

Pose as a Gender Signifier – Bodily Commemoration, Meaningful Transference and the Constitution of Gender in Art

Mario Thalwitzer, University of Vienna

To pose is to show, to display oneself for others to see - to pose is to perform. The performer wants to be recognized in a specific way but not in the sense of individuality but rather the opposite. A pose wants to convey meaning. Poses are taken in performative arts, visual arts, advertisement and propaganda. All these are in need of an efficient transference. The possibility of transference is dependent on cultural background and embodiment. This encoded message is formed through iterative processes which are in some cases centuries old. Aby Warburg calls them *Einverseelung* and understands them as a mnemonic embossment. These processes are essential for the legibility of representations of moving living subjects. The *Vorprägung*, this bodily imprint allows for an immediate response and does not only affect us cognitively but also emotionally. Aby Warburg's vocabulary is finding an echo in the development and concepts of the cognitive science. A bodily commemoration is an essential foundation to make sense of the world and for meaningful transference. It's also relevant for our perception of gender. We take pose as a man *or* as a woman. We are in the role of a man *or* a woman, we are readable as either one or the other. To strike a pose is to *do* gender (West/Zimmerman). Since we are in a role, as a performer, our perceived gender is somewhat detached from our biological gender.

To test these theses we conducted a study in collaboration with Frankfurt based artist Carolin Kallert. We reduced and varied context and mode of depicted figures in poses from different painting. We asked people to rate them and ascribe different gendered emotions to them (as semantic differentials). Participants rated how feminine/masculine the figures are. The analysis correlates this rating with the ascribed notions. The Eye Movements were tracked to seek out differences in gaze patterns between experiment conditions and groups of subjects. Gender differences were a main target in the analysis to reveal constructions of femininity and masculinity. The talk will briefly summarize the theoretical apparatus, present the study design and discuss some of the major findings.