

Poietical and Critical Model of Imagination in Selected Aesthetic Theories

The present research project is closely related to the subject of my doctoral thesis I have been working on since 2013 in the Department of Aesthetics at the University of Warsaw under the supervision of Professor Iwona Lorenc. The aim of the project is to develop a new model of imagination. The research was undertaken due to the uncertain status of imagination in philosophy in late modernity as well as the necessity to reinterpret and update it in contemporary philosophical discourse.

Imagination is one of the fundamental philosophical concepts. It has played an important role in epistemological, aesthetic, anthropological, and also ethical discussions. It is the basis of human capacity for creating mental images, recreating images of previously seen objects in their absence as well as constructing images of non-existent things. On the one hand it participates in the cognitive process, on the other it opens us up to the sphere of the free play of images, phantasy, and even semblances. Imagination is not an unambiguous category, especially after the collapse of the romantic and modern faith in the independent creative power of a human being understood as an exceptional individual – a genius. Human creative activity is implicated in broader linguistic and visual structures as well as mechanical and digital means of image production.

The aim of my project is to redefine the category of imagination and to propose a poietic and critical model based on selected, contemporary aesthetic theories. The term “poietic” refers to the Greek word ποιήσις (poiēsis), which means creation of artifacts. It is also related to creation of poetic or literary works. The poietic aspect of imagination means, in this case, the ability to create contents while the critical aspect the ability to see things and events from new perspectives. It is thus a creative imagination which plays an important role in the hermeneutico-cognitive process of finding oneself in the world.

In my research I analyze and critically examine contemporary aesthetic theories in which the category of imagination plays a significant role. In my research I focus on Immanuel Kant's conception of imagination, which – though part of Enlightenment and romantic vision of creativity – paved the way for the most important developments and transformations of the category of imagination. It shows how the content of experience is constructed (through ordering representations) and how innovation is possible (thanks to the capacity to capture the free play of images and recognition). This framework will be expanded to include hermeneutical reinterpretations of the Kantian conception of imagination, contemporary accounts of imagination, image and montage as well as hermeneutic analysis of selected visual works of art. Together they will form a basis for formulating a poietic and critical model of imagination.