

Editorial · *Aesthetics and Politics*

Within the last 10–15 years we have witnessed a turn towards art and aesthetics amongst explicitly politically inclined philosophers and theorists whereas many art theorists and art critics have drawn the political aspects of contemporary art to the fore. With the present issue of *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* we want to address the relationship between aesthetics and politics and the ways in which this relationship has been and might be dealt with, analyzing the possible reasons for this current emphasis on the political potentials of art and aesthetics. Furthermore we aim to analyze the current interest in the different ways arts and aesthetics can have a political function and to contextualize this analysis within the broader return to aesthetics that have taken place within the humanities over the last 20 years.

The articles by Esther Leslie and Peter Osborne stem from their keynote presentations at the annual conference of The Nordic Society of Aesthetics, held at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, May 26–28, 2011 under the heading “Aesthetics and Politics”. With particular focus on Charles Baudelaire’s poetry, Walter Benjamin’s interpretation thereof, and the poet Sean Bonney’s recent collection *Baudelaire in English* Esther Leslie, in her article “Crowds, Clouds, Politics and Aesthetics, Flipping Again”, traces the intertwinements of aesthetics and politics over the last 150 years in a search for an urban poetics in relation to the rise of techno-culture.

In “Temporalization as Transcendental Aesthetics: Avant-Garde, Modern, Contemporary” Peter Osborne proposes an expansion of the theoretical terms involved in reflections on the relationship of aesthetics to politics by extending the field of transcendental aesthetics – inherited from German thinking of the late 18th century – into the domain of historical temporalization. Thereby fundamental art-historical categories may be incorporated into ‘aesthetics’ as forms of historical temporalization, namely avant-garde, modern, contemporary. Osborne argues that the temporality of the modern is a historical subsumption of the temporality of the avant-garde whereas ‘the contemporary’ is a historical subsumption of the temporality of the modern. The modern stands to the avant-

garde as the negation of its politics by the repetition of the new whereas the contemporary stands to the modern as the negation of the dialectical logic of the new by a spatially determined, but imaginary co-presencing.

In his article, "Form-of-Life: From Politics to Aesthetics (and Back)", Jason Smith analyses Giorgio Agamben's concept of form-of-life looking at the way the concept is indebted to certain strains of Italian workerist and post-workerist thought and arguing that it should be understood as a fundamentally aesthetic concept.

Johan Hartle investigates the connection between aesthetic discourse and political projects in "The Struggle is Beautiful: On the Aesthetics of Leftist Politics". Based on the observation that modern aesthetics reflects the structure of social and political emancipation, and that decisive elements of the aesthetic discourse coincide with the political ontology of the left, Hartle argues that the aesthetic attribute of 'beauty' can also be ascribed to forms of emancipatory politics.

The issue of struggle is also taken up by Gene Ray in his article, "Adorno, Brecht and Debord: Three Models for Resisting the Capitalist Art System". Ray outlines three models of radical cultural practice: Adorno's dissonant modernism, Brecht's functional transformation of institutions through estrangement and dialectical realism, and Debord's *détournement* of art. Ray argues that each of the models is still capable of generating radically critical and resistant effects and therefore none of them is obsolete although the first one remains firmly within the institution of art while the Brecht and Debord model transgress the autonomy of art and thus points beyond the limited sphere of art.

Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen address the relationship between art and war in his contribution, "Art, War and Counter-Images", where he analyses the relatively meager response of Western artists to the 'war on terror' compared to the response of American artists to the war in Vietnam where artists organized both exhibitions and protests against the war in South East Asia. Through a juxtaposition of an installation by the Retort collective with an installation by Alfredo Jaar Bolt Rasmussen analyses two different ways of confronting the image war of the capitalist state machine with either a 'heavy-handed' use of art or a negative representation raising the question of the ability of art to intervene in current political processes.

In the article "Artistic Re-Appropriation and Reconfiguration of the Medium's Milieu" Jacob Lund expounds Bernard Stiegler's and Jacques Rancière's conceptions of medium as a *milieu* trying to address the question of the political aspects of the aesthetic in relation to the notion of me-

dium. Based on the analysis of this theoretical question the article interprets and discusses artistic endeavors to re-appropriate and reconfigure conservative symbolic orders and media milieus that have become dissociated with reference to the art of Alfredo Jaar and Thomas Hirschhorn.

We also bring an excerpt from the introduction to the new English translation of Bernard Stiegler's *Uncontrollable Societies of Disaffected Individuals: Disbelief and Discredit* volume 2 in which he addresses the question of spiritual misery as a consequence of what he terms 'symbolic misery'. This question is related to his use of Gilbert Simondon's concept of 'individuation' and 'dis-individuation' in late capitalist societies.

The issue is rounded off by Jakob Lothe's review of Jacob Lund's collection of essays *Erindringens æstetik* (The Aesthetics of Remembrance).

We would like to thank Thomas Hirschhorn, Alfredo Jaar and Retort for permission to reproduce images of their work, and Celia Cretien at Galerie Chantal Crousel, Jonathan Terranova at Jaar's studio and Gail Wight for kindly providing the images.

Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and Jacob Lund