

The Good Life, or Nothing proves that pleasure is a happy affair*



John Carpenter, *They Live* (1988)

Saturday 23 June 11am – 4pm
PROGR, Kleine Bühne, 1 OG Bern, CH

This symposium is organized by Aaron Schuster as part of the exhibition “Unknown Pleasures” curated by Angelique Campens.

Well-being, human flourishing, hedonic potential, optimal functioning, self-realization, personal fulfillment, positive thinking, flow... Is there any greater proof of the supposedly discredited idea of the end of history than our contemporary obsession with the ‘good life’? The aim of this symposium is to bring together a wide range of thinkers to discuss the meaning of pleasure today, and especially to examine the set of clichés that seem to underlie our understanding of late capitalist society. What are the ideals of happiness proposed to us by contemporary culture? Do we live in times of hedonistic permissiveness, bereft of authority and strong symbolic prohibitions, or are we not rather submitted to a new regime of socially imposed rules and injunctions? How is enjoyment both incited and regulated by economic markets, mass culture, and political movements? What are the subjective effects of the contemporary demand to enjoy in its multiple facets (“Be yourself!” “Be happy!” “Realize your inner potentials,” “Knowledge is power,” “I shop therefore I am,” etc.)? How can a philosophical history of such terms as pleasure, happiness, and the good life help us to understand contemporary ‘modes of enjoyment’? And, can pleasure be adequately conceived as a strictly ‘pleasant’ phenomenon, or, following Freud, does not the ultimate paradox of pleasure reside in the fact that it is not necessarily a happy affair...?

* Georges Perros, *Papiers collés* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960).

Symposium Program

11:00 Welcome

Angelique Campens (curator, Belgium)

How to derive the maximum enjoyment from crackers

Aaron Schuster (philosopher, USA / Belgium)

11:45 Passive pleasures

Audronė Žukauskaitė (philosopher, Lithuania)

12:30 What is your idea of pleasure?

Dominiek Hoens (philosopher, Belgium)

13:15 Lunch break

14:30 I don't need it. I want it.

Alevtina Kakhidze (artist, Ukraine)

15:15 I didn't finish my epitaph

Raimundas Malašauskas (curator, Lithuania)

16:00 Reception

How to derive the maximum enjoyment from crackers

Aaron Schuster

In one of his seminars Lacan remarks that “it is along the paths that appear to be contrary to enjoyment that enjoyment is obtained.” I will examine this ‘paradox of enjoyment’ (where pleasure is gained from activities, situations and objects that seem precisely to thwart satisfaction) with reference to Ed Ruscha’s book *Crackers* (1969), based on a humorous sketch by Mason Williams. I will further comment on how this ‘perverse’ dynamic, the strange and wayward paths of human pleasure, is for psychoanalysis the basic marker of the anthropological difference, the dividing line between human beings and animals.

Passive pleasures

Audronė Žukauskaitė

The condition of late capitalism is characterized by permissiveness, the lack of a clearly defined symbolic authority and the absence of a set of moral laws. The main question today is how to get satisfaction if there is nothing to transgress? How can desire be channeled without the coordinates of the Symbolic, in the silent absence of the Other which is no longer concerned with our demands? In this context we can reconsider such moral stances: the retrograde one, insisting to return to the universal maxims of moral behavior (an impossible quasi-Kantian position); the popular claim that everyone has the right to his/her difference, this is why the only universal thing is our particularity or ‘pathology’ (the position of Lacanian psychoanalysis); the idea that the absence of external prohibitions reveals the inherent obstacle to desire which freezes the subject in paralytic passivity (Slavoj Žižek’s position). In my paper I will discuss this phenomenon of passive subjectivity using the examples of films by Pedro Almodóvar and Lars von Trier.

What is your idea of pleasure?

Dominiek Hoens

One gets free access to the online version of *Le Monde des Livres* if one is prepared to sit through a short commercial. The latest one bombards the reader with WHAT ... IS ... YOUR ... IDEA ... OF ... PLEASURE ? Immediately after this question the surfer is shown an image of a BMW.

In this paper I will try to explain how this commercial works by exploiting the fact that our pleasures work with (a) ideas (b) that are unknown to us, for (c) they are not ours in the first place.

I don't need it. I want it.

Alevtina Kakhidze

My talk will be about consumer desire, true pleasure and happiness, as a Ukrainian looking at (and sometimes living in) the West. I will focus on the evolution of consumer desire from the coveting of goods to the desire for exotic places and exotic experiences (flying your own plane, deep sea diving, etc.), and the logic of different places of exchange like stores and auction houses. I am interested in the phenomenon of highly industrialized commercialism and consumerism and wonder how financial confidence and disposability affect the individual.

I didn't finish my epitaph

Raimundas Malašauskas

To be announced (with reference to John Fare: <http://www.john-fare.com>).

www.stadtgalerie.ch

www.beeldend.be/unknownpleasures.html