

Imagining Cosmopolitical Collectives: Toward Theorizing Aesthetic Speculation as Method

Chi-she Li

Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National Taiwan University
E-mail: jisheli@ntu.edu.tw

Abstract

In the Anthropocene, a key challenge facing studies in the Humanities is determining how to appropriately recognize the coexistence of humans and things and their intricate relations. This study acknowledges the profound significance of Bruno Latour's concern with what "we" are, or the collective composition of humans and nonhumans. Latour stresses "diplomacy," a two-sided negotiation between humans and things, as the path to what this essay calls "cosmopolitical collectives," or the political weighing of interest-sharing among humans and things. As Latour sees it, the cultivation of aesthetic sensitivity is critical to the possibility of human engagement in this two-sided dialogue. This study further proposes that 19th-century German philosopher Robert Vischer, who offers an aesthetics that depicts humans' object imagination, effectively suggests an explanation of how aesthetics can be a method for composing the human-and-nonhuman collectives, enabling the imagining of humans and things connected in the form of various cosmopolitical collectives. Vischer contends that aesthetic activity arises from object-guided, object-driven, psychological imagination. He believes that human imagination is open and receptive to objects, and the capacity of imagination lies in its ability to repeatedly scrutinize objects (in relation to humans) as "felt" active agents. Consequently, objects establish dense interactions and connections with humans in psychological perception. In this sense, Vischer's aesthetics theorization can synergize with Latour's curatorial approach to "composing" human and nonhuman collectives. In the final section of the essay, two exemplary scholarly examples demonstrate

that the proposed aesthetic method has been implicitly drawn on and can contribute significantly to studies in the Humanities seeking ways of imagining cosmopolitical collectives.

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