Jacques Rancière: The Space of Conflict Between Art and Philosophy

Seminar Leader: Bruno Besana

Times:  Monday 10:45 – 12:15
       Wednesday 10:45 – 12:15

Location: P98a.O.04

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Course Description

The work of Jacques Rancière will be used in this course as a tool to develop a series of lines of inquiry in the relation between philosophy and art, with a particular focus on contemporary art. Namely, we will try to see how aesthetics, far from being that part of philosophy that provides a descriptive and normative account of the history and of the essence of art, is rather configured as a battlefield, as a place of fractures, interruptions, disagreements which are far from being without political consequences.

First we will try to reconstruct Rancière’s idea of the contemporary regime of art as determined by a certain confusion between the active and the passive, between the expressivity of nature and the will of the subject. This first part will allow us to investigate the history of aesthetics by means of an analysis of texts from Plato, Aristotle, Baumgarten, Kant, the Romantics and Hegel. Also, we will investigate Rancière criticism of various claims (articulated by Barthes and Benjamin among others) that there is a ‘proper’ of art.

In a second moment, we will analyse Rancière’s understanding of the history of art in terms of discontinuities and fractures, by placing his work in parallel with a series of other readings that aim at subverting the classical idea of philosophy ‘reflecting’ on art (Nancy, Deleuze, Badiou).

Thirdly, we will focus on his critiques of two ideas of contemporary art: the idea of an art that, finally liberated from representational structures, would express ‘the real’; and the idea of an art bound to the fundamental *impossibility of expressing* the real of a century whose catastrophies have challenged the viability of representation itself. This inquiry will allow us to approach the analysis of individual artists (Godard, Jia Zhang-ke, Medvedkin, Alfredo Jaar) but also to investigate the history and the contemporary reception of the concept of the sublime (Kant, Schiller, Lyotard).

In a fourth and final moment we will analyse how Rancière aims at individuating the political consequences of those singular moments in which the modes of production of art are reconfigured, along with the modes of relation between genres and styles and the modes of circulation and perception of art. We will then insert his conclusions in the contemporary debate about art and power (Boris Groys) and analyse the reception of Rancière’s work by contemporary curators and artists.
Attendance and evaluation
Attendance is essential. A short mid-semester writing assignment (of about 1500 words) and a longer final one (5000 words) will be required. Deadlines for essays are: 23:59 on October 29th and December 15th.

Grade breakdown
Classroom participation will count 40%; writing assignments - 60% (15, 20 and 25% respectively).

Course Schedule
N.B.: The current bibliography is larger than what will actually be required, and will consequently be limited to an average 30 pages per session. Some of the texts will be available as options to choose from, while other texts will be required as mandatory readings.

Week 1.1
Introduction to the course: the paradoxes of aesthetics

Week 1.2
Aesthetics and historical fractures

Week 2.1
Plato's Republic; art between technique and kallistic
Plato, Republic: 367e-403c; 462a-462e; 474c-476c; 514a-521c; 586a-608c

Week 2.2
The farewell to truth: art from technique to fiction
Jacques Rancière, The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible, chapter 4 (only pp. 35-38)

Week 3.1
The Aristotelian regime of fiction
Aristotle, Poetics 1-4, 6-9, 11, 18, 34-25 (only from 1460a25 until 25, 1461a10, and 1461b9-26)
Aristotle, Metaphysics, A, 1-2

Week 3.2
Aesthetics of confusion

**Week 4.1**
The beginning of the end (The end of art, the beginning of the aesthetic regime)
Session in collaboration with Frank Ruda, Bard College Berlin
Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics* (reader will be provided)

**Week 4.2**
Art and expropriation/1
Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, chapter 5, pp. 107-131 (the Pensive Image)

**Week 5.1**
Art and expropriation/2

**Week 5.2**
Art and expropriation/3
Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, part 1

**Week 6.1**
Beyond philosophy of art/1
Jean-Luc Nancy, *Muses*, chapters 1 and 2 (“Why are there Several Arts and not One?” and “The Girl who succeeds the Muses”)

**Week 6.2**
Beyond philosophy of art/2
Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness*: “What is the creative act?”, pp. 312-324; and “We invented the Ritornello”, pp. 377-381
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* Introduction and chapter 1, “What is a concept”, pp. 1-34

**Week 7.1**
Beyond philosophy of art/2.2
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, chapter 7, pp. 163-200

**Week 7.2**
Beyond philosophy of art/2.3
Jacques Rancière, “Is there a Deleuzian Aesthetics?”
Week 8.1
Beyond philosophy of art/3.1
Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, Chapters 1 and 2
Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Chapter 1 and 8

Week 8.2
Beyond philosophy of art/3.2

Week 9.1
Confusion and the real/1
Jacques Rancière, *Film Fables*, “Prologue: A Twarted Fable”

Week 9.2
Confusion and the real/2
Jacques Rancière, *Film Fables*, chapter 11 (A Fable without a Moral: Godard, Cinema, (Histoires)
Jean-Luc Godard, *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*, DVD

Week 10.1
Confusion and the real/3
Jacques Rancière, *Film Fables*, chapter 10 (Documentary Fiction: Marker and the fiction of Memory)
Session in collaboration with Pietro Bianchi, Università di Udine
Chris Marker, *The Last Bolshevik* DVD
Aleksandr Medvedkin *Kinotrain* DVD
Les Groupes Medvedkine DVD

Week 10.2
Confusion and the real/4
Session in collaboration with Tzuchien Tho, Max Planck Institute, Berlin
Jia Zhang-Ke, *Still Life* (DVD)
Jia Zhang-Ke, *24 City* (DVD)
A reader with critical articles (e.g. Rey Chow, Pietro Bianchi, Zhang Xudon) will be provided beforehand

Week 11.1
The real and the irrepresentable/1
Week 11.2
The real and the irrepresentable/2
Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §§ 23-29

Week 12.1
The real and the irrepresentable/3
Bibliography on Jean-François Lyotard will be decided at a later moment

Week 12.2
The real and the irrepresentable/4

Week 13.1
The real and the irrepresentable/5

Week 13.2
Politics and/or aesthetics 1
Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, chapter 4, (the Intolerable Image)

Week 14.1
Politics and/or aesthetics 2
Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, chapter 1 (the Emancipated Spectator)
Jacques Rancière, Dissensus, chapter 10 (the Paradoxes of Political Art)

Week 14.2
Politics and/or aesthetics 3
Bibliography on Boris Groys will be decided at a later moment

Week 15.1
Politics and/or aesthetics 3
Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*, preface, chapter 1

Week 15.2
Politics and curatorial practices
Conversation with guest curators
Additional readings
During the second half of October, in several occasions we will also refer to
Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §§1-22, and §§ 43-54, § 60

Bibliography


Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness*, Boston, MIT Press, 2005


**Filmography**


