

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the second issue of the re-designed *Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*. Although this issue is without an overall theme the five articles it comprises are more or less explicitly connected through their historically informed analyses and reflections on different dynamics of the relationship between aesthetics and politics that are currently in operation.

Within the framework of visual culture studies and building upon Hannah Arendt's understanding of the political domain as a "space of appearance" Nicholas Mirzoeff reviews the possibility of such a space under the authoritarian nationalism that Trump and Brexit stand for. With reference to the movements of the South African Rhodes Must Fall, Occupy Wall Street, Free University and Antiuniversity Mirzoeff – in the article "Empty the Museum, Decolonize the Curriculum, Open Theory" – explores how higher education can be reorganized in order to facilitate the appearance of those who are excluded from the present space of representation; "to imagine and create that hitherto non-existent America in which Black lives do matter". We should begin, Mirzoeff argues, by decolonizing our white supremacist curriculum and make this body of knowledge mean otherwise; by emptying our museums of its aesthetics based on colonial expropriation, questioning the logics of display and its addressees; and by opening theory and turn high theory into low theory where the "open" of "open theory" functions as a verb.

In the article "From the Mouth of Shadows: On Automatism and the Other Side" Kasper Opstrup shows how surrealist automatism worked as a divination tool for a future community and provoked a re-orientation of life and an institutional re-organisation. Opstrup sees surrealism not only as a revival of the occult of past times when confronted with crises, but also as reacting to a certain magical thinking in the modern, which "echoes eerily into our own big data contemporary of social medias where we tend to substitute equations with associations". Marit Grøtta also offers an historical analysis whose subject is a practice that unfolds in Paris, namely Baudelaire's media aesthetics of the mid-19th century. Her article "Photography Clichés: On Baudelaire's Media Aesthetics and the Mechanical Arts" shows how Baudelaire explored the new media of his time and argues that he developed a media aesthetics of his own. Grøtta focuses in particular on Baudelaire's relation to photography with reference to his interest in commonplaces and clichés, and suggests that Baudelaire was playing with the media dispositives that surrounded him.

The concluding section is co-published with *Field: A Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism* (field-journal.com) and is an exchange on the analysis and criticism of socially engaged art between Danish cultural critic Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and founding editor of *Field* Grant Kester. While acknowledging *Field's* turn to ethnography in the analysis of community-based artistic projects as relevant Bolt Rasmussen – in “A Note on Socially Engaged Art Criticism” – formulates a critique of what he sees as Kester’s renunciation of the transgressive potential of avant-garde art. This critique is based on a mapping of the most salient artistic practices of the 1990s: relational art, institutional critique, tactical media, and socially-engaged art, where the latter according to Bolt Rasmussen is the only one still holding a critical potential. In “The Limitations of the Exculpatory Critique: A Response to Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen” Grant Kester argues that Bolt Rasmussen’s critique forms part of a certain exculpatory critique according to which the artistic practices in question are devalued aesthetically because of their direct engagement in processes of social change while also being compromised by their ideological justification of existing systems of domination. Through an examination of the model of political transformation that he sees this critique to be based on Kester points out some of its most important shortcomings and outlines another understanding of art’s possible role in social action.

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