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Habitus in Habitat I
Emotion and Motion

Introduction

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Theories of habituation reflect their diversity through the myriad disciplines from which they emerge. They entail several issues of trans-disciplinary interest – such as embodiment, aesthetics and phenomenology, which on the other hand have profoundly influenced the discussion. Embodiment has become a prominent issue in disciplines such as the cognitive sciences, neurosciences and psychology – but it has equally had an impact on the social sciences, art history, and cultural, literary, and media studies, as well as philosophy of mind and phenomenology. Since the 1980s, from the interaction of these various perspectives, interdisciplinary fields of research have emerged. Phenomenological and neurophenomenological issues play a key role in the discussions, and this is one of the most promising fields of cultural, social and psychological interest. At the same time the issue of aesthetic experiencing, and especially of the relation between the senses and the emotions, has provided vivid and fruitful debates – and they are essential for artistic fields of knowledge as well. One major issue here is not just the senses, but also phenomena of ‘sense’ (meaning) and ‘sense’ (sensuality) in their intricate interaction.

This interaction includes the ‘sense’ emerging in environmental relations, but also its subjective manifestations through perception; and it is based upon the correspondence of the sensual organs and the modalities of the senses.¹ The interdependence of sense and the senses, of cultural meaning and sensuality, can only be conceived as being a complex relation of stability and flexibility, of habituations and readjustments, considering both a shared reality and private experience. The meaning emerging from the balance and the adjustments of these interrelations cannot accordingly be analyzed by referring to concepts of the intelligible world alone – as would be the case when reducing it to concepts of inscribed meanings. Embodiment entails a phenomenology that cannot just be reduced to concepts or metaphors of scripture. Rather the approach to these phenomena must be profoundly based on concepts of performance and performativi-

1 Cf. Krämer: “Sinnlichkeit, Denken, Medien”, p. 24. Krämer argues that the distinction between the Sense (sensing) and sense (meaning) has not always been a cultural given: “Sense derives from traveling or following a track; originally it implies a movement in space and most of all the pursuit of a certain direction in the act of doing something”, p. 29. Cf. also Flach: *Sensing Senses*.

ty, regarding the interrelation of sense and sensing² as a relation as inextricably linked to the interrelation of habitus and habitat.

Despite the fact that similar discussions have always been inherently interdisciplinary, the disparate nature of disciplinary approaches continues to thwart the necessary exchange of ideas. To grant a common base for the whole project, we have developed the unifying theme: *habitus in habitat*, because it constitutes a fundamental issue concerning all these fields of interest, and it allows for contributions from a variety of disciplines.

The term habitus, in a general sense, refers to habituated embodied and mental schemata, implied in social communication, in personal attitudes, in social identity, in cultural experience and in the production of cultural meaning. On the other hand subjectivity is not only constituted by habitus – a habitus is also deeply rooted in subjectivity and depends on subjective experiencing as well.

The concept of habitus is also profoundly ‘emotional’ from its very origin and its antique predecessors. The Greek word for habitus is *hexis* – i.e., the ‘having’ also rendered in the Latin word habitus – and as such it is already used in Aristotle, most prominently in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle thinks of *hexis* as a tendency or disposition, induced by our habits, to have feelings and to act (1105b 25–6). *Hexis* is a stance on oneself and on the environment. Moral virtue, in his eyes, is therefore the right *hexis*, i.e. the disposition to have appropriate feelings and act appropriately. It is thereby a form of cognition and judgment as well – even though it does not necessarily imply conscious reasoning.

Indeed, emotions have always been central to human experience and behavior. They condition our actions and are inherent in all forms of communication.³ It has also become widely accepted that there is no cognition without emotion, suggesting that every formation of cognitive skills and epistemological faculties, every cultural practice and any form of human communication is accompanied by specific emotional habituations and the formation of an *emotional habitus* – a set of habits involved in emotional communication.

Since these habituations always imply a stance on the surrounding environment, they are closely linked to a habitat as well. In the current discussions on the emotions, this is true, e.g. for Jesse J. Prinz, who conceives of emotions as “not merely perceptions of the body but also perceptions of our relations to the world”⁴; it is true for Peter Goldie, who develops a concept of conscious “feeling towards”⁵ and focuses on emotions “by subtly identifying the thoughts which are involved” in order to open up “a space to consider the ethical and sometimes the political dimensions of an emotion”⁶; it is true for Joseph LeDoux, who con-

2 Emrich: “Illusionen, die Wirklichkeit und das Kino”, p. 41/46, and Krämer: “Sinnlichkeit, Denken, Medien”, p. 33.

3 Damasio: *Descartes' Error*.

4 Jesse J. Prinz: *Gut Reactions*, p. 20.

5 Peter Goldie: *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration*, pp. 58–62.

6 Ibid., p. 27.

ceives of conscious feelings as being grounded in a subjective “capacity to be consciously aware of one’s self and the relation of oneself to the rest of the world”⁷; and it is true for Matthew Ratcliffe, who developed a theory of existential feelings, i.e. of feelings as “finding oneself in the world”⁸. This is just to name four recent theories considering the emotional relation with an environment in very different ways. According to each of them, *habitus* is nevertheless closely tied to issues of both subjectivity and environmental interaction.

Habitus, though, is not just individually acquired, but it also forms a foundation for habituation to collectively shared patterns of embodied communication. For Marcel Mauss *habitus* is closely related to the *Techniques du corps* – techniques of the body, which consist of a “work of individual and collective practical reason”⁹. This remains stable in Pierre Bourdieu’s vast theory of *habitus* as a fact of the production of social meaning and social distinctions – which are embodied in human interaction. His concept of *habitus* – at least in his later writings¹⁰ – can be understood as an enactive way of the social production of meaning, referring to the whole body and including cognition, judgement and aesthetics. Moreover, Bourdieu elaborates on the *habitat* as well. For him *habitus* stems from the habituation with an *environment*. It is a fact of being habituated with what one *inhabits*. And at the same time it is a fact of being inhabited by one’s own *habitat*. *Habitus* is formed *by* and constitutes a ground *for* embodied interaction. Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* has recently been extended by his former student Loïc Wacquant, who focuses even more on embodiment than did his mentor. In opting for a “carnal sociology” of *habitus*, taking more seriously the knowledge gained by “bodily and sensual apprenticeship”¹¹, he opens up the term for phenomenological considerations drawing upon Edmund Husserl,¹² Maurice Merleau-Ponty¹³ and Martin Heidegger,¹⁴ for the discussion of “dispositional representations” in the brain (such as conceived of by Joseph LeDoux)¹⁵, for considerations about cultural meaning – and for the knowledge sometimes implied in artistic practises.

All this makes the concepts of *habitus* and *habitat* apt for describing the cultural aspects of embodied cognition, perception, appreciation, judgment and taste – of being more or less attuned with situations or people, of practical knowledge, and of subjective experiencing. *Habitus*, hence, can be understood as a set of behavioural attitudes and habits that make up both a subjective and a cultural

7 LeDoux: *The Emotional Brain*, p. 125

8 Ratcliffe: *Feelings of Being*, p. 2.

9 Mauss: “Body Techniques”, p. 101.

10 Cf. Bourdieu: *Pascalian Meditations*.

11 Loïc Wacquant: “*Habitus* as Topic and Tool”, p. 146.

12 Husserl: *Cartesianische Meditationen*.

13 Merleau-Ponty: *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris: Gallimard 1945.

14 Heidegger: *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen: Niemeyer 1986.

15 Joseph LeDoux: *The Synaptic Self*.