts reinforce the broad scope of the topic "Expressing through the arts how nature affects" and outline a variety to implement the theme. The fact that aesthetic experience and aesthetic expressivity can open up meaning for human beings and become a resource for coping with the challenges of individual life is proving to be a source of consensus. In other words: distinctive abilities of aesthetic perception and experience are, in addition to all other abilities of problem solving, an indispensable dimension, a character-forming parameter of human action.

## **The educational context of the topic**

The reciprocal relationship between natural existence and individual perception via the human senses, which are themselves inherently predisposed, proves to be inescapable. The experience of nature takes place and effects primarily "on one's own body". The reflection of these sensual processes opens up the possibilities of self-perception. The focus of all thematic approaches is the aesthetic dimension of the contact with and through nature.

The discussion of the aesthetic dimension of experience does not exclude that of conceptual and ethical recognition. It wants to enable scientifically and practically, to make them distinguishable, reflectable and available. Aesthetic experience contains in itself the power that moves the human, through the 'awakened senses', in the experience of the own life-atmosphere, in conscious relationship and connection to the totality of his personal environment and to his self, to generate and realise the meaning of life.

## On the content of the contributions

"Touching nature", in a direct way, the contributions "Percussively transformed nature sounds" by the Salzburg sound artist *Gerhard Laber*, recorded and filmed by *Hannes Valtiner* in remote places of Salzburg's natural landscape, demonstrate this. Into the continuity of the sound-symbiosis of water, air, earth and vegetation moved by natural processes *Laber* places sounds with the same material, subtly, according to the rhythmic schemes of Japanese haikus, not by separating the designed soundscapes from nature, but by blending of these soundscapes.

The Salzburg music educator and artist *Alrun Pacher* takes a similar approach in her contribution about the pedagogical communication of art with children and young people. She confronts her learning groups with the artistic transformation of perceived nature in the artwork "A Garden for Orpheus" by Paul Klee and the musical transformation of the artwork through the composition "Hommage à Paul Klee, a Garden for Orpheus" by Jean Luc Darbellay. As a further approach she chooses the work "Ryoanji", which John Cage created intimately impressed of a Japanese Zen garden. *Pacher's* practice-orientated explanations show how children and young people engage with these approaches in their own artistic creation.

*Marianne Gayko-Roth*, visual artist and dancer, presents the metaphorically inspired contribution "Nature and seeds of artistic creation; exchange of seeds and thoughts". From the symbolic power of the germinating, sprouting seed and its urge to develop, the German/French professor of art of the Haute-Ecole des Arts du Rhin initiates a poetic dialogue in reference to the natural energies of growth and transformation.

The contribution "Creative holograms of natural moments" by *Dietmar Jürgens*, professor for aesthetic education at the universities of Cologne and Alfter near Bonn, derives from polyaesthetic practice. It deals with nature as a place of aesthetic education and embeds the creative activities of students from courses of studies in social work, in special and childhood education. This had been succeeding even where the nature scenes had to be communicated photographically due to the restrictions of the corona pandemic.

Via a performance of images and poetry within the further contribution "500 Years Facing Nature" *Dietmar Jürgens* enables the auditory to reflect the aesthetic approach to sceneries of natural landscape by a group of senior citizens. The scenes address the question of age-specific peculiarities of being touched by nature and prompt reflections on this specific, increasing field of aesthetic education.

The presentation by *Andrea Kárpáti*, Professor of Visual Literacy at Corvinus University Budapest, also addresses a specific social group of Western Europe societies: "Visual Literacy as a Reflection of the Perception of Nature by Roma Youth and Artists" is the report of a scientific project by Andrea Kárpáti and Sónia Somogyi-Rohonczy. The project investigates the expressiveness of Roma children and young people and develops identity-building approaches for an ethnic group who suffered from negative connotation in many other contexts.

*Masayuki Nakaji*, Professor of Music Pedagogy at Gukagei University, Tokyo, is presenting a study about poetry in school and children's songs in Japan. It attests the paradigmatic Japanese closeness to nature. At the same time, *Nakaji* addresses the problem of acceptance of this kind of linguistic expression by Japanese students who use to live in a highly technological minded world.

Two series of paintings by the Viennese painter, composer and performance artist *Wolfgang Seierl* are entirely focussed on the problematic issue of social distancing imposed by the corona virus. Under the title "Manuke", derived from Japanese, they deal with the conflict between human closeness and distance, based on several philosophical passages on the same theme. The communication of a one-metre line as a metaphor for distance gave rise to an artistic space for international exchange. The second series of his works deals with the anthropological, naturally based problem what makes human beings live interpersonal closeness and distance.

*Gerhard Hofbauer's* contribution refers to the phenomenon "touched by nature" in a philosophical and theoretical way. He discusses the phenomenon of nature-existent movement and its systemic coherence with movement. The phenomenology of Martin Seel and Gernot Böhme as well as its reflection by the German philosopher Heinz Paetzold provide the discursive approach to the discussion of individual aesthetic perception, experience and possible subsequent insight.

The "Experiencability of Breath" investigates the quality of aesthetic experience by awareness to the physiological processes on the own body in *Ingrid Sitzenstuhl's* workshop. The psychotherapist and pedagogue, who teaches at the Catholic University of Applied Sciences in Cologne, introduces the natural conditions of the human breath according to the psychotherapist Ilse Middendorf and opens up inspiration and exhalation as a bodily-sensual experience.

The workshop by *Claus Thomas* also is aimed at physical-sensual experience, par excellence. The professor emeritus of the Freiburg Academy of Music and University, medical doctor, theatre director and scientist, leads through kinaesthetic-sensory exercises to get aware of deepened bodily sensation, to the experience of lightness and gravity. The processes are mentally supported and interdisciplinarily reflected upon through the imagination of a marionette being moved by a puppet-master in reference to Heinrich Kleist's novella "Über das Marionettentheater".

The dialogue with the two workshop speakers, moderated by *Gerhard Hofbauer*, explores the experiential qualities of both aesthetic approaches and reflects the development of the ability to experience and to express oneself aesthetically in the educational context of personality.

Literature as art is represented by two recitations: Friedrich Hölderlin's poetry, expressively recited by *Claus Thomas*, dialoguing with musical performance by the wind soloist Sabine Ross, and the lecture of own poetry and prose by *Hans Martin Ritter*, emeritus professor of theatre art at the Berlin University of the Arts and of music pedagogy at the Hanover University of Music, counterpointed by *Gerhard Laber's* natural sound sequences.

A reversal interpretation of the theme of the symposium was presented by the Cologne media scientist and pedagogue Anna Zembala. Highly related to the state of art of media technology and media-research, she posed the problem: "How Digital Reality Touches Us and What It Reveals To Us About Nature." Do the digital technologies of virtual reality and augmented reality reveal and open up the individual's relationship to nature?

A holistic approach is formulated by *Barbara Hielscher-Witte*, who heads a training institution for "Expressive Arts" in Berlin and teaches this discipline internationally. Her explanation of the educational concept "Expressive Arts" illustrates its development from an art-therapeutic origin to a methodology of general claim, which deals with the individual process of expression as an inner process of personal transformation. "Expressive Arts" considers the necessary skills for this to be intrinsic. The perception of the processes on one's own body makes experience accessible to every person. In reflection the process leads into a personal story of embodiment. Responsively, in the poetic processes of artistic expression, the story shapes, materialises and generates an individual reference to the world.

The elaboration of all the above-mentioned contributions and of some video sequences is in progress. In their diversity they will form the basis for a final communiqué of a "call for projects" by the International Society for Polyesthetic Education. Pedagogical institutions of various kinds are going to be invited to carry out projects on the theme "expressing through the arts how nature affects".

In a network of inter-university and international institutional cooperation, projects are to be developed simultaneously at different locations and communicated and presented around summer of the year 2022 at the next polyesthesia symposium. A summary documentation of these projects shall give examples of the applicability of "expressing within the arts how nature affects", sustainably.