



Faculty of Fine & Performing Arts

KONB90, Solitude and Saturation, 20 credits

Ensamhet och Mättnad, 20 högskolepoäng

First Cycle / Grundnivå

Details of approval

The syllabus was approved by Department Board of Malmö Art Academy on 2021-02-25 to be valid from 2021-02-25, spring semester 2021.

General Information

Theoretical course, Lund University, Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts, Malmö Art Academy.

Optional course for the BFA programme (KGFKO).

Language of instruction: English

Main field of studies

Fine Arts

Depth of study relative to the degree requirements

GXX, First cycle, in-depth level of the course cannot be classified

Learning outcomes

The aim is to provide the students with deepened knowledge and insight in both the artistic field which their work will be a part of and the history of how that field has developed.

To integrate analytical knowledge into their own artistic work, both in the spoken and the written language, will be given special attention.

The course aim is to enhance the students' ability to formulate and show a well motivated artistic wholeness.

The goal is that the students shall develop a deepened understanding of artistic work.

Course content

1. A BRIEF PRESENTATION OF SOLITUDE & SATURATION

In our historical moment, to be contemporary might mean to re-learn how to dwell in instability and uncertainty. Now that the notion of progress (or capitalist modernism)

This is a translation of the course syllabus approved in Swedish

seems finally questionable, anything that once was solid is currently in the process of evaporating. The viral pandemic is ravaging the global population, confirming the volatility of what we understood to be a stable world. Having deeply altered our context, this crisis calls for new tools for gaining new understandings of new areas of friction. As a result of COVID-19, we have been digitised by force. What we call digital confinement now could in all likelihood be viewed as a global transition to digital capitalism. In that context, which is both propagated and consumed by the digital, the twin concepts of solitude and saturation are very useful aids as we seek to understand where we stand right now and what might come out of this. A.V.

2. WEBINAR PRESENTATION

For the last twenty years, online life has succeeded in bringing people closer to each other, in the digital sense. The counterpart of this is an unprecedented accumulation of data and digital detritus. It is so huge that new issues like 'less of more' and 'human/non-human' have arisen. Is the digital market now too saturated for anything to stand out from the competition, break through digital fatigue, and grab the viewer's attention? A plurality of experts claim that digital life will continue to expand people's boundaries and opportunities over the coming decade. According to them, the world to come will bring more good than harm to people's lives. Even so, nearly a third of individuals believe that digital life will be mostly harmful to people's health, mental fitness, and happiness. Most say that there are solutions. Over the coming years, how will changes in digital life impact people's overall well-being, both physically and mentally? For those who are worried about the arrival of a digital dystopia, a turn back to physical products may sound appealing. Today, one might feel that too much art is being produced. Should this be the case, from which perspective is the judgment made? And in what way might this be linked to digital saturation?

Saturation is defined as "the state or process that occurs when no more of something can be absorbed, combined with, or added." This definition is suitable for the digital market, as well as for production in general. It also speaks of humans and exhaustion. In the present moment, the sense of saturation is widespread. We know that the digital realm is enormous, and that it is filled with roughly two billion websites. However, as this realm continues to grow, the Internet-viewing audience has plateaued. Billions of people are browsing the Internet daily, and these people lack either the inclination or the time to view more digital content. In that respect, there is no doubt that soon, less will once again be more. Following that headlong rush logic, both solitude and saturation are now taking centre stage in the digitised arena. In a world crushed by information overload, relentless self-promotion, digital fatigue, obsession with appearances, and the fear of invisibility, the twin concepts of 'solitude' and 'saturation' are very useful aids as we seek to understand where we stand right now. Further, they have the capacity to highlight zones in which creative work might be richly developed.

Solitude has always possessed an ambivalent status. Although the capacity to enjoy being alone can make sociability bearable, those predisposed to solitude are often viewed with suspicion or pity. If, over the centuries, the absence of company has been regarded differently, the ambivalent nature of solitude became a prominent concern in the modern era. Loneliness, which is one of the major paradoxes of our world of hyper-polarisation between the self and the rest, has been increased by the role played by new communications technologies and social networks. This phenomenon is the culmination of a long history that began in Antiquity when, in the eyes of the intellectuals, humans were either social animals or lovers of bucolic charms. Later, the Bible said, "It is not good that a man is alone," and yet Judeo-Christianity extols the solitary lives of hermits and monks. In the classical period, the "loners" and "walkers" are opposed to the "honest men" of the Salons, thus extending the alternative from

Antiquity mentioned above. In the romantic age, solitude became a source of respite to citizens living in ever more complex modern societies. While the search for solitude was seen as a symptom of modern life, it was also viewed as a dangerous pathology: a “wow! no thanks!” that might lead to psychological disorder and antisocial behaviour, as has been explored by psychoanalysis. This ambivalence is now taking on a new dimension. At the dawn of the digital age, solitude has acquired new meanings as physical isolation and intense digital sociability has been interwoven: a paradox that needs to be explored.

Humans are resolutely social animals; they need to establish intimate bonds of some form with others. And yet, it takes an unprecedented global pandemic before we are prepared to acknowledge our primordial need for group belonging, as solitude and socialisation are both necessary components. Forced into social isolation, we mourn the loss of this sense of being part of the mass. However, loneliness doesn't necessarily entail physical solitude, but rather an absence or paucity of connection, closeness, or kinship: an inability, for some reason or other, to find as much intimacy as is desired. Hardly any wonder, then, that it can reach its apotheosis in a crowd.

Somehow, solitude and loneliness are different from one another. Being lonely is a matter of feeling disconnected from those around you, whether from an interpersonal or a universal standpoint. The lonely feel empty and drained. Loneliness is a state of mind. Solitude, on the other hand, can be restorative and healing. Some individuals—such as surfers, swimmers, artists, and writers—require solitude in order to do what they love. Solitude is actually vital for them: it instils in them a sense of wisdom and creativity, that is far removed from the ultimate threat of automation that characterises the age of “Social Everything”. Solitude enriches creative work. Hardly any wonder, then, that it empowers inspiration for change, and life. As Louise Bourgeois, for whom aloneness was the raw material of art, put it in the late 1930s: “Solitude, a rest from responsibilities, and peace of mind will do you more good than the atmosphere of the studio and the conversations which are generally a waste of time.” Solitude is political, while saturation has a ring of the psycho-economic to it.

As a result of the pandemic, the two have converged in involvement with our intimacy. We have been digitised by force, and what we now call confinement—that which generates digital loneliness—will probably come to be viewed as a global transition to digital capitalism. Digitisation is the animating force of everyday life, a technology or a medium between self-forgetfulness and self-submergence in tech. And it is promoted to us as the future. However, as Hito Steyerl puts it: “Technology is not the answer. Nor is it a solution. It is an open question and urgent problem—which nevertheless needs to be confronted in order to think the present and free the future from false algorithmic certainties.” Co-extensively to that, can algorithms encapsulate solitude, too? Digitisation is a socio-historical process that is contributing to the erosion of democracy. The seeds of these developments are, paradoxically, related to the ideology of digital utopianism that emerged in the late 1960s with the rise of a social model of computing. This led first to a set of beliefs furthered by the neo-liberal technocracy of the 1990s, and then on to the popularisation of networked computing that has generated a social interdependency to the feed, and paved the way to our current digitised existence and digital saturation.

The webinar on the twin concepts of Solitude & Saturation is dedicated to their joint exploration through the efforts of exceptional visionary thinkers and artists whose views have tackled the ‘system of production,’ and questioned the combinations of life forms that emanate from it. In our exploration of zones where intelligence and instinct are one, what's at stake at their intersection will be the subject of critically examination, taking as the main backdrop the experience of art as both a means of engaging in the world and a tool for knowledge production, or research for criticism,

beyond tangible objects, and ultimately for change. This is a great chance to confront ground-breaking voices through which our current alienation, emotional sterility, and overcrowded loneliness can be questioned and ultimately invalidated. Combining lectures and workshops based on specific research methods involving text, film, events, and narratives, the webinar will generate a vitalising laboratory for self-discovery. Experience-oriented, its main articulations will lie with case studies and intellectual frameworks that set the scene for a thought-provoking reflection on the current bio-political conditions that prevail in the arts, where social engagement, personal interests, and public intellectual work intersect. Borrowing from various disciplines, such as sociology, exospheric studies, critical theory, histories and practices of art and media, anthropology, literature, and urban planning and architecture, both the lectures and the workshops will conflate different skills and thoughts that are currently under pressure, given that both solitude and saturation enrich creative work, and it is thus relevant in a system that plays with ideas of presence and distance, over and under, too little and too much, or the seen and the unseen. During our 5 months of exploration, topics such as decontextualised contexts, network fatigue, a world of stay-at-home 'nomads', and twin notions like arbitrariness and indifference, intimacy and overexposure, or AI and surplus will be examined and discussed in the light of a diverse array of cultural materials. Reflecting on the creative, emotional and political consequences of moving towards saturation while critically resisting it, the webinar argues that there can be no growth without stagnation, no movement without inactivity, and no progress without refusal; and, maybe, no fertile solitude without saturation. A.V.

Course design

The webinar is divided into two types of sessions:

- the lectures (1 every two weeks, 1-2 hours)
- the workshops (2 h weekly, the weeks when there's no lecture)

Assessment

For the grade pass the student needs to be at least 80% present at lectures and seminars and receive the grade pass on tasks, if any.

The examiner, in consultation with Disability Support Services, may deviate from the regular form of examination in order to provide a permanently disabled student with a form of examination equivalent to that of a student without a disability.

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Subcourses that are part of this course can be found in an appendix at the end of this document.

Grades

Marking scale: Fail, Pass.

Entry requirements

General requirements for university studies in Sweden

Subcourses in KONB90, Solitude and Saturation

Applies from V21

2101 Solitude and Saturation, 20,0 hp
Grading scale: Fail, Pass