



He points out that when elite art forms were opened to public view they contained radical aspects, such as foreign views, as well as priming a paternal management of culture for the masses. "Art exists as a separate world since anything whatsoever can belong to it." p.X. It is this openness of Art that allowed the conservative old aristocratic patronage and ossified state academies to be challenged. "It shows how art, far from foundering upon these intrusions of the prose of the world ceaselessly redefined itself... blurring... the boundaries that separate them from the prosaic world." p.XI.

He avoids the usual canonic key events and formations, and the disciplinary categories that tend to separate art discourses rigidly into the different artforms. His study demonstrates that the practices of artists and their audiences tend not to adhere to these artform disciplines. Aesthetic innovation leaps the boundaries imposed by our 'disciplines'. It is argued that perhaps the dancer Lois Fuller and comic Charlie Chaplin contributed more to the 'modernist paradigm' than Mondrian or Kandinsky, or that Walt Whitman is as influential as Stéphane Mallarmé.

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Aisthesis is the most authoritative text from Ranciere's, as he develops a singular and non hierarchical thesis on art. Art is both very living through its reactivation in the performance space Ranciere conceives, even it is necessarily divorced reality, since anything can belong to it. These come in a series of 14 vignettes that capture the high of antiquity sculpture to gymnastics, from Dresden 1764 to Hale County New York (that's rural people) 1941 , Ranciere engages with the reception of the art object, its space in the activation of its own performance, hence never static forms multiply a diverse strata, a regime of perception that can at times be constituted by welcoming the images, objects and performances that can seem opposed to fine art. For Ranciere, thinking is in welcoming the unthinkable, and his own aesthetic gaze leads to obscure yet determined ruptures in his Aisthesis. Be it the operators of the spotlight on Charlie Chaplin or the symbols of the spiritual world of Emerson, the logic of the regime of perception, affection, and thought that Ranciere supposes in the dream of artistic novelty and the coming together of art & life as proposed by modernity and destroys that dream--art exists as an autonomous sphere of production. The highlight in this series is the ultimate chapter on a journalistic report and art in actual, as is represented by the neutrality of the gaze. Journalism s "art of reportage" it's "universality" , is based on composite represented ideas

& images--facts. It is in choosing these signs that are sufficient to provoke the audience is knowing what evils and what fortunes and miseries the signs are symptoms of--and even what cures them!

One thing that *Aisthesis* shows is that we should forget the tired and very old laments about the power of the art market. Rancière teaches that the politics of art and aesthetics lies elsewhere. It belongs to the apprehension (not the acquisition) of an object that breaks with customary divisions of labor and places us in a state of contemplative bliss that belongs to everyone and no one.

In the 1960s, Rancière was a student of the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser. He broke with his mentor over the worker and student protests of May 1968. Responding to what he judged to be the elitist underpinnings of his teacher's positions, Rancière subsequently worked to elaborate new forms of political analysis, and even of philosophy itself. In recent years, he has attracted a substantial following in philosophy, literature departments, activist political circles, and the art world. Well known for his penetrating analyses of art and literature, what distinguishes Rancière is his ability to draw unprecedented connections between ideas and practices customarily separated — a skill put to dramatic use in *Aisthesis*.

His primary achievement consists of rethinking the relationship between aesthetics and politics. Rancière does not deliver prescriptions regarding how art should be, nor does he call for another round of politically engaged art.

According to Rancière, art need not be politicized, for indeed its practices are already political inasmuch as they alter the distribution of bodies and voices within a given society. What is required, Rancière thinks, is a historical framework in which to take account of the political significance of artistic and literary practices.

Throughout *Aisthesis*, we are on familiar territory, the period associated with artistic modernism. But here the signposts have been changed. Rancière deliberately avoids the standard references, focusing on more obscure works that turn out to harbor interesting propositions regarding the nature of art. While many thinkers would restrict themselves to a single medium, Rancière moves effortlessly between painting, sculpture, literature, pantomime, dance, theater, design, photography, and cinema. By provocatively placing these disparate works within a common framework, unprecedented affinities become manifest, and Rancière builds his case that artistic modernism has been profoundly misunderstood.

Rancière followed the work of Michel Foucault, apprenticing in Foucault's use of archaeology and genealogy as philosophical methodologies. Both methods enable the philosopher to inject history into philosophical discourse, demonstrating that what is experienced as necessary and self-evident is in fact contingent and historically conditioned.

Rancière explains:

Influential histories and philosophies of artistic modernity identify it with the conquest of autonomy by each art, which is expressed in exemplary works that break with the course of history, separating themselves both from the art of the past and the "aesthetic" forms of prosaic life. Fifteen years of work have brought me to the exact opposite conclusions: the movement belonging to the aesthetic regime, which supported the dream of artistic novelty and fusion between art and life subsumed under the idea of modernity, tends to erase the specificities of the arts and to blur the boundaries that separate them from each other and from ordinary experience.

*Aisthesis* gathers polemical force in its final passages by sidling up to Clement Greenberg's influential account of modernism — the one in which avant-garde art separates itself from commercial kitsch by turning the medium of a given art into the subject of that art — and displacing it with a richer, more interesting historical picture.

For many, Rancière will forever be known as the theorist of the "equality of intelligences." In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, he adapted the ideas of a little-known educational theorist Joseph Jacotot in order to argue that equality is not a goal to be progressively implemented, but an initial assumption that is either confirmed or betrayed in practice, whether pedagogical, political, or artistic.

Equality must be a starting point; otherwise, even well intentioned people court the risk of reproducing the inequalities they profess to work against. The political task, as Rancière sees it, consists of affirming and demonstrating equality against the hierarchical orders set up to deny it.

The presupposition of equality is an idea that animates Rancière's own writings. In *Aisthesis*, the postulate of equality assumes a unique form, one that explains the book's unusual structure. Fourteen "scenes" challenge readers to establish the broader thematic connections hinted at in each chapter. This can be understood as Rancière's attempt to communicate his idiosyncratic erudition while maintaining a healthy respect for the reader's intelligence. Readers will complete what Rancière has begun, and indeed it will be interesting to see how specialists from different fields respond to this work.

*Aisthesis* opens with a discussion of Winckelmann's description of the Belvedere Torso, a standard enough source for a book on the genesis of art. Rancière finds in Winckelmann the origins of a certain idea of art, one according to which art is the expression of a people's history.

Rancière will testify to an "inactivity" at the heart of the modern aesthetic regime, one that highlights a "free activity" not subordinated to particular ends, akin, though he doesn't mention it, to the *désouevrement* of Jean-Luc Nancy's *Inoperative Community* as well as the "means without ends" of Giorgio Agamben's 1990s political writings.

*Aesthesis* is broken up into fourteen "scenes" that amount to a "counter-history of 'aesthetic modernity'" (page xiii). Modernity is not the marking of the autonomy of different arts and their retreat from everyday life, as in so many theories of "kitsch," but is the opposite for him.

Winckelmann's statue has the perfection of a collectivity that is no longer there, of a body that cannot be actualized. The beautiful inactivity [*belle inactivité*] of the god of stone was the product of a free activity of a people. From now on, the indifference of the statue alone lends a figure to this free activity [*libre activité*] (page 18).

This prose, which points to a non-teleology, a non-organicity of art, describes what would be a new aesthetic regime, a new distribution of the sensible on Rancière's telling, that supersedes and operates often alongside in modernity the previous regimes of representation and the ethical. Rancière is, despite his emphasis on the indifference and inactivity of the aesthetic, the most schematic of writers. Just as his political writings delineate three different appropriations of politics—archi-politics (Plato), para-politics (Aristotle), and metapolitics (Marx)—his genealogy of aesthetics begins in Plato, who not only naturalized class and other societal differences to put politics out of play, but also provided an "ethical regime" of imagery, privileging those arts that educated the community members about their roles within the Platonic distribution.

There is also an isonomy between what Rancière finds in Aristotle's aesthetics and his parapolitics, which Rancière says "replaces the actors and forms of political conflict into the parts and forms of the policing apparatus" (Rancière 2004, page 72), at once recognizing the conflictual nature of the political while attempting to isolate it through an articulation of power and command over the *dēmos*, all to make politics less about dissensus than proceduralism. On Rancière's account, Aristotle provides the West with a "representative regime" that liberated *mimēsis* from specific ethical norms, while nevertheless isolating its own rules for fabrication, as any reading of Aristotle's *Poetics* makes clear.

The mimetic regime is a "regime of visibility [that] is at once what renders the arts autonomous and also what links this autonomy to a general order of occupations and ways of doing and making" (page 22), again isonomous with Aristotle's parapolitics and its long political and aesthetic logic of representation.

Against this view, Rancière views Winckelmann's *The History of Art in Antiquity* as marking the beginning, within art, of the disruptive, anonymous inactivity of aesthetic democracy against the above forms of policing. A regime without a regime, it belongs to no specific place or ordering.

The remaining thirteen chapters of *Aesthesis*, which range in contexts from the reception of Stendhals's *Red and Black* to the 1879 appearance of English pantomimes in Paris, the newspaper account by Mallarmé of a performance by Loïe Fuller, and the journalism of James Agee, take up artistic practices "high" and "low" and in all manner of genres, all guided by the paradoxical logic through which one testifies to the singularity of what cannot be represented within the work of a given theory.

Rancière's is a modernist project. He modestly acknowledges that the book could be read as "a counter-history of 'artistic modernity,'" but the scare quotes imply that he wants to pressure the very conception of "artistic modernity"—perhaps by this he means *modernism*?—as somehow ocular or pictorial. His "counter-history" would

seem to favor the condition of modernity in the life-world of its subjects (xiii). Yet I would argue that his project is still modernist, for Rancière is most interested in "scenes" that reveal changes in the paradigms of art—"a thinking that modifies what is thinkable by welcoming what was unthinkable" (xi). I take this to be a variation on the old avant-garde project, but with radically transformed forms and media in play. What traditional art history might characterize as vaudeville or popular entertainment, Rancière wants to see as the glimmerings of new aesthetics—"regimes of art"—coming into being. So even as works of art are encountered as already enmeshed in aesthetic systems (criticism, producers, programs, lighting, audiences), these works are transforming their viewing subjects, at least in Rancière's argument. There are politics in this move, of course, for these are definitely not the beaux arts; these are scenes for, from, and about middle- and lower-class folks—citizens of the republics in which these forms appeared (mostly in France and the United States, a little in Germany and England). If the instigating object for these encounters came to Western culture from a cultic or princely past (the *Belvedere Torso*, for example), it is the way that remnant functions for modern people that interests Rancière. And so, Johann Winckelmann becomes the figure inaugurating the historical moment "when Art begins to be named as such, not by closing itself off in some celestial autonomy" (none of Victor Cousin's *l'art pour l'art* here!), "but on the contrary by giving itself a new subject, the people, and a new place, history" (xiii). As expanded in the chapter on Winckelmann and the birth of art history, this crystallizes into one of the hundreds of aphorisms that will certainly be pulled from this book: "*History exists as a concept for collective life*" (15; emphasis added). Rancière is after the shape of that collective, and how it can wrest, from the base materialism of popular culture as well as the rarer forms of art, progressive forms of living and being.

Rancière's statement on aesthetics and modern art is refreshingly not so. Rather than trying to locate the political in the artistic, *Aisthesis* posits that art itself is political when it stresses the freedom of the artist from the conventions of the form, whether those conventions are of subject matter in painting (Bartolome Esteban Murillo), of "story" in dance (Loie Fuller), or of sentiment in film (Charlie Chaplin). Rancière moves deftly and effortlessly among his examples.

Despite the chronology of his chapters, Rancière's argument does not pierce like a "javelin" of reason but instead washes over the reader in waves, only to be brought together, ever so loosely, colloquially, in the final paragraph of the book. Rancière's style beckons the reader into the very historical form that he explores, teaching its movements through the rhythm of his prose as much as through the analyses of his chosen artworks. As such, the book is not an easy read, and at times readers can flounder in the tide of Rancière's words.

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