# AESTHETICS, DISINTERESTEDNESS, AND EFFECTIVENESS IN POLITICAL ART

MARIA ALINA ASAVEI

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*This book is dedicated to Andruska, Misha, Karl and Teodor*

# Contents

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# Introduction

## *Is Political Art at Odds with the Aesthetic?*

Recently, "aesthetics" has become anathema to socially and politically engaged art. The relationship between art and politics in light of aesthetic concerns is still a contested one, despite of those several theoretical attempts to disentangle this issue (Hannah Arendt, Jacques Ranciére, Chantal Mouffe, Claire Bishop, Grant Kester, Stanley Cavell to name but a few). Yet, should politically concerned and engaged artistic production disregard questions or/and requirements of aesthetic reception? Whether art should be "aesthetic" or "political" is not a new question. Therefore, in spite of those several contemporary approaches of this issue, the answer is not set in stone and the debate is still going on. More recently, Davide Panagia also elaborates on the disconcerted relationship between politics and aesthetics, suggesting a new aesthetics of politics grounded in a reconceptualization of aesthetic experience.[1] Gabriel Rockhill chooses a different path, attempting to disentangle how power operates in art and political practices rather than conceptually framing power, politics, and art. His approach can be understood as a "counter-historiography."

Thus, Rockhill's stance is more a history of practices rather than a conceptual history of the concepts under scrutiny.[2] However, as Alison Ross argues, "Rockhill's study does not so much demolish the terms of the standard debate on art and politics, as provide eloquent elucidation of the following proposition: there has never been a standard position on 'art' and 'politics.'"[3]

This volume aims to broaden these debates and it stems from numerous conversations with politically engaged artists and artist collectives on issues related to the "aesthetitzation of politics" versus the "politicization of art," as well as the phenomenon of the so-called unhealthy aestheticism in political art. Thus, this study—derived in part from my doctoral dissertation in philosophy of art—has three interrelated aims. *First,* it aims to offer

an interdisciplinary account of the relationship between art and politics, and between aesthetics and the political. *Second*, it attempts to explore what exactly makes artistic production a strong—yet neglected—field of political critique when democratic political agency, history from below and identity politics are threatened. *Finally*, to illuminate the relationship between critical political theory, on the one hand, and the philosophy of art, on the other by highlighting artworks' moral, political, and epistemic abilities to reveal, criticize, problematize, and intervene politically as democratic interpellations about imperative aspects of our political reality.

In many studies, aesthetics has become the chief enemy of socially and politically engaged art. To give just an example, the theoretical discourses around the 7th Berlin Biennale of Contemporary Art titled "Forget Fear," 2012 (where *Voina* art collective was one of the associate curators) emphasized the aesthetic and the aesthetic object as one of the enemies of political art (the other "enemies" were the curator, the art market, the neoliberal elites, and the individualist art production as opposed to the collectivist art production). In other words, there appears to be a gap between aesthetic and political art. Some art theorists, critics, and aestheticians hold that political art is not "proper art" because the coexistence of politics and art undermines the aesthetic dimension of art. Political art deals with problems of injustice or abuses of power, necessarily implying a certain degree of knowledge of the context and awareness from the viewer's side, while the aesthetic has to do with an autonomous and pleasurable experience of a special kind, which happens to us when we perceive the form of art works and other natural kinds.

This book claims that there is no dichotomy between "political art" and "aesthetic art." The old question of whether art should be aesthetic or political is a poorly phrased question. In short, this book attempts to bring into discussion a series of significant points: even if contemporary critical-political artists and their publics' main focus are on the social and political usefulness (effectiveness) of their art, this does not mean that aesthetic concerns should be de-emphasized. Of course, the way in which aesthetics has been traditionally defined and understood (narrowly and in terms of purity of perception, immediate pleasure, etc.) is incompatible with contemporary political-critical art, especially after the conceptualist turn of the 1960s. Yet, all these developments in contemporary artistic practice have triggered a series of important implications for the aesthetic theory of art and not a dismissal of the aesthetic at the hands of the "social turn" in art.[4] As we know, traditional aesthetics is grounded in the traditional metaphysical distinction between object and subject (art object—art beholder). In very general lines, something (an artistic or natural object) is "aesthetic" (in a traditional sense) if it is pleasing in appearance (where the pleasure is immediate and disinterested), and thus affords an autonomous (so-called aesthetic) experience to the beholder. It appears

that, contemporary political art is not pleasing in appearance and it does not occasion this kind of autonomous experience mostly because the beholder's experience is not "pure" but situated in a spatial, economic, cultural, and social context. Does this mean that political art is non-aesthetic art?

Many contemporary philosophers of art and art theorists have proclaimed "the end of art" (e.g., Arthur Danto, Donald Kuspit, and Leon Rosenstein among others). They contend that "art," as we used to know it, is dead because it has lost its aesthetic import at the hands of "ideological" (political) interests. In what follows, this study contends that politically engaged art practice does not signify "the end of art" or "the end of aesthetics" (as often assumed via Hegel), but only the end of a certain, narrow understanding of the aesthetic(which is also questioned by Arthur Danto, Simon O'Sullivan, Harold Osborne, and Nicolas Bourriaud). Thus, aesthetics is not dead, but that it has only changed its face and in some cases even the "traditional" views on certain aesthetic categories might be taken into account when dealing with political art's apprehension and appreciation. Still, some aesthetic concepts have lost their weight—like contemplation and disinterestedness—having been replaced with others (collaboration/participation and interestedness).

Furthermore, certain concepts have been reconfigured (such as representation that no longer connotes "imitation," but simulation or reenactment). Thus, when politically engaged art is at stake, aesthetic concerns are not de-emphasized or replaced by political-critical concerns. In what follows, this study aims to illuminate the relationships between art, aesthetics, and politics relaying on critical political theory, art theory, and philosophy of art. More exactly, it aims to revisit traditional aesthetics as expressed by Immanuel Kant, David Hume, and Jerome Stolnitz among others, arguing that some neglected aspects of traditional aesthetics and philosophy of art such as Kant's theory of dependent beauty actually support and enhance the relationship between art and politics more than contemporary art theorists are ready to admit. Bringing this historical perspective—of traditional aesthetics—as a theoretical framework, this study can also illuminate neglected theories of traditional philosophy of art which actually are not *always* at odds—as usually assumed[5]—with political, critical, activist, and other more radical formats of artistic production. In supporting these arguments the book will explore concrete case studies from contemporary political art from a variety of contexts (feminist art, environmental art, protest art, ethnic minorities' art, social movements' art, etc.).

This book is an interdisciplinary study scrutinizing theories of art and politics from philosophy of art, political philosophy, sociology of art, and critical theory. The relationship between art and politics is a contested one. It is not yet clear how to approach this relationship; what political art is and what the relationship between "art," "the political," and "the aesthetic" is.

In contemporary philosophy of art, art theory, and critical studies, there are major disagreements regarding the relationship between art and politics, on the one hand, and political art and the aesthetic, on the other. Thus, this book aims to clarify these very convoluted issues. Divided into seven chapters, the structure of this study is based on the main argument put forth.

To this end, this volume first attempts to conceptually clarify the meaning of political art and the relationship between art and the political. Chapter 2 attempts to provide a conceptual clarification of the term "political art." It argues that the common sense understanding of political art as "art with a political message and content" is problematic on many grounds. First, it fails to acknowledge the fact that political art is not exclusively a matter of content or message. Second, it assumes falsely that political art must be political in an "overt" sense, and it fails to distinguish political art that is "propaganda" for hegemony from political art that is not "propaganda." Moreover, there is confusion concerning the question of what should be considered "political" in art and a great controversy regarding the degree to which art and politics should or can mix at all.

The aim of this chapter is thus twofold. *First*, it aims to conceptually clarify the term "political art." To complete this aim, it first discusses what "art" means and what "political" means in the cultural sphere. The controversy regarding the relationship of art and politics is mostly due to the two views with which the issue is apprehended: first, "all art is political"; and second, the theory which holds that politics takes place in political institutions and should not or cannot take place in art; these are the two autonomist claims, namely "art and politics cannot mix" or "art and politics can mix, but they should not." I rebuff the claim that "all art is political" on the grounds that "it's potentially politically harmful to view everything as political, because it takes the force out of things that undoubtedly are political,"[6] and on the grounds that the statement "all art is political" destroys both the concept of "the political" and the concept of "art" by expanding them to mean everything and nothing in particular.

This introduction also argues against both autonomist claims (namely, "art and politics cannot mix," and "art and politics can mix, but they should not") on the grounds that both theories inappropriately regard the autonomy of art in terms of "separateness"—whether of the art-work as an end in itself, or of a mode of experience with which it usually is associated. Political art's autonomy is not a matter of separateness—a separate object/a separate experience. We can understand the autonomy of political art in different terms by criticizing socially, politically, and culturally imposed hierarchies of values, art gains its "autonomy" and its potential for resistance without needing to be a separate realm.

*Second*, chapter 1 aims to clearly distinguish political art that is propaganda in support of hegemony from political art that is not propaganda (as I call it

here critical-political art). Why is this distinction important? Propaganda art supporting hegemony is only political in a minimal sense of the term. Propaganda art is political in the sense that it is concerned with politics, attempting to reinforce, legitimate, and impose whatever regime of representation the hegemony wants to be enforced at a certain moment. This type of propaganda art is deficiently political; however, because it circumvents critical evaluation and affirms a political status quo or a cause without appealing to any deliberative or rational capacities of the viewer. Political art—in a robust sense—is not only *about* politics but it also appeals to the viewer as a political being in possession of the faculties needed for genuine political participation and deliberation. For this reason, this book is concerned with political-critical art and not with propaganda art. Therefore, distinctive ways of framing the meaning of political art are suggested because these conceptual demarcations are nevertheless crucial for understanding the ways in which the public engages with political art.

Thus, political art, in its narrow and robust sense, is art that deliberately sets out to critically intervene in power relations by challenging the imposed hierarchies and values whether cultural, economic, or social. This understanding of political art allows us to distinguish between works of art which are political only in a lax and incomplete in sense like propaganda art for hegemony from works of art which are not merely dealing with a political topic or confirm the hegemony but critically resist the status quo (critical-political art).

At the same time and in line with the main argument, this book aims to bridge the gap between political art and the aesthetic, in spite of all discontent regarding their concatenation (chapter 2, 3, and 4). Chapter 2 argues for an enlargement of the concept of the aesthetic which accommodates extra-perceptual, political, and other contemporary arts. Thus, chapter 3 attempts to provide a sound way of joining the aesthetics and political art, in spite of all discontent regarding the encountering between the two. Many theorists hold that there is a gap between political art and the aesthetic. Why there appears to be a gap for these theorists?

The *first* category of detractors, which includes Donald Kuspit and Hilton Kramer, argues that political art is not proper/good art because the encountering between politics and art undermines the aesthetic dimension of art, the aesthetic value of art as art. They assume that political art is confrontational, dealing with problems of injustice or abuses of power while the aesthetic is something which has to do with a pleasurable experience of a special kind. Political art, these critics claim, does not operate primarily via the aesthetic: it is not an aesthetic art because its purpose is not to afford us, the public, an aesthetic experience but to make us angry, for example, about society's flaws and injustices. They conclude that political art does not have an aesthetic purpose and this makes it a lesser art or bad art.

The *second* theoretical camp also argues that there is a gap between political art and the aesthetics but for different reasons than the first category of theorists. This theoretical position holds that the aesthetic is an "ideological construct" (Terry Eagleton, Paul de Man, Griselda Pollock, Roger Taylor, and Pierre Bourdieu among many others) or an instrument of "evasion" (Raymond Williams) which usually supports and popularizes the values of the status quo represented by the cultural and economic elites. The argument which underlines this claim is that the real function of the aesthetic is that of an ideology. This ideology imposes what is good art. For this theoretical camp, the most frequent critique of the aesthetic asserts that the aesthetic is an ideological construct: "It's classical vocabulary of disinterestedness, immediacy, wholeness, universal value, genius, and the like, strike one as outdated, naïve, and perhaps as even a covert collaboration with a self-interested hegemonic politics."[7] Griselda Pollock also claims that political art must reject all forms of aesthetic value because the aesthetic requirements of unity and pleasant form damage the political message.[8]

Against both categories of critics, I will argue that political art does not need to be evaluated in accordance with the notion of the aesthetic they are employing. It seems that both categories of critics conflate the aesthetic with a "pure aesthetic" approach to art. However, as it will be argued in this chapter, the aesthetic is one thing and a pure aesthetic is another. Both categories of critics seem to fail to make this distinction. The first category of critics identifies the aesthetic with a particular and influential historical version of it, namely, the "purist version of the aesthetic."[9] The second category of critics also reduces the complexity of the aesthetic to a purist understanding of the concept. These critics see the aesthetic as a merely "sensual experience" and as a way of engaging the ideology of the elites.

The book's core chapters (3 and 4) are dedicated to revisiting and revising two interconnected concepts of traditional aesthetics: beauty and disinterestedness. Revisiting these two paradigmatic concepts of the traditional aesthetics is not inadvertent. The aestheticians/philosophers of art of the last two hundred years have generally relied upon an understanding of the aesthetic that has to do with a disinterestedness thesis (e.g., Jerome Stolnitz, Edward Boullough, and Imanuel Kant).

Thus, chapter 3 attempts to revisit the eighteenth-century understanding of the aesthetic disinterestedness (Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury's) as opposed to the twentieth-century understanding of the term (Jerome Stolnitz's). The topic of disinterestedness cannot be excluded from the discussion on the aesthetic because "much of the history of more recent thinking about the concept of the aesthetic can be seen as the history of the development of disinterest theses."[10] This chapter aims to demonstrate that we still have to preserve a certain instance of aesthetic disinterestedness in

attending political art but this "disinterestedness" has to be understood more in Shaftesbury's way (yet not identical with Shaftesbury's) than in Stolnitz's. Chapter 4 deals with beauty. Traditionally, beauty has been considered "the paradigmatic aesthetic quality of art."[11] At different times, the aesthetic has been identified with the idea of beautiful (to be aesthetic meant to be beautiful). Many theorists find political art non-beautiful (mostly because of its unappealing look). Against these views, chapter 4 will demonstrate that beauty is not at odds with critical-political engagement because beauty is not a matter of how the object looks. Therefore, political art does not need to look pleasing at sight in order to be apprehended as beautiful.

Chapter 5 focuses on political art's effectiveness. It attempts to answer several interrelated questions. Each of which has to do with the issue of "effectiveness" in political-critical art's case. There is no single or simple answer to what "effective" means. In order to clarify if political-critical art is effective or not, this chapter will address the following set of questions: What does "effective" mean and whether there are different types of effectiveness or not, and what are the reasons for denying or affirming the political effectiveness of critical art? This chapter also investigates whether political-critical art is most effective within an institutional setting or rather outside of it and to whom political-critical art must be addressed in order for it to be most effective. Thus, political-critical art can be effective in many ways and that is the reason why the question of effectiveness should be addressed from several perspectives. In line with this argument, to be politically effective does not only mean, for example, to stop a war, to defeat hegemony, or to make a politician resign. Finally, I will present the conclusions of the theoretical approach.

## NOTES

1. Davide Panagia, *Ten Theses for an Aesthetics of Politics* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

2. For more on this issue see Gabriel Rockhill, *Radical History and the Politics of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

3. See Alison Ross's review of Gabriel Rockhill, *Radical History and the Politics of Art* in *Notre Dame Philosophical Review: An Online Journal*, October 2014, https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/radical-history-and-the-politics-of-art/.

4. According to Claire Bishop, "social turn" in art has prompted "an ethical turn in art criticism." What does this imply? The art pieces produced by artists and the artists themselves are judged by their working process, that is: "the degree to which they produce good or bad models of collaboration." In other words, the "social turn" in art criticism means disregarding questions of aesthetics and focusing more on questions of politics. See Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents," *Artforum International* 44, no. 6 (2006).

5. See Hal Foster's edited collection, *The Anti-Aesthetics: Essay on Post-Modern Culture* (New York: The New Press, 2002).

6. Noël Carroll, "The Strange Case of Noël Carroll: A Conversation with the Controversial Film Philosopher," interview by Ray Privett and James Kreul. *Senses of Cinema*, April 13, 2001, http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2001/13/carroll/.

7. Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 34.

8. Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

9. Responsible for this purist version of the aesthetic are the modernist formalist tradition (Bell, Fry, Hanslick, Gurney, Greenberg, Fried, Prall) and the attitude theorists (Stolnitz and Bullough). A pure aesthetic approach to art embraces several ideas: Works of art *only* have aesthetic properties and purposes (and the aesthetic properties are formal and purely perceptual properties); works of art are or ought to be Fine Art or "High Art"; and we should understand and appreciate works of art in total detachment from their social, historical, or political contexts.

10. James Shelley, "The Concept of the Aesthetics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, September 11, 2009, with substantial revisions October 17, 2017, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetic-concept/.

11. Matthew Kieran, "Aesthetic Value: Beauty, Ugliness and Incoherence," *Philosophy* 72, no. 281 (1997): 383.

## *Chapter 1*

# Political Art

## *A Conceptual Clarification*

As Duncombe and Lambert aptly put it, "Art about politics is not necessarily political art."[1] The antinomy "political art" versus "autonomous art" appears as originating in the writings of the utopian socialists such as Charles Fourier and Henry de Saint Simon namely, the idea of a leading social role for arts and artists as well as in Theophile Gautier's introduction for *Mademoiselle de Maupain* (the idea of art as a distinct field from politics and ethics as a form "militant aestheticism").[2] On this account Henry de Saint Simon's early avant-garde constitutes the theoretical background of understanding political art and Theophile Gautier's "art for art's sake" doctrine can be seen as the background of autonomous art theory. His introduction to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835) is usually seen as the manifesto of "art for art's sake," even though the term itself is not used by Gautier at that point.

Yet, what is political art? Clearly, this question admits of no immediately straightforward answer. There is no immediate straightforward answer because the formula "political art" contains two concepts: "art" and "political" and each of which is a matter of contestation, debate, and interpretation. At the same time, it is not enough or accurate to merely assert that political art is something like "art with a political message or content" (a common sense understanding of political art).[3] This formulation is tautological because it appeals to the terms "political" and "art" to define "political art" and thus goes in a circle. At the same time, this common sense definition of political art is problematic for at least three reasons: *First*, it assumes that political art must be political in an "overt" sense. Second, it fails to acknowledge the fact that political art is not exclusively a matter of content but of form or style too.[4] Third, it fails in distinguishing between political art which is propaganda art in support of hegemony and political art which is not propaganda art and this distinction is also essential as argued below.

The aim of this chapter is thus twofold: this chapter aims to conceptually clarify the term "political art." To complete this aim we need to first explore what are the meanings of art and the political. There is an old, ongoing debate concerning the question of whether politics and art should or can mix. This controversy regarding the relation of art and politics is due mostly to two views which I will take issue with: first, that art is always political ("all art is political" claims) and second, that art and politics cannot really mix because each of them necessarily belongs to a separate realm.

This chapter also attempts to clearly distinguish political art that is propaganda from political art that is not propaganda (as I call it in this book—for the sake of clarity—critical-political art). Why is this distinction important? The reason it is important to distinguish between the two is this: propaganda art is only political in a scarce or minimal sense of the term "political." Propaganda art is political in the sense that it is about politics and concerned with that type of politics it aims to impose on art's spectators/viewers. It is deficiently political, however, because it circumvents critical evaluation and affirms a political status quo without appealing to any deliberative or rational capacities of the viewer, who is not expected to react as a *zoon politikon*. Conversely, critical-political art is not only about politics but it also appeals to the viewer as a political being too, in possession of the faculties needed for genuine political evaluation and participation. For this reason, this study is mostly concerned with political-critical art and not with propaganda art.

It is commonly held in art theory that political art is that type of art which deals with politics, or delivers a political message. But, as I will argue, this is both a loose way of speaking and a problematic understanding of political art. I don't endorse this largely accepted understanding and I assume that those theorists who call art "political" in this fashion operate with a simplistic and reductive conception of the political. I'm going to argue later that if we understand it this way, then political art and propaganda art which is political only in a lax and very general sense are considered as being "political" in the same sense and to the same degree while they are not equally "political."

The argument put forth will be that political art, in this sense at issue here, is that art which criticizes and opposes the status quo of the moment and gives a voice to those who are marginal, forgotten, and excluded. Political art is art that critically intervenes in relations of power and it does not merely reflect on them. In its narrow, critical sense, political art is not merely a container of political messages (as propaganda is), but it is politically polyvalent in its criticality. It needs a certain flexibility of movement in order to make room for apprehension, interpretation, and deliberation. It cannot be chained down by a single political message imposed from above. Propaganda art, on the contrary, does not pose questions of meaning and interpretation.

## WHAT IS ART?

Many definitions of art have been proposed by philosophers, artists, and art critics: functional definitions, procedural definitions, historical definitions and so on. Until this moment there is no definition of art free from criticism. I will not elaborate here on all the definitions of art and the objections to them because I don't hope to solve this complicated problem here and now, but what I want to do is to adopt a minimal (working) definition which will allow me to distinguish art from nonart. Why do we need that? We need it because political art's practice is sometimes considered indistinguishable from political actions which are not art. Nina Felshin posits that in the light of the features which political art has in common with nonartistic forms of political activism, the proper answer to the question "But is it art?"[5] is "What does it matter?" if the piece fulfills its critical-political purpose. My response to Felshin is that it does matter because, otherwise, why would she bother calling it "art." At the same time, it does matter in order to make sense of our practices with regard to the sphere of art.

There is a long tradition of trying to examine art either by providing a definition in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions (essentialism) or by tracing its contours as an indefinable, open-ended concept (anti-essentialism). Some theorists (following Wittgenstein) are skeptical about any possibility of defining art in an essentialist way (i.e., Morris Weitz). They usually hold that art cannot be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions; because to define it this way would mean to find a common trait which resides in all arts—a common trait which the so different arts do not in fact possess. Other theorists question not only the essentialist definitions of art but also the assumed monism of the art concept, claiming that the art concept is not a monistic concept but a pluralist concept. Christy Mag Uidhir and P.D. Magnus argue that both art essentialists and art anti-essentialists share an implicit assumption of art concept monism, disagreeing only about the structure of that art concept: "We argue that this is a mistake. Species concept pluralism—a well-explored position in philosophy of biology—provides a model for art concept pluralism."[6] The point these philosophers of biology try to make is that different art concepts are useful for different purposes and a monist concept of art would never be exhaustive (to encompass the plurality of disparate art kinds, art forms, and art functions).

Yet, for the purpose of this study we need to distinguish art from nonart. Many in today's art world hold that virtually anything can be art. That is why I posit that we need an efficient and convincing way for distinguishing art from anything else for avoiding sterile conclusions of the type "everything is art." Maybe the difference between art and nonart is no longer simply visible/perceivable (especially after *Fountain* and *Brillo Boxes*) but it is still there.

Even if any object can be a work of art, it does not mean that a work of art can be that *kind* of object. For my purposes, the notion of "the art world(s)" provides the tool to separate art from nonart. In the attempt to make sense of what is art and how we can distinguish it from nonart, I will adopt a view that combines Arthur Danto's[7] and Howard Becker's understandings of art and art world(s). "X is art" if X is an artifact brought into existence by the "art world(s)." By **"**artifact" we understand a product of some human activity not necessarily a product of human work, as opposed to a natural kind. Even in the case of the "found objects" (the readymade) of natural kind, a procedure is applied in order to be considered an art piece. For example, a driftwood becomes an artifact with some human action (the artist picks it up, brings it to art gallery etc.). By "art world(s)," it is generally understood that there are certain theoretical environments within which a work of art is done, apprehended, and distributed. Danto says that the "atmosphere of theory" does not refer to any kind of theory held by artists or art critics but to a theory provided by the art historical context in which the work is produced. If something can be art at a certain moment within the history of art, it depends on what has become art up to that time. Art is a kind of thing that depends for its existence upon theories of art. Without these theories we cannot distinguish art from nonart: "black paint is just black paint" and not painting (as Danto would say). These theoretical environments make art possible and allow us to identify it as art and to distinguish it from nonart. Yet, these theoretical environments are not necessarily the institutions of art or the mainstream (the official) institutions of art.

Until now we have two main philosophical theories of the "art world": Arthur Danto's (in his article from 1964, "The Artworld") and George Dickie's influential "institutional theory of art" (there are two versions of it: one from 1974 and the other from 1997),[8] in which he claims that the art world is an institution represented by critics, artists, theorists, curators, and other people acting on behalf of a certain institution, who confer the status of art only for artifacts. Thus, the notion of art world was appropriated and used by Dickie and others in the development of the institutional theory of art overlooking Danto's initial recommendations. The main difference between Danto's view and Dickie's lies exactly in the institutional issue. Thus, the art world is an institution for Dickie—it is an institutional structure which generates power to confer the status of art to artifacts—while for Danto is constituted by "art history and an atmosphere of theory." Because of the enormous importance attached to the art world by Danto, he is wrongly sometimes regarded as a proponent of the "institutional theory of art," even if he never said that he had an institutional theory of art. For Danto the art world is not an "institution." As Jeffrey Wieand suggests, the art world in Danto's understanding should be regarded as a kind of "community": when somebody

speaks of the "college community" he does not mean only the students and employees of the college (of the institution), but also of people more or less connected with the college (retired professors, alumni, persons who read college's newspaper). "The community, in other words, consisted of all those people whose lives were affected by college and who, in turn, affected it. I suggest that the art world is a community rather like this."[9]

Beside these philosophical definitions of the "art world" offered by philosophers of art we cannot neglect the importance of other contributions. Sociologist Howard S. Becker used the plural term "art worlds" to describe the diversity of possible art productions and networks of distribution (he has developed this concept after Dickie's in 1982). These art worlds have flexible boundaries and sometimes the aesthetics of one art world criticizes the other. New and parallel "art worlds" have emerged as reaction to mainstream institutions and theories of art (such as The Independent Media Center of Philadelphia which used to edit an independent *Aesthetic Journal*). Political art has its own alternative art world or art worlds. Usually it manifests its opposition vis-à-vis the mainstream, globalized art world understood in the institutional, Dickian sense. But, even if these alternative art worlds have emerged as reaction to the globalized one, they also consist in an atmosphere of art theory and art history but the theory is a critical theory of art and art history is usually a cultural, political history from below.

I contend that Danto and Becker's understandings of art in terms of "art world(s)" are the most suitable for the purpose of this study. Unlike other definitions of art, these two definitions do not restrict art-hood to either compositional elements which can be aesthetically perceived by means of the five senses (e.g., functionalist definitions of art) or to those objects which had acquired the art status because some persons acting on the behalf of a certain institution say so (George Dickie's institutional definition).

Functionalist definitions of art take some function(s) to be definitive of artworks. Usually they take the concept of the aesthetic or some allied concept like the formal, beauty, or expressive as essential in identifying art. Our access to these formal or expressive properties of art is considered to be mediated by sensing. Then, if we accept this stance, many instances of contemporary art would be considered nonart because we experience them differently (i.e., conceptually). Perhaps, we could work more on the concept of the aesthetic by extending it to non-perceptual properties (as pointed out by James Shelley, Noël Carroll). In this case, a functionalist definition would be workable for distinguishing art from nonart without leaving outside a considerable amount of contemporary art production (conceptual, political, radical art, etc.). That is why other contemporary definitions of art could be compatible with my understanding of art, in the sense that if we hold a less restrictive view of the aesthetic, then it should not be a problem that art as art exhibits

aesthetic properties which are not perceptual. In this light, Danto's definition of art in terms of "art world" could be conjoined with a less restrictive, functionalist definition. As long as this less restrictive functionalist theory allows non-perceptual art to inhere the class of art, Danto's requirement (namely "to see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry") seems to be not contradicted.[10]

Unlike institutional definitions of art, the "art world(s)" theory does not tend to side with the institutions of authority and power, that is, with the mainstream, established art "heavies." Even if the "art world" is seen by Dickie in his new, 1997 definition, as an aggregation of art worlds, this definition still has problems: it is circular. At the same time, Dickie still maintains in his new definition the touch of a hierarchy when he claims that "the institution" decides what art is and includes "the essential core" and the peripheral groups.[11] The art world is made visible in the institutional account only through the mainstream institutions. Accordingly, the art piece is always presented in an institutional context: in a museum, a gallery, a biennial, or a catalogue. This does not mean that art pieces cannot be produced in alternative, peripheral spaces as well but, obviously, the official art institutions create the visible structures and hierarchies in the presentation and dissemination of art as art. The art world, in an institutional definition, typically represents itself as a top-down process. The mainstream art institutions cannot constitute the boundaries through which something becomes "art" because they are just the bureaucratic confinements of art production, reception, and distribution. In this way, any authoritarian political regime could decree what is art and what is whatever else just on the basis of its art institutions of power. Besides that, another reason for rejecting the strong institutionalism in defining art is that for every work of art, there is some reason or other that the institution has for saying that it is a work of art.[12]

The "art world" is a sort of condition for something to be art and here both Dickie and Danto's theories seem to converge. Art is defined in this way relationally taking into account the whole context of the artwork; historically, economically, or socially, surpassing the belief that the aesthetic perception alone can be enough to discriminate art from nonart (as Danto's slogan states that "art is not something that the eye can decry"). Yet, Danto's definition of the "art world" differs from Dickie's. In Danto's art world, art history and art theory are the most important factors for identifying art, while Dickie's art world is more sociological. In other words, Danto's art world is a world of ideas and Dickie's art world is a world of artists and their publics organized around the art institutions.

It can finally be concluded that something does not become art just because some persons acting on the behalf of cultural institutions say so. Art has to involve certain awareness about itself as a practice in order to

demarcate it from other activities which may look similar but are sure not art. Moreover, something is art when we have the theoretical framework (an art history and theory) to understand that something as art. The "theory and history" are not necessarily only the mainstream/official ones. Every art world is framed by a certain atmosphere of theory but, as already mentioned, in some cases the theory is a critical theory of art and art history is an art history from below. Yet, this history and theory is crucial for defining art in general (and political art in particular). The very concept of art has evolved in relationship to the evolution of art history and art theory. That is why some objects lacking art-hood during a historical period attain that status during other periods.

Danto's type of understanding of art (in terms of "art world(s)") is useful to this study for several reasons: It helps delimitating art from nonart, art from life, and the artistic readymade from commodity and in the political art's case we can delimit an art protest from a mere protest; it allows the possibility of art production outside the mainstream institutions of art, and art history and art theory are not necessarily the official ones and the "art world" is more of a theoretical atmosphere than an institutional elite; Danto's conceptualization of art makes room for objects and situations which have not been considered art in the past (like avant-garde or conceptual/political art); it tries to define art without using evaluative concepts (he claims that we don't have to evaluate a piece according to its genre or style but "individually"; from this it does not follow that art is equally and indifferently "good"); finally, a pluralistic "art world" is a more democratic art world in the sense that the access to art is not limited to the lucky few.

## IS ALL ART POLITICAL?

In what follows, this chapter will scrutinize the relationship between art and politics by objecting to two popular views: "all art is political" and "no genuine art is political." The first view holds that all art is political because all human activity is political. It is sometimes taken for granted without much further elaboration that art, like any other human activity, is always political and cannot be political in one way or another in the sense of supporting or rejecting hegemony. For many art and cultural studies theorists, it makes no sense to distinguish between political and nonpolitical art because "all art is inherently political." Artists like Diego Rivera, August Wilson, Wafaa Bilal, or curators such as Anne Lynnot—as well as political philosophers Jaques Ranciere and Chantal Mouffe—are only a few who argue that "all art is political." Some theorists hold that all art is political in the same way that every choice we make is political; others claim that "all art is political in the sense

that it serves someone's politics"[13] and some claim that there is no such thing as nonpolitical art because the political is ubiquitous in all social relations.[14]

The most common argument for "all art is political" assertion is that all human activity is political (and art is a human activity) because all human activity is shaped by structures involving power relations. For instance, Daniel Van Der Gucht argues that the twentieth century developed the new relativist paradigm "everything is political/everything is art"—with the element added by Beuys "everyone is an artist."[15] Both formulas seem sterile saying nothing about politics or about art. "Everything is political" formula stems from the assumption that no matter what we do—or, for that matter, do not do—we make a political statement, and thus take political action of some kind. But, as Chris Bateman points out, and I agree with that, this claim seems "counter-productive"—"for if everything is political, why take political action?"[16]

On the one hand, not all human activity is political because some has no political import (like eating, tying shoelaces, etc.). On the other hand, this position seems to be very unhelpful and unsubtle. It is like saying that all food is poison because all food contains bacteria. It's true that all food contains bacteria and bacteria can poison, but we can distinguish between foods that are really dangerous for your health and foods that are not. Same with political art: not all art is political just because all art is a result of a human activity and all human activity is influenced by power relations. Some human activities are political and others are not and some human activities are more political than others. If all art is political (according to this understanding of the political), is all art equally political? Is KuoHsi's *Clearing Autumn Skies over Mountains and Valleys* as political as Oleg Kulik's *"I Bite America and America Bites Me?"*

Art and politics have always been related, but art is not always political and should be considered sometimes as mere entertainment, as a skill, as the expression of a deep private and personal feeling or emotion like the emotion in front of a sunset. An artist who is painting literally a particular political event isn't necessarily taking a political stance but just painting something that moves, inspires her. There is art which is neutral to society's problems and injustices, art which does not intend to criticize or oppose the mechanisms of domination and power or to support the status quo. There are many examples of nonpolitical art: the majority of landscape art,[17] landscaping, accidental art, some of the naïve art and folk art like embroidery, naïve painting, naïve religious painting, textile art (excluding maybe artifacts such as the Chilean *arpilleras de adorno* which are political[18] and perhaps the pseudo-naïve professional painters' art), and other individual examples of art from different genres and styles which don't express, suggest, allude, or intend to support or to criticize hegemonic power over something. A footnote is needed

here: choosing to make functional art, naïve art, ornamental art is not always a political statement but the choice of materials could be like, for example, *Arte Povera* which deliberately uses very cheap and previously used materials on purpose. There are obviously many more examples of nonpolitical art that could be mentioned. This study does not pretend to list them exhaustively here. The point it aims to make is that we can and should distinguish nonpolitical art from political art. As Noël Carroll rightly argues, "It is potentially politically pernicious to regard everything as political, because it takes the force out of things that clearly are political."[19] I will only add to Carroll's statement that "all art is political" claim obliterates both the concept of the political and the concept of art by expanding them to mean everything and nothing. If "all art is political" then what is the meaning of "art" and of the "political"?

## ART AND POLITICS: CAN THEY MIX? SHOULD THEY MIX?

When trying to answer the question of what should be considered political in art, two diametrically opposed approaches can be distinguished: one is the view discussed above—"all art is political"—while the other view holds that politics and art don't mix as politics takes place in the political institutions and not in art and when it happens to mix them, we lose either the art part or the political. There are many voices which find the combination of art and politics problematic.

The first theoretical camp which considers the blending of art and politics problematic hold that by this mix, usually, the political dimension is lost or at least de-emphasized. They criticize the relationship between art and politics from a "normative" perspective (they don't claim that art and politics are mutually exclusive). Even if art and politics can mix, they should not mix if the mixing is detrimental to the political. Why would this mixture be detrimental to the political? This mixture of art and politics is detrimental to the political when art and politics are blended just for achieving a successful artistic effect overlooking or de-emphasizing the political purpose of that piece. Art's engagement to the political, these theorists claim, is almost always a superficial one: "not even the most committed political art practice can, on its own, be a substitute for the simple act of being politically involved, as a citizen, organizer and activist" and, moreover, as Davis posits,

> There is no elegant fit between art and politics, no ideal meld of the two. What is needed for effective political activism relates to the needs of a living political movement . . . which most often does not call for something that is particularly

aesthetically refined, just as what "works" best aesthetically in a gallery is not usually a slogan or a placard.[20]

In this understanding, political art looks ludicrous when faced with the urgency of live political movements because it is "too aesthetic to be political."[21] Being "too aesthetic" means that the work is concerned too much with the business of aesthetics (pleasant form, exquisite execution, etc.) and the political part is just a mean to achieve this aesthetic end. The theorists from this camp don't say "don't mix politics with art" or "don't make political art in general." They have a slightly different requirement namely "don't make superficially engaged political art because this art cannot be truly political." In other words, they consider problematic only political art of certain stripe: the combination of art and politics made for the mainstream institutions of art such as biennales and museum shows. In these situations, when art and politics are blended for attaining mostly a successful artistic effect, the political is de-emphasized or even irrelevant.[22]

The second theoretical camp is split into two parts: one holds that no genuine art as art is political because art and politics are mutually exclusive, while the other claims that no "good" art is political because art and politics can mix, but they should not mix. Before disentangling what arguments underline these claims, I will note that the first claim—"no art is political"—is no longer so popular (obviously, *Guernica*, "The Disasters of War," *The Stonebreakers* are political artworks and it would be naïve to claim that these pieces are not art when they are universally appreciated as art works). Yet, for many conservative art theorists the combination of art and politics even if it is possible is detrimental to art. Let's recall several points of view which criticize the combination between art and politics: "any work that intends to change opinions about political issues fall into the category of propaganda, which has a use, and by definition ceases to be art" (Edward Winkelman);[23] "art is art-as-art and everything else is everything else" (Ad Reinhardt);[24] "political commitment in our time means no art, no literature" (Robert Motherwell).[25] Other contentions go in a similar direction: "If we understand a work of art in terms of . . . the politics implicit in it, and sometimes quite explicit and transparent, we limit our understanding of it as art" (Donald Kuspit),[26] "art should bypass politics and register a direct aesthetic appeal to the beholder" (Dave Hickey quoted in Heinz Ickstadt)[27] and "art is an autonomous enterprise not to be reduced to the sum of its social and material circumstances . . . . Is 'The Dinner Party' art? Well, I suppose so. After all, what isn't nowadays? But if it is very bad art, it is failed art" (Hilton Kramer quoted in Emma L.E. Rees).[28] Another example of the kind of rejection of the conjunction between art and politics is the following: the contemporary political artist Hans Haacke has received the following answer from Whitney

Biennale regarding his submission: "This is not art, it is politics and therefore it shouldn't be allowed here."[29]

All the above contentions, both "no art is political" and "art and politics don't mix well and they should not mix," seem to entail two things: (a) that art and politics are two separate realms, and (b) that art is an autonomous self-enclosing entity. "No art is political" view, conceives art as a completely closed monad which has no windows. Art is a self-enclosing entity with no relation to the reality outside of it. At the same time, art is its own purpose. Thus, art cannot have another purpose (e.g., political) yet still be art.

The philosophical origins of the idea of autonomy of art are found also in Kant's third critique where he was mostly concerned with the autonomy of the aesthetic judgment. The aesthetic judgments are autonomous; in that they do not rely or presuppose a concern with the object's purpose, utility, or even its actual existence. The idea of "autonomous art" appears during the late eighteenth century based on Kant's considerations about the autonomy of the aesthetic judgment even if Kant's main interest was not in art per se but in beauty (as an aesthetic judgment). He distinguished between free judgments of beauty which are conceptless and purposeless and dependent judgments of beauty which are not conceptless and purposeless and explicitly stated that art which is not just decorative is dependently beautiful and not freely beautiful. Anyway, the theorists of the autonomy of art (nineteenth and twentieth century) considered only what Kant said about the free aesthetic judgments (which are functionless and purposeless). They took Kant's concept of free beauty—the autonomous aesthetic judgment—as the origin of a theory about art's autonomy. But this is a mistake: we have to be aware that Kant's reference to the autonomy of aesthetic judgment of beauty is not the same thing as art's autonomy.

What does it mean for art to be autonomous? There is no one thing meant by the claim that art is autonomous and here I don't discuss all its senses.[30] "Autonomy" has been used in aesthetic theory in so many different ways, since Kant, that it is no longer clear what does it mean that "art is autonomous." For the purpose of this chapter, I will investigate only one sense of art's autonomy: "the independence thesis"[31]—because those theorists who reject the mixing of art and politics usually rely on this thesis. The independence thesis is only one of the senses of the "art for art's sake."[32] In a very general sense, autonomy of art is usually taken to mean that art is governed by its own laws and rules, and that artistic value makes no reference to social and political values. Another way of explaining art's autonomy is to say that art's practice does not serve any other practice in this way art being an end in itself. To be autotelic[33] art needs to be a separated sphere of activity from everyday life and its purpose should be the creation of something without a direct function or purpose. The artwork's purpose is to have no other purpose

than its own existence as such (it is an end in itself). The argument of "no art is political" is also based on these grounds. In short, autotelic art is art that is self-referential, functionless, and purposeless. "No art is political" stresses that art is a self-enclosing entity which by its very nature does not refer to something external to its nature. This is a sense of autonomy which emphasizes the "art itself" and "in itself."

The other autonomist claim—"art and politics can mix but they should not mix"—emphasizes the autonomy of the "experience" of art from the point of view of the subject who experiences art. "Art and politics can mix but they should not mix" concedes that art is not necessarily a separate realm, detached from social and political reality. I have quoted Hilton Kramer earlier calming that "art so mired in the pieties of a political cause . . . fails to acquire any independent life of its own, as aesthetic art."[34] However, these theorists hold that art has to be appreciated as art in an autonomous way. So they don't say that art has its own separate realm and in this sense is "autonomous," but our appreciation of art should be autonomous. That is, the reason why art and politics can mix but they should not mix—the political from art ruins the aesthetic experience. (I will develop more on this idea of aesthetic experience's autonomy in the next chapter.)

For the moment, I would like to reject both autonomist claims: the one that affirms that "no art is political" and the one that states that "art and politics can mix but they should not mix." The first claim—art and politics are mutually exclusive—is obviously unreasonable because, as I already stressed, to admit that art is art only when it is pure art—when it is only about itself and an end in itself—is to deny not only that *Guernica*, "The Disaster of War," and *The Stonebreakers* are art but also all art which is about something or serves a purpose. If art has no other function, purpose, or end and it is just an end in itself, then not even art which servers the purpose to afford aesthetic pleasure is not art. Therefore, by this token not only propagandistic pieces are not art but also landscape painting and naïve painting.

The other autonomist stand "art and politics can mix but they should not mix" is also problematic because it assumes that the aesthetic experience of art is "autonomous" in the sense of a pure experience (that the eye is an innocent organ of perception), while our aesthetic experience as any other experience is never a cognitively uninfected perception and it is always determined by the viewer's contextual background which has also political, social, and cultural components. The political significance of art does not de-emphasize its aesthetic experience because the aesthetic experience comprises the whole framework in which the artwork is situated and this framework includes the object's background, the mode of production and the viewer's background, the art object and the viewer's conceptual, historical, social, and political background.

Another way of understanding art's autonomy is theorized by Theodore Adorno. The autonomy of art is not understood in terms of isolation from the social but in critical terms. For him art has a double character as both "autonomous and social *fait* [social fact]."[35] This formulation seems paradoxical. He regards art aesthetically as autonomous and sociologically as social fact, simultaneously. For him, this pair between aesthetic autonomy and social fact is a dialectical pair where the two entities are interpenetrating. We could say that in his *Aesthetic Theory* there are two interrelated senses of autonomy: social and aesthetic. The autonomous artwork is produced in a social situation and not in a vacuum (in this way being a social fact), but it has no direct social function and thus is autonomous. Adorno's understanding of art's autonomy is a step further from the common view according to which art's realm is separated from anything else but it still focuses on purposelessness of art as the core of its autonomy; in Adorno's aesthetics, autonomous art has as its purpose, the creation of something without direct function or purpose. Yet, what is interesting in Adorno's approach of art's autonomy is the fact that autonomous art is critical art—which in my approach is called political-critical art—without having a direct social or political function or purpose. Autonomous art is purposeless, functionless, is not socially useful but it is still critical. It is still critical in Adorno's sense because it criticizes the society by merely existing. It is precisely the refusal of social function which makes autonomous art to acquire in the end a critical dimension. For Adorno, the autonomy of art is double-edged and in spite of the interpretations which consider his aesthetic an "art for art's sake" theory, Adorno has a "theoretical adherence to the relation between art and society"—as his scholars put it—when he discusses art's autonomy.[36] He does not demarcate the social realm from the aesthetic realm of art, but just demarcates from the realm of autonomous art the art which has a direct political purpose or purpose.

I assume that Adorno rejected art with a direct political function or purpose or art which is socially useful because he worried that this art would become a tool in the hands of the status quo becoming *Vulgäre Tendenzkunst*, that is, propaganda. That is the reason why he states in "Commitment" that "politics has migrated into autonomous art."[37] What he meant is that only that art which does not have straightforward political purpose is politically autonomous. While I agree with his idea of autonomous art which criticizes society, I don't think that art is critical and autonomous by merely existing and refusing a social function—to serve a purpose—because art can still be critical even if it has a political or a social direct function; for instance, art can have the function to criticize the imposed hierarchies or values.

Even if art and politics can mix, this does not mean that art is always mixed with politics. The blending of art and politics is just a momentary one. When art and politics mix, this combination still can be called "autonomous."

The momentarily overlapping of art and politics in political-critical art, persecuted as it used to be by the mainstream art world, effectively overcomes the traditional aesthetic dichotomy between autotelic art and art which is politically concerned and it cannot accurately be called art. The temporary "concatenation between art and politics" (to use Gerald Raunig's words), which in a certain way still preserves the autonomy[38] of both of them but it also allow them to work soundly together, opens the way for reconsidering the traditional aesthetic categories and canons. Since we no longer speak about absolute field demarcations and art can overlap with politics without losing its relative separateness, we cannot be completely wrong if we attempt to retool the rigid and conventional cannons imposed by established, modernist aesthetic theories of art. The relation between art and politics is not a problematic one and there is no need to be concerned that one would de-emphasize or annihilate the other if mixed.

We can rescue the idea of art's autonomy in such a manner that it would make the combination of art and politics unproblematic. Instead of thinking art's autonomy in terms of separation between "art-as-art" and "anything-else-as-anything-else," a better path to follow is to understand "autonomy" in different terms. As Boris Groys stresses "by criticizing socially, politically and culturally imposed hierarchies of values, art gains its 'autonomy' and its resistance potential."[39] In other words, the separateness of aesthetic concerns from political and social factors has been the mistaken way of understanding art's autonomy. If art deals with politics or ethics, it is not less autonomous or less "aesthetic." On the contrary, one of the main conditions for art to be considered critical and political is to manifest varying degrees of both autonomy and opposition toward the status quo, including here the mainstream art world with its official institutions. There is a politics of autonomous art in the sense that art manifests its autonomy as resistance to hegemony and in this sense art and politics mix in an unproblematic way. Art's autonomy is not understood in terms of purity, autotelism, or isolation from other concerns (as in the conservative understanding of autonomy), but in critical terms. It is possible to retool the idea of art's autonomy not as a means of withdrawing once more in the world of pure aesthetic forms but instead as a model for subversion, critical intervention, and political questioning. This autonomy entails that art's production and distribution can stand alone and can be self-sufficient from the power of those who rule the art world and its ideology. In this sense art can be both political and autonomous. Moreover, this autonomy of art makes possible the autonomous power of resistance or the political engagement. The art world, in the institutional sense, cannot be observed in any significant sense as autonomous, since it is regulated by many rules and aesthetic value judgments which reflect power structures and dominant social conventions. Still, art can break taboos and norms imposed from above, and become autonomous and political at the same time.

## WHAT IS POLITICAL IN ART?

What makes a work of art political? The label "political art" is in general applied to a wide variety of art productions, practices, and activities. In the contemporary art world there is great confusion concerning the question of what should be considered political art partly because there is another great debate concerning the questions of what is political.[40] The term "political art" is frequently employed in literature and theoretical debates on art and politics as an umbrella term which accommodates arts which sustain and legitimize the status quo, arts which criticize and oppose it, as well as arts which simply portray a political affair or event without taking a stance (neither "pro" nor "against").

For those who endorse the common definition of political art ("art with a political message and content"), this can be divided into three categories: endorsement, critique, and portrayal. The first category supports and legitimates the political power of the moment (some art styles or movements seem to fit better in this category than others: Socialist Realism, Advertisement Art, and to some extent Pop Art).[41]

The second category critiques and negates the status quo of the moment (political, economic, or artistic status quo) and attempts to make visible the injustices that the dominant structures of power tend to obscure and here too; some art movements seem to fit better into this category than others: Dada, Conceptual Art, *NeueSachlichkeit*, Realism, Social Realism, Performance Art (but also many instances of "Outsider" art and Art Brut). Finally, the third category covers art that does not necessarily support or critique the status quo but only portrays power relations like Historical Painting. Artists from this category merely record or chronicle the events without taking a political stance. The fact that some art styles and movements fit better than others in one category or another does not mean that exceptions cannot be found. Political art does not belong to any particular specific style or genre and it does not employ any particular specific technique and medium. Political art pieces can range from Rococo to Conceptual Art and from classical portraits to contemporary multimedia art.

Although all three categories are generally considered instances of political art, only the "critique" category highlights the antagonistic dimension of the political and thus deserves the label "political art" in the sense at issue here. Art is often produced in a network of power relations and only affirms that relations of power. Is such art then accurately called "political"? The answer to this question depends on what understanding of the political we employ. The political can be defined as something having to do with "social relationships involving authority or power."[42]

This understanding of "the political" is certainly correct as the political is the expression of power relations and hegemony but it is incomplete.

The hegemony part of the definition of the political has to be coupled with the antagonistic or counter-hegemonic struggle if it wants to offer a fruitful account for what is political in the sense intended in this book. In other words, as Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau argue, there are two key concepts involved in the political: hegemony and antagonism. By hegemony they mean "the process by which the views, values, or interests of a section of society come to dominate the society as a whole by occupying the place of the official, accepted, authorized, and legitimated thought"[43] and "antagonism" comes to mean "a we/they relation between enemies who want to destroy each other." Mouffe adds that,

> A properly political intervention (antagonistic) is always one that engages with a certain aspect of the existing hegemony in order to disarticulate/re-articulate its constitutive elements. It can never be merely oppositional or conceived as desertion because it aims at re-articulating the situation in a new configuration.[44]

In other words, she is saying that in a properly political intervention, it is not enough to negate or to criticize hegemony. My understanding of the political is inspired by Mouffe's, but also differs from hers in certain respects. I would define the political as the totality of the relations of power and authority in society, all of which can be questioned by counter-hegemonic interventions. Every hegemonic order is susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices which attempt to challenge and destabilize it.

Like Mouffe, I consider that the concept of the political incorporates both the idea of power (hegemony) and antagonism (resistance and denial of hegemony). It cannot be accurately defined if we don't take into account its antagonistic or critical and anti-hegemonic dimension. Unlike her, I don't endorse the view that a new configuration of power has to be "re-articulated" to replace the old one. I don't assume that the counter-hegemonic practices (inherent in the political) which attempt to disarticulate power have to necessarily install another form of hegemony. Once a counter-hegemonic intervention is transformed into a new form of power, it becomes part of the establishment.

If we follow Mouffe's path, then we replace a form of hegemony with another and the focus in understanding the political will be on the hegemony rather than on antagonism; when in fact both of them equally count in the understanding of the political. This does not mean that critical art cannot question the hegemony from within. For example, those artists who self-consciously choose to work on the margins and in opposition with the mainstream globalized art world perform their "politics of invisibility" and exodus from the hegemonic institutions. Their choice to withdraw is informed by reasons of social, economic, and political critique: "by grasping the politics

of their own invisibility and marginalization they inevitably challenge the formation of normative artistic values."[45] The weakness of Mouffe's account is not that hegemony cannot be questioned from within (obviously it can), but with her two further claims that (a) critical art as simply a manifestation of refusal or negation of power is not a properly political intervention. "Too much emphasis on dis-identification happens at the expense of re-identification, i.e., we don't only need a critique of what exists, trapped within a deterministic framework, but also a re-imagining of what is possible,"[46] and (b) "Every hegemonic order is susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices i.e., practices which will attempt to disarticulate the existing order so as to install another form of hegemony."[47]

I define political art as art that deliberately sets out to oppose by criticizing the hegemony. This critique can function both as a withdrawal and disengagement from power and as an involvement with a certain aspect of the existing hegemony (in order to destabilize that hegemony). I don't prioritize, like Mouffe, the second form of critique over the first. The reason I don't prioritize the second form of critique over the first one is because many times the outsider artists who are not involved in the mainstream institutions of power challenge the hegemony by refusing to be part of it. In this way they manage to make the others aware of the mechanisms of domination present within these institutions of power without necessarily wanting to replace the hegemonic power with another power.

For example, the dissident artists of the totalitarian regimes have criticized the power with their political art without being part of power's institutions (e.g., the unions of artists from the former Eastern bloc) and without criticizing a point of view in favor of another. For example, the dissident artists from the former USSR (like Gennady Donskoy, Viktor Skersis, and Mikhail Roshal) criticized the socialist hegemony of the moment by performing a ritual burial. The artists were buried in the ground and spoke into a microphone about their struggles as artists in the communist USSR. When they eventually came out from the hole, they started to scream: "Where is Chris Burden when we need him?" What I want to illustrate with this example is that political art does not criticize a perspective, in this case communist hegemony, in favor of another perspective—which is "better" or it would be a candidate for a new hegemony to replace the criticized one. When the Russian dissident artists asked "*Where is Chris Burden when we need him?*" their critique was not just meant to challenge the communist USSR hegemony and its official art scene and to contrast it with the free art of the West. Their critique is directed at the heart of any hegemony (the Western art world and its celebrity Chris Burden included).

This way of understanding political art does not put emphasis on art's "political message and content," as in the common definition of political

art, but on "critical intervention." To critically intervene in power relations does not mean to merely reflect on these relations (either being affirmative of the relations of power in which art is produced or merely portraying these relations). It has to be added here that the common definition of political art is problematic not only because it misconstrues the understanding of "the political" but also because it situates it within art's content only. As the next chapter will demonstrate, the critical intervention can be the organizing principle of the political art in all its aspects: not only its content but also its form and its modes of production and dissemination. At this point, I just have to stress that art's content or message is just one element which might count as political but not the only one. Just to briefly take an individual example, let's look at political music: the elements that are in fact political in some musical pieces range from lyrics (content), to rhythm, sounds, and performance (see for example the role of drumming in social movements).

To detect to what extent a piece of art is political or nonpolitical we need a good knowledge of its general context larger than the art historical one. For instance, we cannot suitably claim that some of Picasso's art, dealing with the Spanish Civil War is political if we have only a limited knowledge of the Spanish Civil War, of Picasso's stylistic and personal history and so on. The context described in Art History books is not always enough because many times political power manipulates the discipline of Art History and the textbooks from school curricula, and the art that survives from the past epochs is whatever the authorities permitted to be preserved in museums and archives like in authoritarian regimes. The "political" dimension of an art piece depends on the context in which it is performed, exhibited, or listened to.

For example, the music of an ethnic minority that is listened to solely for entertainment purposes (totally nonpolitical) in the country of origin becomes a tool for the identification and protest of ethnic groups against the interests of the dominant groups from the country of settlement.[48] This example shows that the same art piece can be seen both as a form of political expression when the power relations are at stake and as a form of entertainment when the power relations are not at stake the same piece of music is just an artistic piece of nonpolitical entertainment.

## PROPAGANDA ART VERSUS POLITICAL-CRITICAL ART: IN TOTALITARIAN REGIMES AND IN LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES

Until this point, this chapter attempted to clarify what makes art political. As stated at the beginning, the second aim of this chapter is to distinguish

political-critical art from propaganda art. I have suggested that propaganda art is political only in a minimal sense and it would be a mistake to think that critical art or counter-hegemonic art and propaganda art are equally "political" in the same sense and to the same degree. In what follows, I explore the differences between the political in critical art and the political in propaganda art.[49]

For the sake of clarity, I propose to address the question of "the political" in propaganda art and in critical art in a comparative perspective: in totalitarianism and in liberal democracies. First of all, this comparison allows me to address the question of the political in art in two antithetical political regimes: from a political regime where almost all arts were submitted to the ideological and institutional control and all art were expected to be "political," to a regime of liberalization of art where theoretically there is no official requirement for art to be politically concerned. Tackling the issue of what is political in art comparatively in totalitarianism and in liberal democracies is unavoidable for my approach for several reasons which I will discuss at large below. Art that is politically concerned has not appeared only or first in the twentieth century's totalitarianism; actually it existed a long time before these political regimes and has not stopped after their fall either. The reason why both art theorists and political scientists refer first to the totalitarian regimes when they address the question of what is political in art is twofold: from a strict academic perspective, "politics and the arts" studies has developed as a marginal subfield of political science, and the idea of propaganda is usually associated with totalitarian regimes, especially when we focus on the art production of those regimes. It is stated that the propaganda machine of totalitarian regimes used all cultural production including *all* arts for its purposes to promote and legitimize the status quo. Totalitarian regimes emphasized the political importance of propaganda art to such an important degree that it became the only officially accepted art of those regimes.

The theorists of "political art" usually disagree on whether political art can be truly political in totalitarian regimes to the same extent as in liberal democracies. One group of contemporary philosophers, which includes Boris Groys and Jean Baudrillard, claim that the art of liberal democracies is predominantly a "spectacle" commodity and it cannot accomplish a substantial critique of the mechanisms of power which produced it and distributed it. Therefore, for these theorists, any form of political art created under (neo)liberal capitalist democracies of the Western world (as the one that only confirms that condition) cannot be truly political. Groys explicitly states, "Art becomes politically significant only when it is made beyond or outside the art market—like propaganda art."[50] By stating that, Groys explicitly admits that especially propaganda art of communist regimes is "truly" political, if it is compared to any political art produced in liberal democracies, because the propaganda art

of the communist regimes has been produced outside the art market because there was no art market during communist rule.

The second group of theorists claim that, on the contrary, only art produced in liberal democracies can be truly political and critical of the mechanisms of power, while the art of totalitarian regimes has been just plain propaganda for the unique party because at that time the unique party neutralized any form of critique. Finally, the third group claims that only dissident art in totalitarian regimes produced beyond or outside the political power is accurately political because only that art has been critical of the regime's propaganda machine with the risk of being forbidden and censured. They claim that in liberal democracy art cannot be truly political anymore (critical art) because the critique is always "tamed" and assimilated by the cultural status quo. Every form of artistic dissent is institutionalized by the hegemonic art world and the critical aspect, in this way, vanishes.

## PROPAGANDA ART VERSUS POLITICAL CRITICAL ART IN TOTALITARIAN REGIMES

Propaganda is usually defined as a term used to describe a goal driven communication meant to "send out an ideology to an audience with a related objective."[51] Yet, this book is concerned with political art and not with nonart propaganda. Propaganda art is political art in the sense that it is concerned with promoting a certain political view and it has a political message. However, typically its message usually promotes the hegemony of the moment or critiques whatever that hegemony wants to be criticized. There are many guises in which propaganda art may appear but I don't explore them here. Some artists argue, for instance, that art created in opposition to ruling ideas and values of hegemony may also fall under the rubric of propaganda. Thus, when does art become propaganda? Art becomes propaganda not necessarily when artists work on behalf of hegemony or in opposition to it but when it leaves no room for a deliberative stance in the viewer, when it leaves no room for genuine political participation and deliberation. Anyway, although I admit that sometimes, it may happen that art created in opposition to hegemony to fall under the label of propaganda (if that piece of art wants to impose a certain view without leaving room for deliberation and interpretation), typically art which opposes the hegemony of the moment has a certain flexibility in its meaning. To put it shortly, propaganda art is simply *Vulgäre Tendenzkunst* ("vulgar tendentious art") and doesn't leave the possibility for flexibility in its appreciation and understanding. In totalitarianism, propaganda art does not leave room *either* in the production *or* in the reception because its politics, commitments, and meanings have been imposed from above and controlled

from above. Its politics is an enforced politics in which the deliberative stance of the artist/audience is totally disregarded.

Many people tend to consider only propaganda art as "political" (especially people from the former communist countries). Not only have those from the art business (artists, curators, art critics) but also the untrained art public tended to consider only the first defective and minimal sense of "political art" ("political art is art with political message and content"). For those who are not into arts, political art is understood exclusively as the propaganda art of communist and Nazi regimes. This artistic production is regarded as political because it served the unique party or the political power and because its "message" was political. Political art was considered to be exclusively "official" art of the totalitarian regimes which was meant only to reinforce and the hegemony. Another significant aspect is that the communist status quo required that only the content of all art to be political. There were no definite demands regarding the form of artistic production. In other words, art could have any form or style, as long as the content was "political."

In what follows, this chapter shows, contrary to common opinion, that the official art of totalitarian regimes is political only in a minimal sense, precisely because of its forcefully committed stance, while the unofficial art, mainly opposition-critical art, is truthfully political in the robust sense precisely because of its non-imposed commitment. Socialist Realism has been the official canon of art in communist regimes. Socialist Realism required that all arts perform a "political" function, and for this reason Socialist Realist art has been labeled the "eminently" political art. The communist ideologues used the formula "political art" in order to denote "Socialist Realism," the official canon of all art adopted in the Soviet Union and in its satellites starting with 1930. In this view, Socialist Realism has been the *only* "political art." The ideologues of Socialist Realism did not see the unofficial art as political (by "unofficial" art I mean in this context both art that was directly confrontational to the regime and its canon, and purely aesthetic art).

These art practices of antagonism and critique of the "cultural hegemony" were regarded by the totalitarian regime as "degenerate" art practices but not as "political." For example, in the former Soviet Union, party's cultural officials denounced the writings of the humorist Mikhail Zoshchenko, charged with writing "degenerate and vulgar parodies on Soviet life."[52] The same cultural hegemony also censured the poetess Anna Akhmatova, who was blamed for writing "empty and 'nonpolitical' poetry."[53] Producing nonpolitical art during communism was regarded as the artist's immense blemish, as a "devil-may-care attitude" and "ideological indifference." The artist's obligation was to spread the communist cultural and political values and to produce political art: "artists assume that politics is the business of the government and the Central Committee (. . . .) We require that our comrades both as leaders in literary

affairs and writers, be guided by the vital strength of the Soviet order—its politics."[54] As these examples demonstrate, political art has been identified entirely with propaganda art. Maybe this is one of the reasons why, long after the collapse of the totalitarian regimes in the former communist countries, political art is still understood "exclusively" as the official or propaganda art of the regime.

In spite of this constraint, many works of art produced during harsh dictatorship did not respect the canon imposed from above by the status quo without being critical in an overt sense. The communist party disapproved even of these art works because their appeal to masses was insignificant and, more importantly, because they were not "political" enough. Being "not political enough" represented for communist hegemony "not having a political message or content." To sum up, political art was reduced to a source of ideological information (propaganda) and the artists were reduced to a "singleness of aspirations, singleness of ideas, and singleness of aim."[55]

However, Igor Golomstock is right when he posits that not everything created in the art context under a totalitarian regime could be explained through a single party's monopoly.[56] Not all art works that have been produced during authoritarian regimes can be understood as official, propaganda art. In the case of communist art, "autonomous" productions have been a political tactic by which artists differentiated themselves from their contemporary field of cultural politics. "Autonomous" art in a totalitarian political regime refers in my approach to that art which criticized and opposed propaganda art and the political imperatives which underlines it, in this way safeguarding its political and critical autonomy.

Thus, unofficial, critical works of art manifested their politics through various strategies of opposition: from the overtly anti-hegemony critique to the ways in which they indirectly opposed the official canon of art production, interpretation, and distribution. Unlike propaganda art, critical art of communist regimes is not political only in an overt sense but it appeals to the viewer as a political being in possession of the faculties needed for a genuine political deliberation. Both propaganda art and critical art are committed to the political reflection on reality but their commitment is different. The commitment to create a critical art piece remains politically polyvalent, while propaganda's politics has no flexibility. As Williams posits, an artistic commitment at its best means to take social reality and the political reality as the focus of the artwork and "then to find some of the hundred ways in which all these aspects can be approached."[57] At its worst, it could be an imposed commitment which merely focuses on what the hegemony of the moment demands. By the same token, Adorno claims that politically motivated commitment in arts "remains politically polyvalent as long as it is not reduced to propaganda."[58] Propaganda art's imposed committed standpoint leaves no room for deliberative thinking for debate and no room for what the work may articulate because the meaning and function is imposed from above.

## POLITICAL-CRITICAL ART IN LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES

Political-critical art of both totalitarianism and liberal and illiberal democratic regimes is a counter-hegemonic intervention which typically unsettles the status quo. Many times, critical art is censured in both regimes. Not only totalitarian regimes have censured critical art but also the liberal democratic ones. For example, Botero's series of Abu Ghraib paintings have been banned in most parts of the United States; the mayor of New York City, Rudolf Giuliani, disapproved Botero's art to be shown in the Brooklyn Museum and so on.

Contemporary political artists from liberal democratic regimes strive to question the neo-liberal hegemony exactly as the oppositional artists of totalitarian regimes have questioned the Nazi and Communist authority in spite of so many voices claiming that art has lost its critical power after the fall of totalitarianism, because any form of critique is automatically neutralized by the capitalist system. Marco Martiniello and Jean-Michel Lafleur hold, for example, that political-critical music loses its political stance once it enters the multifaceted system of the music industry. Once the music enters the capitalist market it becomes a product that is produced, disseminated, exchanged, and even censored. There is always a struggle for some political music between remaining partly a form of protest music and becoming a mainstream genre, removing any controversial lyrics in order to broaden the audience. Boris Groys also argues that the only way for art to become political under liberal democracy is to become critical ("which means that it tries to reflect explicitly on its own-character-as-commodity").[59]

By the same token, he argues that Islamist videos and posters functioning in the context of the international anti-globalist movement are political creations made outside the dominating art market, and which are overlooked by the institutions of the art market because this art is not a commodity.[60] Yet, not being a commodity is not always a necessary condition for art to be truly political. In some contexts even the commodified art pieces preserve their critical value. For instance, Rap music which deals with problems of discrimination, poverty, and violence may remain in some contexts a powerful tool for Afro-Americans to express their anxiety and critique against status quo even though sometimes it is mass commercialized through MTV and other channels of consumerism.[61]

Nonetheless, political art from both totalitarian regimes and liberal democracies has several elements in common, but this does not mean that relevant differences cannot be discerned. While the political art of the totalitarian regimes manifested its critique of hegemony mostly as withdrawal, remaining mainly outside official art institutions (being mostly an apartment-underground art type), in liberal democracies critical-political art tends to be

institutionalized and, in this way, its political stance is sometimes neutralized. It is not uncommon to hold the view that capitalism can mobilize to alter any critique into a form of commodity that thereby neutralizes in the end that critique (Mouffe, Jameson). There are many examples of critical art which has been depoliticized once they have become part of the culture industry.[62]

A very interesting phenomenon, known as the "institutionalization of dissent," started in the 1980s: critical art is gentrified by the mainstream culture and by its institutions. What at the beginning was intended to be "critical" to hegemony suddenly becomes a new "mainstream." This is not such a big surprise since the "enemy" looks familiar, being the hand that feeds the contemporary political artists. As the American political artist Lucy Lippard honestly puts it, "We were picketing the people we drank with and lived off [. . . .] We were full of 'mixed feelings,' because we wanted to be considered workers as everyone else and at the same time we were not happy when we saw our products being treated like everyone else's, because deep down we know as artists we are special."[63]

In spite of this tendency, there is still room for true dissent even if these gifts of resistance are not always visible because of their marginality. Political-critical art of liberal democratic regimes continues to coexist with the art of a globalized mainstream art world which is fully developed providing distribution systems which integrate artists into the global market. But if an established distribution system rejects what it considers to be "inconvenient" art pieces, it will always be possible to organize a *Salon des Refusés* more or less fully developed in providing art circulation. In other words, artists can choose various distribution systems, not necessarily the mainstream galleries or art magazines, which serve them best or constrain them least. In liberal democracies, political art does not cease to be oppositional and critical.

For some contemporary artists and art theorists "political art" is a tedious term which has to go away. Anja Kirschner and David Panos pointed out that these days the term "political art" operates "to obscure competing notions of the 'political,' replacing potential antagonisms with the self-congratulatory assumption that all 'political' art shares a liberal/progressive and ultimately compatible perspective."[64] For me it is clear that this term makes no sense for many people because of at least three reasons: the frequently heard assertion that "all art is political"; the conception that art is political when it deals with political issues, without distinguishing if this "dealing with political issues" comports a critical manner or not; and the misconception that politics has to do with legitimizing power over something. Instead of giving up the term political art (as Anja Kirschner and David Panos among others suggest) it would be more useful and productive to better disentangle it.

To this end, this chapter attempted to conceptually clarify the meaning of "political art." It rejected the common sense understanding of political art

as "art with a political message and content" on the grounds that it fails to acknowledge the fact that political art is not exclusively a matter of content or message; it assumes falsely that political art must be political in an overt sense and it fails to distinguish political art that is propaganda from political art that is not propaganda. Then, this chapter suggested that political art, in its narrow sense, is that art that deliberately sets out to critically intervene in power relations by challenging the imposed hierarchies and values—cultural, economic, or social. This understanding of political art allows us to distinguish between works of art which are political only in a "lax" sense from works of art which are not merely dealing with a political topic or confirm the hegemony but critically resist the status quo. The latter are "robustly" political.

There are nonetheless distinctive ways of framing the meaning of political art and these conceptual demarcations are nevertheless important for understanding the ways in which the public engages with political art, because the political involved in propaganda art of Socialist Realism is not the same with the politics of Liliana Basarab's performance art piece titled *We Might Fall Down or We Might Stand Up* (2013), where the artist envisions an artistic participatory action meant to destabilize and critique the myth of the individual "self" under the neoliberal order (see Figure 1.1).

The fact that we customarily call them both "political" pieces of art does not mean that they both are political to the same degree and in the same way.

**Figure 1.1 Liliana Basarab, *We Might Fall Down or We Might Stand Up*. 2013.** *Source*: Courtesy of the artist.

The way in which art *is* political determines both its appreciation as art and its effectiveness. Art that is called "political" but only restates the dominating hegemony of the moment is political only in a lax sense because its politics circumvents the spectator's political deliberation. If it circumvents reflection then it works like a hammer in a didactic manner and becomes ineffective both politically and artistically being boring, ineffective, and uninteresting. My proposal of considering the different ways of framing the meaning of political art is meant to assist us in distinguishing the degrees of politicality in a piece of art. That does not mean that what people call "political" always will coincide with the conditions of my definition. I concede that in some cases one person's propaganda art will be another person's critical art. There is room for disagreement on this issue because it cannot be settled in advance for whom art is political in a critical sense and for whom is propaganda art. Here, in a philosophical fashion, I have attempted to merely set out the principle.

## NOTES

1. Stephen Duncombe and Steve Lambert, "An Open Letter to Critics Writing on Political Art," *Centre for Artistic Activism*, http://artisticactivism.org/2012/10/an-open-letter-to-critics-writing-about-political-art/.

2. For a detailed account of this issue see Paul Wood, *The Challenge of the Avant-Garde* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

3. This common sense definition of political art is entrenched in art theories and common language very much. For instance, Amy Mullin holds that "political art designates art that explores political subject matter but it is not made in a way that involves political action" (Amy Mullin, "Feminist Art and The Political Imagination," *Hypatia* 18, no. 4 (Fall 2003), http://www.public.asu.edu/~kleong/activistart-theory.pdf).

4. This will be largely treated in the next chapter.

5. Nina Felshin, *But Is It Art?* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).

6. Christy Mag Uidhir and P. D. Magnus, "Art Concept Pluralism," *Metaphilosophy* 42, no. 2, (2011): 83–97.

7. I have to note here that I look only at Danto's concept of the "artworld" namely, its role in fixing art's identity and interpretation from his 1964 article "The Artworld" (*The Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (1964): 571–84). For the moment I don't deal with the other two conditions of something to be art-"aboutness" and "embodiment"—put forth by Danto later on.

8. The 1974 definition of art holds that a work of art "in the classificatory sense is (1) an artifact, (2) a set of the aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the art world)" (George Dickie, *Art and the Arsthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 34). The 1997 definitions state that an artist is a person who participates with understanding in the making of

a work of art; a work of art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an art world public; and a public is a set of persons the members of which are prepared in some degree to understand an object which is presented to them; (3) The art world is the totality of all artworld systems; (4) An art world system is a framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to an art world public (see George Dickie, *The Art Circle* (New York: Haven, 1984), 79–111).

9. Jeffrey Wieand, "Can There Be an Institutional Theory of Art?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 39, no. 4 (Summer, 1981): 413.

10. Arthur Danto, "The Artworld," *The Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (1964): 580.

11. See George Dickie, *Art Circle: A Theory of Art* (Chicago: Spectrum Press, 1997).

12. Derek Matravers distinguishes between strong and weak institutionalism but criticizes both of them (see "The Institutional Theory: A Protean Creature," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 40, no. 2 (April 2000): 242–50).

13. August Wilson, *The Paris Review* (Winter 1999): 12.

14. See Chantal Mouffe, *On The Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 16.

15. Daniel Van Der Gucht, "Pour enfinir avec la mythologie de l'artistepolitique: de l'engagement a la responsabilite," in *Les FormesContemporainesd'Art Engage*, ed. Eric Van Essche (Bruxelles: Collection Essais, 2007), 59–68.

16. See Chris Bateman's article *The Activist's Argument (Everything is Political)*, http://onlyagame.typepad.com/only_a_game/2010/05/the-activists-argument-everything-is-political.html.

17. For example in East Asia the classic Chinese mountain-water ink painting was traditionally the most respected form of visual art, while the landscape painting in the West until the nineteenth century occupied a lower status in the accepted hierarchy of the genres (for more on this issue see *Landscape Painting in Chinese Art*, July 17, 2017, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/clpg/hd_clpg.htm).

18. Originally, these "arpilleras" were exclusively detailed hand-sewn, three dimensional textile pictures which tell the story of those who disappeared during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in the 1970s and 1980s. In another instance, women political prisoners who were held captive during the Pinochet dictatorship used "arpilleras" to camouflage notes sent to helpers outside. Even the most suspicious guards did not think to check the appliquéd pictures for messages, since sewing was seen as inconsequential women's work. March 29, 2017. http://www.thefolkartgallery.com/arpilleras.htmn.

19. Noël Carroll, "The Strange Case of Noël Carroll: A Conversation with the Controversial Film Philosopher," interview by Ray Privett and James Kreul. *Senses of Cinema,* April 13, 2001, http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2001/13/carroll/.

20. Ben Davis, "What Good is Political Art in Times like This," *Artinfo,* February 2011, http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/37024/what-good-is-political-art-in-times-like-these/.

21. The formulas "This is too aesthetic" and "This is too political" appear in Azoulay's writings among others (Ariella Azoulay, "Getting Rid of the Distinction

between the Aesthetic and the Political," *Theory, Culture and Society* 27, no. 8 (2011): 239–65).

22. Ben Davis, "What Good is Political Art in Times Like This," *Artinfo*, February 2011, http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/37024/what-good-is-political-art-in-times-like-these/.

23. Edward Winkelman, *The Oxymoronical 'Political Art' Issue (again): Open Thread,* June, 19, 2009, http://www.edwardwinkleman.com/2009_06_01_archive.html?view=classic.

24. See Ad Reinhardt's considerations at "The Art Story, Modern art Insight," http://www.theartstory.org/artist-reinhardt-ad.htm.

25. Robert Motherwell quoted in Lucy Lippard, "Hot Potatoes: Art and Politics in 1980," *Block* no. 4 (1981): 2–9.

26. Donald Kuspit, "The Psychoanalytic Construction of Beauty," *Artnet*, http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/kuspit/kuspit7-23-02.asp.

27. Heinz Ickstadt, "Towards a Pluralist Aesthetics," in *Aesthetics in a Multicultural Age*, eds. Emory Elliott, Louis Freitas Caton and Jeffrey Rhyne (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2002), 289.

28. Emma L. E. Rees, *The Vagina: A Literary and Cultural History* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 160.

29. Chantal Mouffe, Rosalyn Deutsche, Branden W. Joseph, and Thomas Keenan, "Every Form of Art Has a Political Dimension," *Grey Room* no. 2 (2001): 100, MIT Press.

30. I don't discuss here all the senses of the "autonomy of art" but I just mention the most popular: the aesthetic sense (the autonomy of the aesthetic judgment), the social autonomy of art (the artist is free from patronage, church or state), the autonomy of one art (e.g., painting) from other arts, the autonomy of art in general from nonart.

31. "Art is or ought to be divorced from life. Art has a life of its own (just as thought has) and develops purely on its own lines" (Oscar Wilde, *The Decay of Lying* (New York: Lamb, 1909), 54).

32. There are various possible definitions for art for art's sake: (1) moderate aestheticism or separatism = the thesis of the separation of the value spheres (there is a concept of aesthetic value separated from moral and other values); (2) radical aestheticism = aesthetic value is superior to moral or other values (Friedrich Nietzsche, Oscar Wilde); (3) contemplation thesis = the aesthetic is the domain of disinterested, distanced contemplation, involving a special attitude; (4) independence thesis = art is separated from life (for more on this issue, see for example Andy Hamilton, *Adorno and the Autonomy of Art*, http://www.andyhamilton.org.uk/).

33. The autotelism is a nonutilitarian theory of art holding that a work of art is an end in itself or its own justification (for a standard definition see http://www.thefreedictionary.com/autotelism).

34. Hilton Kramer, "Art: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party Comes to Brooklyn Museum," *The New York Times*, October 17, 1980.

35. Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Athlone, 1997), 5.

36. James Martin Harding, *Adorno and "The Writings of the Ruins": Essays on Modern Aesthetics and Anglo-American Literature and Culture* (New York: State University of New York Press, Albany, 1997), 12.

37. Theodor Adorno, "Commitment," in *EssentialFrankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arto and EikeGebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1982), 300–19.

38. In art's case "autonomy" is just a relative autonomy. Excepting the case of formalist art where art can itself be treated as an autonomous "life of forms," in any other case art is art as something else, so the autonomy is just a relative one. Even when art is abandoned for "real life," it is still partly autonomous. Even in the cases when the art production as part of culture industry has only a relative autonomy, there is still something to be done about this autonomy as fragile as it is.

39. Boris Groys, *The Power of Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 16.

40. This confusion is due in part to the ongoing debate concerning the question of what is political. The twentieth century witnessed a proliferation of interpretations regarding the concept of "politics," among which one could find the inclusion of the private sphere ("the personal is political") and other phenomena circumscribed by expressions like "identity politics," "social work's politics," "cultural politics," and so on.

41. Beside its critique of Fine Arts art of the past, Pop Art supports consumerism and advertisement industry.

42. Common definition of the "political," see http://www.thefreedictionary.com/political.

43. Chantal Mouffe, "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces," *Art and Research* 1, no. 2 (Summer, 2007), http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v1n2/mouffe.html.

44. Chantal Mouffe, *On The Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 16.

45. Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter*: *Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 4.

46. Chantal Mouffe, "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces," *Art and Research* 1, no. 2 (Summer, 2007).

47. Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 18.

48. Salsa music, rap music and other examples of political music are discussed at large in Marco Martineiello and Jean-Michel Lafleur, "Ethnic Minorities' Cultural and Artistic Practices as Forms of Political Expression: A Review of the Literature and a Theoretical Discussion on Music," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34, no. 8 (November, 2008): 1191–217.

49. A larger and slightly different version of this section has been published in Maria-Alina Asavei, "A Theoretical Excursus on the Concept of Political Art in Communism and its Aftermath," *Studia Politica* 11, no. 4 (Fall, 2011): 647–61.

50. Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 5–7.

51. Lisa White, *Transitional Justice and Legacies of State Violence* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 101.

52. Ann Demaitre, "The Great Debate on Socialist Realism," *The Modern Language Journal* 50, no. 5 (May, 1966): 264.

53. Ibid.

54. *LiteraturnaiaGazeta,* September 21, 1946, 83 (my translation from Russian).

55. Karl Radek, "Contemporary World Literature and the Tasks of Proletarian Art," *Problems of Soviet Literature* 35 (1948): 9.

56. Igor Golomstock, *Totaliatarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China* (London: Collins Harvill, 1991).

57. Raymond Williams, "The Writer: Commitment and Alignment," *Marxism Today*, http://www.amielandmelburn.org.uk/collections/mt/pdf/80_06_22.pdf.

58. Theodor Adorno, "Commitment," in *Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arto and EikeGebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1982), 300–19.

59. Boris Groys, "Art after Communism," http://www.unitednationsplaza.org/event/22/.

60. Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 9.

61. For more details about the way in which rap groups accept to soften their message for reaching a global audience as an effect of commercialization (while remaining at the same time opposition artists), see Tricia Rose, *Black Noise. Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

62. An example is Rai music in France elaborated by Martinello and Lafleur. This music developed in Algeria as a combination of rural and urban culture music. It is considered to have been talking about difficult social issues like poverty, marginal life, and so on. From 1979 onwards Rai has been struggling between remaining a form of protest music and becoming a mainstream genre, removing any controversial lyrics in order to broader the audience (Marco Martineiello and Jean-Michel Lafleur, "Ethnic Minorities' Cultural and Artistic Practices as Forms of Political Expression: A Review of the Literature and a Theoretical Discussion on Music," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34, no. 8 (November, 2008): 1202).

63. Lucy Lippard, "Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power," in *Art Theory and Criticism*, ed. Sally Everett (McFarland Company Publishers, 1983), 191.

64. Anja Kirschner and David Panos, "Art and Politics—A Survey (part 2)," interview with Frieze, September 12, 2012. http://blog.frieze.com/art-and-politics-a-survey-part-2/.

## *Chapter 2*

# Political-Critical Art and the Aesthetic

This chapter disentangles a perspective on the aesthetic which goes beyond a certain, purist understanding of it, hoping to provide a sound mode of joining the aesthetic and political art, in spite of all discontent regarding their compatibility. As a preliminary remark, I point out for the sake of clarity that the conception of the aesthetic this chapter puts forth goes beyond a purist aesthetic approach to art which was very popular in the twentieth century known as Aesthetic Modernism. It will be shown later on that many vestiges of it are still found in contemporary art theory and philosophical aesthetics.

Many theorists hold that there is a gap between political-critical art and the aesthetic. Why does there appear to be a gap between them? On the one hand, political-critical art is a confrontational art, dealing with problems of injustice or abuses of power. Its purpose is to increase the awareness about the mechanisms of domination in society by criticizing those mechanisms. On the other hand, the aesthetic has been customarily understood as something affording a pleasurable experience of a special kind which happens to us when we perceive the surface/"form" of artworks or natural kinds. Political art, these critics claim, does not operate primarily via "the aesthetic": it is not a pleasing art because its purpose is not to afford us an aesthetic experience but to make us conscious of society's problems. For attaining this purpose, political art looks unappealing, shocking, or repellent and even when it looks attractive its attractiveness is separate from its political content. They conclude that political art does not have an aesthetic purpose and this makes it a lesser art (bad art) or at least a non-aesthetic instance of art.

On the other hand, another theoretical position also holds that there is a gap between political-critical art and the aesthetic, but for different reasons than those sketched above. This theoretical position holds that the aesthetic is an "ideological construct" (Terry Eagleton, Paul de Man, and Pierre Bourdieu

among many others) or an "instrument of evasion" (Raymond Williams) which usually supports and popularizes the values of the status quo (cultural elites). The argument which underlines this claim goes like this: the real function of the aesthetic is that of an ideology. This ideology imposes what is good art and good taste and assumes an alienating division of human labor distinguishing between art (aesthetic, superior) and craft (non-aesthetic, inferior). From this perspective the concept of the aesthetic does not go well with counter-hegemonic critical art.

Against both types of critics, this chapter argues that political-critical art need not be evaluated in accordance with the notion of the aesthetic they are employing. It seems that both categories of critics conflate the concept of the aesthetic with a "purist aesthetic" approach to art. However, the aesthetic designates one thing and a purist aesthetic designates a different one. Both categories of critics fail to make this distinction. The consequence of this conflation of the aesthetic with the pure aesthetic approach to art led to a rejection of the aesthetic tout court from contemporary art discourse and theory in general. The present day rejection of the aesthetic (Eagleton, de Man, Williams, Schödlbauer) has to do (among other things) with a recurrent identification of the aesthetic with a particular and influential historical version of it, namely, the "purist version of the aesthetic." According to this version: the piece of art x is "aesthetic" if (a) it affords an aesthetic experience (based on an affect-oriented apprehending of art), (b) the aesthetic purpose of art is its *only* purpose (or the primary purpose), and (c) art appreciation is defined as a response to purely formal qualities—line, shape, space, texture, light, and color (where "'form' refers to the visible/perceivable elements of a piece, independent of their meaning").[1]

Responsible for the popularity of this understanding of the aesthetic are the formalist aestheticians, both from the modernist formalist tradition (Bell, Fry, Hanslick, Gurney, Greenberg, Fried, Prall), contemporary formalist aestheticians (Beardsley and Curtain), and the so-called attitude theories (Stolnitz and Bullough). The pure aesthetic approach to art is erroneously considered by many theorists "the aesthetic paradigm of art" betrayed also by the twentieth century Avant-Garde. My stance is that this version of the aesthetic is, indeed, exclusionary and narrow and needs to be rejected. It is exclusionary because many art pieces which do not afford us a pleasure of a certain kind, would not be credited with aesthetic potential and would be considered inferior/bad, "aesthetically meretricious" art or nonart. This understanding of the aesthetic emphasizes a raw/immediate "sensibility" as opposed to "conceptual-dependent aesthetic understanding" of art where the art piece is experienced as part of a certain context or history and with a certain awareness of the fact that what we experience is art.[2] Thus, this chapter argues for the later and against the former.

One final disclaimer: I have to acknowledge from the beginning that I am not criticizing the entire aesthetic tradition but only a part of it: purist aesthetic approaches of art. I will take issue with those theories (both traditional and contemporary) which take the concept of "the aesthetic"—or some allied concept like the "formal"—as essentially perceptual or formal (a cognitively non-inflicted perception of a special kind).

What this chapter will provide is a revision and an enlargement of the understanding of the aesthetic which will accommodate political-critical art. Before putting forth the main arguments, it has to be first explained what counts as the aesthetic. We have been accustomed to rely more upon a sense of the aesthetic as established by a certain version of the philosophical aesthetic tradition. According to this tradition, the "sensuous" is central to the idea of the aesthetic.[3] Another tenet we are familiar with, closely connected with the (purist) concept of the aesthetic, is that "form" of an object is paramount to its aesthetic appreciation. On this view, "form" would be seen as the depoliticized structure of art while content is the aesthetically devaluated counter-part of it. I attempt to circumvent the dichotomy between political content seen as non-aesthetic in art appreciation and pure or aesthetic form. I posit that the political can find expression through formal, aesthetic means too.

In order to defend this position, it has to be first explained what counts as the aesthetic. The first section of this chapter focuses on the concept of the aesthetic attempting to highlight its traditional meanings. The second section elaborates on the two categories of critics of the mixing of political-critical art and the aesthetic who find that "there is a gap" or an incompatibility between the aesthetic and political art. The first group of critics finds political art as detrimental to the aesthetic, while the second one finds the aesthetic as detrimental to the political. The need for a revised understanding of the aesthetic according to which non-perceptual properties of art are still aesthetic properties will be the focus of the third section. It is quite clear that "the aesthetic" has recently undergone substantial redefinition and enlargement (especially after the *Brillo Boxes* by Andy Warhol). This enlargement of the concept of the aesthetic, for example, as envisaged by the contemporary aesthetician James Shelley, accommodates political, conceptual, and radical art.

By accepting non-perceptual properties as aesthetic properties in art appreciation and experiencing, "the gap" between political art and the aesthetic "can be overcome." Section four also argues for "bridging the gap" between the aesthetic and political-critical art by considering the aesthetics of form as the aesthetics of meaning. The aesthetic has been identified—in the purist versions of it—with the formal aspect of the work while political art is usually defined as a matter of content and meaning. This section argues that form—and not only the content of art—is also meaningful and political without ceasing to be aesthetic.

## THE AESTHETIC

Often, referring to something as "aesthetic" is to refer to it as "beautiful," "tasteful," or "formal." However, there is no all-encompassing definition of the concept of the aesthetic because the term is vague and polysemic. Some contemporary philosophers have argued that the concept of the aesthetic is vacuous and indefinable and ought to be purged from the philosophy of art.[4] Apart from philosophical environments and, sometimes, even within these environments, the usage of this contested term is avoided. As Nick Zangwill points out, "the aesthetic" is a debatable term and there is no single answer concerning how the term should be used.[5] But this is a contemporary pronouncement. In the last two centuries this sentence would not be acceptable because "the aesthetic" used to have a certain understanding which, for many theorists, is no longer acceptable. Born during the eighteenth century, the concept of the aesthetic has come to be used to designate, among other things, "a kind of object, a kind of judgment, a kind of attitude, a kind of experience, and a kind of value."[6] That is why aestheticians are used to talk about aesthetic objects, aesthetic judgments, aesthetic attitude, aesthetic experience, and aesthetic value as central to the understanding of the aesthetic. In other words, all the elements mentioned above have been used to participate to the understanding of the aesthetic.

One major theoretical tendency explains the aesthetic as a special mode of sensory perception or experience that is relevant in art apprehending. Generally, the aestheticians of the last two hundred years have relied upon an understanding of the aesthetic which has to do with an "immediacy thesis" and a "disinterestedness thesis" (as stated by James Shelly). The eighteenth century's immediacy thesis holds that the judgment of beauty is immediate (a straightforwardly sensory apprehending or, in other words, "we do not reason to the conclusion that things are beautiful," but rather "taste" that they are).[7] The disinterestedness thesis holds that the pleasure in the beautiful is a disinterested pleasure and various versions of this theory can be found in Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, Ronald Hepburn and in arguments of the aesthetic attitude theorists.[8] As James Shelley points out that "much of the history of more recent thinking about the concept of the aesthetic can be seen as the history of the development of the immediacy and disinterestedness theses."[9] In very general lines, something (an artistic or natural object) is "aesthetic" if it is pleasing in appearance (where the pleasure is immediate and disinterested), and thus affords an aesthetic experience.

However, my concern here is not with the aesthetic in general (since we might find nonart objects and phenomena as aesthetic) but with the aesthetic in relationship with art. The line of reasoning widely accepted in the past, goes like this: the aesthetic pleasure we take in experiencing art is associated

with artwork's form, where "'form' refers to the visible elements of a piece, independent of their meaning."[10] The good old distinction between art's form (aesthetic) and art's content (non-aesthetic) is still a starting point for same contemporary theorists in separating the aesthetic from whatever else can be found in an art piece, such as moral, political, art historical elements.

Many art theorists complain that the concept of "the aesthetic is inherently problematic and it is only recently that we have managed to see that it is."[11] The contemporary aesthetician Nick Zangwill starts his article *The Concept of the Aesthetic* with the following questions: "Can the contemporary concept of the 'aesthetic' be defended? Is it in good shape or is it sick? Should we retain it or dispense with it?"[12] There are no simple answers to these questions. Why is this so? First of all, the concept of the aesthetic has several meanings, being employed both in a philosophical sense and in general discussions of a historically specific sensibility (like, for example, in the case of "The Aesthetic of Romanticism" or "The Aesthetic of Cubism"). Even if many times there is "no rigorous separation between aesthetics in a philosophical, specialist sense, and general discussions of period sensibility," we cannot merely dispense with it.[13] As Osborne notes, the aesthetic is a necessary dimension of the historical-ontological conception of art:

> The analysis of a given work will need to treat the specific historically determined character of the relationship between the aesthetic and other factors. Furthermore, these relations between the aesthetic and other aspects of artworks derive their critical meaning from their relations to the equally variable aesthetic dimension of other (nonart) cultural forms.[14]

Yet, even if we assume that the aesthetic has several meanings[15] and may be difficult to define, it does not follow that it is an arbitrary signifier or that we should get rid of it. It may have several different meanings and uses which obscure the meaning that this term may originally have had and then obviously, it no longer plays the role in philosophy of art and in art theory that is commonly supposed. The fact that we already have a formal understanding of the aesthetic with roots in eighteenth century does not mean that it is appropriate for the new developments of art or forever.

At the same time, philosophers and art theorists deal with different senses of the aesthetic. The aesthetic in Adorno's understanding is not the same as in Benjamin's or Kant's. Some works of art engage the mind in a way which could be called "aesthetic" in Kant's sense but not in Greenberg's. By the same token, "the aesthetic" in the sense of New Criticism is not the same as "the aesthetic" in a Marxist sense. Some theorists suggest that at the end of the day it is not so important how the aesthetic is finally defined or if it is defined or not: "there are many other interesting things to do within the

domain."[16] I find this remark a bit perplexing because it is not obvious how we can do "interesting things" within a domain that is so vague unless we try to make some sense of it. More than this, there is a certain, narrow understanding of the term that I would like to combat. This narrow understanding, reduces experiencing art in general (and political art in particular) to a special (purist) mode of sensory perception.

Without the ambition of offering a complete, all-encompassing and everlasting definition of the aesthetic, let me suggest the following: the aesthetic in art is a kind of experiencing art which blends the object of experience and the subject who experiences that object, the cognitive and the noncognitive, form and meaning. This kind of experiencing of art does not have to be reduced to a mode of sensory perception (as it customarily is). This does not mean that the perceptual plays no role in the aesthetic while the conceptual does the whole job. For example, in Liliana Basarab's conceptual piece *Talent Is Not Democratic, Art Is Not a Luxury* (2016) we notice an anthropomorphized grasshopper delivering a message. Although the message (the idea) is the central part of this piece of art, the perceptual is not without weight (see Figure 2.1).

There is no need to separate the conceptual from perceptual in understanding the concept of the aesthetic. It is misleading to contrast artworks as an intellectual/conceptual object and the artworks as an informer of aesthetic experience and to claim that the aesthetic refers only to the later while the former is non-aesthetic. The way we experience an artwork is determined (to some extent) by the theories, worldviews, and history we bring to bear upon it. The eye is not innocent: the experience through which we see what we see and the way we see it is determined by our previous knowledge, understanding and so on. The immediacy of aesthetic experience[17]—understood as uninformed by art exterior factors like theories, history, pre-conceptions, politics—is a chimera.

Another issue that has to be addressed at this point is the so-called distinction between the aesthetic and the artistic. I need to recall this issue because in my attempt to argue that political art and the aesthetic can be bridged in an unproblematic manner, someone may raise an objection against my account by asking why do I need to treat political art from an aesthetic point of view when I can simply accept that political art has an artistic dimension and value but not an aesthetic one. The fact that art has some artistic value (but not the aesthetic one) is not an acceptable solution for me because this would mean that political art is still a lesser or a defective (lower) art form.

Before detailing my stance regarding this objection, let me firstly elaborate on the distinction aesthetic-artistic itself and then I will answer to this possible objection. In the literature and discussion on the aesthetic and arts there are two theoretical positions: one distinguishes between the aesthetic and the

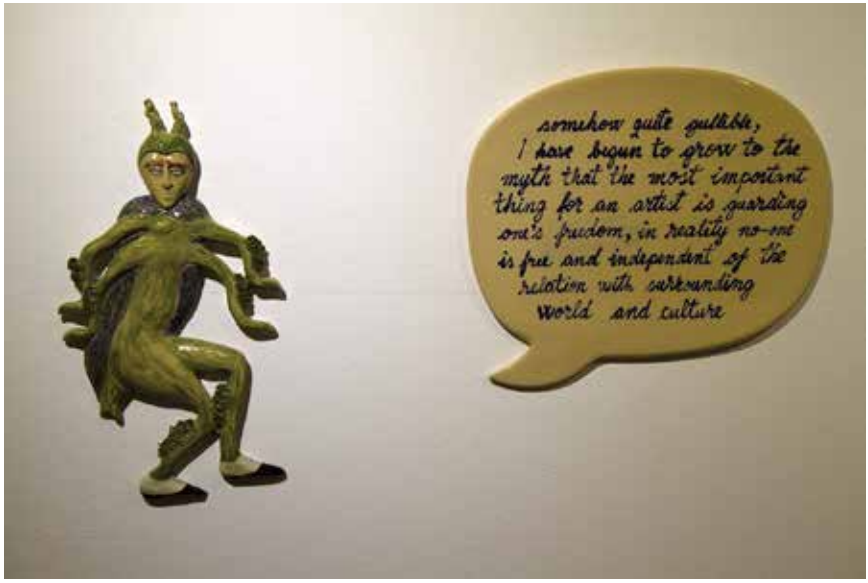


**Figure 2.1 Liliana Basarab, *Talent is not Democratic, Art is not a Luxury*. 2016.** *Source*: Courtesy of the artist.

artistic and the other uses the two terms interchangeably. First, let's see what the two terms etymologically mean.

On the one hand, the concept of the "aesthetic" is seen as the more generic term (it is applicable to other areas beyond/outside the arts). Etymologically, the word comes from the Greek and it refers to sensory perception (more generally). But words do change over time, their meanings, and sure the term "aesthetic" has changed its meaning over the past two centuries. Nowadays, the term "aesthetic" has moved away from these initial meaning (of sensibility), so that artists and theorists tend to use the concept of the aesthetic as "anything having to do with beauty or arts." Yet, vestiges of the initial meaning of the aesthetic (sensory perception) persist.

On the other hand "artistic," by contrast, comes from Latin (*ars*) meaning technique, skill, and craft. "Works of art," in the original understanding of the term, were exercises of this *ars* (cups and swords were as much art as poems and paintings). There was no distinction at that time between artist and artisan. As Raymond William stresses, the term "aesthetic" has emerged as a response to an alienating division of labor (artistic labor performed by artist and the labor of the artisan).

This etymological meaning of the aesthetic and artistic is no longer the only way of making sense of these concepts. There is no consensus on what these two terms denote or if they denote different things or not. The theorists

use and explain these concepts in different ways and some of them don't even distinguish between artistic and the aesthetic value of art.[18] Yet, when philosophers of art talk of the distinction between the aesthetic and artistic properties or values of art they tend to use the term "artistic" to denote non-directly perceptible features in an artwork.[19]

Regarding "the aesthetic," it has to be noted that this term is used at least in two senses: in a wide sense which covers "every kind of artistic appreciation"[20] beside the nonart objects and environments; and in a narrow sense according to which there are two different types of properties in a work of art (aesthetic and artistic).[21] This distinction between aesthetic and artistic properties of art carries with it the distinction between aesthetic and artistic value. But, as Malcolm Budd acknowledges, not everyone that accepts the distinction between artistic and aesthetic properties understand them in the same way: "But perhaps it would be agreed that artistic properties, unlike aesthetic properties, are such that they cannot be directly perceived or detected by attending exclusively to the work itself, even by someone who has the cognitive stock required to understand the work, since they are properties the work possesses only in virtue of the relations in which it stands to other things."[22]

This point of view is also put forth by Stephen Davis and Cain Todd. In other words, those properties which are experienced non-perceptually are not aesthetic properties. According to this narrow interpretation of the aesthetic, what we call "aesthetic properties" of art are formal properties ("in the sense that they depend only upon those perceptual properties, such as color, shape, and size that constitute the 'sensory surface' of the work").[23] Aesthetic properties are "the ultimate source of aesthetic value and contribute to determining the nature of the artworks."[24]

Now, let's go back to the possible objection someone may mention against my account (by asking why I have to treat political art from an aesthetic point of view when I can simply concede that political art has an artistic dimension/value but not an aesthetic one). Let me first explain why someone would ask this question. I suppose that for someone who finds the coexistence of the aesthetic and political art problematic, the latter is a non-aesthetic art (while it is still art) for several different reasons. One of these reasons might be that for this opposite view, political art typically lacks aesthetic value because this type of art is not visually appealing, lacking charm, beauty, or grace (it typically lacks positive aesthetic values). If the objection is made on these grounds, then it is not difficult to side step it.

This position might assume that the aesthetic values can be exclusively understood in positive terms (like beauty, grace, charm, or other traditional positive aesthetic properties) but our appreciation of art need not always be positive. There is no novelty in the fact that many aesthetic values disclose the negative aspect of the world, and this fact does not make them less

aesthetic. As Maria Golaszewska points out, these are still aesthetic values "that disclose the unfriendly, hostile aspect of the world as arousing our fear and rebellion, as unacceptable and repulsive"; she adds that "we cannot ascribe harmony or beauty to the former and expressiveness or ugliness to the latter. For we can be fascinated by both beauty and ugliness; the latter aspect of the world may also attract us, whereas the former may arouse our indifference as being too perfect, too far removed from the nightmare of everyday."[25]

Another reason for a critic to question the aesthetic value of political art might be that he /she assumes that in political art's case the aesthetic experience is not possible (because political art does seem conducive to aesthetic experience). In other words, political-critical art does not possess the type of aesthetic properties which can conduct to aesthetic experience and, without this experience, we cannot evaluate it aesthetically. Aesthetic experience is the basis of "the necessary condition for and the most important criterion of aesthetic valuation."[26] Both my hypothetical critic and I agree with this contention. The difference between us lies in the way we understand this experience. For her/him, aesthetic experience of art is a sensual experience of those properties which constitute artwork's perceivable surface. For me, aesthetic experience requires a full involvement with the art piece (perceptual, cognitive and nevertheless emotional).

Often, political artworks' properties can't simply/directly be perceived as aesthetically valuable. For the appreciation of many of them, some knowledge about the object of appreciation is necessary and this knowledge would extend beyond the directly perceivable surface (many aesthetic properties do require some training in the spectator and this training is prerequisite for their appreciation). For example, the critical-political piece *I bite America and America bites me* (by the Russian performance artist Oleg Kulik, in 1997): the "visible surface" of this piece of art shows us the performer (Kulik) wearing nothing but a dog collar, barking at onlookers and "craning at the barred windows" from his cage-like room (on 76 Grant Street, New York). How could we aesthetically appreciate this political piece of performance art? How an aesthetic experience might have been supposed to happen? If we endorse the narrow view that the aesthetic experience is a state of mind valuable in itself in which we feel disinterested pleasure when we perceive what we see or hear in art objects, then, probably, Kulik's performance is not conducive to an aesthetic experience of this sort.

But, as I will argue, aesthetic experience cannot be a pure experience. Just gazing at Kulik's performance without having some knowledge about the object of appreciation does not mean to experience something. In order to be properly experienced, Oleg Kulik's critical piece *I bite America and America bites me* requires from the audience a certain knowledge of the art history from Eastern Europe, especially the ways in which the artists from

Eastern Europe regard the Western Art and its canons, a knowledge of the art theory & history as Kulik's performance is a response to the famous *I like America and America likes me* by Joseph Beuys earlier in 1974—the callous living conditions from the former Soviet bloc (where people were exhausted of living a dog's life) and so on. Knowing and considering this larger context does not make the experience of Kulik's piece non-aesthetic. Same with Larisa Crunţeanu and Sonja Hornung's "Untitled" piece from the exhibition *FeminaSubtetrix* (2015): the artists have their heads covered with red scarves while one kisses the others' forehead.

This iconic paternalistic gesture recalls some past events: a Romanian politician—Petre Roman—kissing in a demonstrative manner in front of the cameras, the forehead of a textile factory woman worker at the textile factory APACA. What Larisa Crunţeanu and Sonja Hornung's piece reveals "creates a militant equality: two persons of the same gender, with their equally wrapped faces and common indications of youth consensually sharing an intimacy similar to the "socialist fraternal kiss." This feminine, theatrical (re)staging of Roman's "kissing performance" transfers the media image of the manipulated women workers into a resistant zone."[27] The viewer could appreciate aesthetically this piece (as well as Kulik's performance) for its courage, criticality, wit, or relevance but she/he cannot just sense that the piece has courage, wit, or relevance. All of which are non-immediately perceptible features of the piece but we still can experience them aesthetically. An aesthetic experience is a way of experiencing the relationships between what is out there (in the object) and what is in our mind about what is out there. "Experiencing" does not mean just "sensually perceiving" but also "grasping an idea" and the way in which that idea is expressed through art forms. An aesthetic experience is also an experience that moves us ("emotionally") (see Figure 2.2).

Many works of political art are structured in a way that affords an aesthetic experience. The aesthetic experience is still "aesthetic" even if the object of this experience (political art) does not allow a "pure" aesthetic experience as in the case of absolute music.[28] Even if political art does not allow a "pure" aesthetic experience, we should not conclude that political art is artistic but not aesthetic. Aesthetic experience is not necessarily an autonomous experience but is embedded in historically determined conditions of perception. What does this mean? This means that we should not rely on a narrow understanding of aesthetic experience but we should broaden the understanding of the concept of aesthetic experience and the understanding of the aesthetic in such a way that the aesthetic experience and political functions of a piece interact. It may be sometimes the case that certain political art pieces afford no aesthetic experience. It can happen that a certain art institution baptizes something with the label "art," even if that something has nothing to do with

**Figure 2.2 Larisa Crunțeanu and Sonja Hornung, *Untitled*. Digital image (dimensions variable), from the exhibition FeminaSubtetrix, 2015.** *Source*: Courtesy of the artists.

art (or anti-art) but it is just a plain placard or a "mere" riot. A mere political gesture is not yet "art" if the ensemble of formal choices to embody that "politics" has nothing to do with an expected appreciation of that thing as art. Then, perhaps, not all political pieces which are called "art" are in fact art but when they are, they are valuable as art only insofar as they are the objects of aesthetic appreciation. They can afford little or considerable aesthetic appreciation, but nonetheless this is an important condition for their evaluation as art.

Political art has both aesthetic and artistic properties/values, if we take into consideration what these two terms etymologically mean.[29] Yet, the problem is that these two terms changed over time their meaning and now the aesthetic (in a narrow understanding which is also the most popular) refers to that which is "immediately" perceived or detected by attending exclusively to the work itself while artistic denotes those properties which depend on non-perceptible features of the work, like artwork's relation to the history of its production or to art history and theory. However, some properties which are considered artistic in this narrow perspective but not aesthetic properties are in fact aesthetic properties if we enlarge the concept of the aesthetic and aesthetic experience by making room for non-perceptual aesthetic properties. Attending exclusively to the work "itself" just for the sake of having

a "pure" experience of it does not mean to truly appreciate political art. Political-critical art is art with a political function. This means that political art is specifically intended to provoke some political reaction. This political reaction is either a response to the work's scariness, wit, courage, daring, or a response to the work's beauty, ugliness, or sublime. If in the case of beauty or sublime the theorists tend to agree that they are aesthetic properties, in the case of scariness, powerful, wit, or daring (to name just a few examples) there is a great disagreement regarding their aesthetic status. I will tackle this issue in what follows.

## THE GAP BETWEEN THE AESTHETIC AND POLITICAL IN ART: "THIS IS TOO POLITICAL" VERSUS "THIS IS TOO AESTHETIC"

As already mentioned, there appears to be a gap between the aesthetic and political art. Some art theorists hold that political art is not proper art because the coexistence of politics and art undermines the aesthetic dimension of art (because political art deals with problems of justice or power while the aesthetic has to do with a pleasurable experience of a special kind which happens to us when we perceive the "form" of artworks). This section and the next one attempt to suggest the contrary. Political art can be apprehended and experienced aesthetically. Before arguing for this, let's first explain the opposing views. There are at least two categories of detractors of the coexistence of the aesthetic and political art. Let's start with the first category of detractors.

Some contemporary art critics and art theorists question the "coexistence of the political and the aesthetic" in art: for instance, Donald Kuspit holds that "no doubt art can and perhaps should be a vehicle for social commentary, even exposé and editorializing how responsible or irresponsible, effective or ineffective such disclosure and advocacy are must be debated—but the question is whether it does not compromise art in some fundamental way."[30] This "fundamental way" that Kuspit points to but does not name is the "aesthetic" dimension of art. Other theorists and art critics express their worries that political art is not conducive to aesthetic experience: Hilton Kramer repeatedly has stressed that political art can have social significance but exactly this significance de-emphasizes the aesthetic value. He criticized, for example, the feminist critical piece of Judy Chicago (*Dinner Party*), calling it "kitsch, crass, solemn, and single minded"; this feminist political art piece is, in Kramer's opinion, "very bad art . . . failed art . . . art so mired in the pieties of a cause that it quite fails to acquire any independent aesthetic life of its own."[31] But as I have argued in the introduction, Kuspit and Kramer concede that art is not necessarily a separate realm, detached from social and political reality.

Even if these theorists don't consider art as a self-enclosing and separate entity, still they hold that art has to be appreciated in an autonomous way. So they don't say that art has its own separate realm and in this sense is "autonomous," but our appreciation of art should be autonomous. This "autonomous way" of appreciating art is the aesthetic experience (perceiving the art object in its own right while all other objects, events, and everyday concerns are set aside) as opposed to regular non-aesthetic experience. These criticisms directed against the coexistence of political art and the aesthetic assume that the aesthetic reception of art is different in some fundamental way from grasping the political stance of the piece, each of which nullifying the other. They assume that in a piece which is politically concerned, the aesthetic reception of art is different in some fundamental way from grasping the political stance of the piece and it should take priority over grasping the political meaning. They don't deny that art can have some political significance if it is mixed with politics, but they express their worries that exactly this political significance de-emphasizes its aesthetic value because our experience of art is not an autonomous aesthetic experience.

However, these contemporary art theorists and critics are still steeped in a "high modernist" way of thinking and arguing about art and the aesthetic. The idea of aesthetic "autonomy"—whether of the artwork as an end in itself or of a mode of experience with which it is associated—has been central not only to artistic modernity but also to the historical development of the idea of the aesthetic itself.[32] In this understanding, there are two modes of experiencing something: the autonomous way reserved for art perception—aesthetic experience—and the everyday mode of experiencing (non-aesthetic experience). I assume that those art theorists (like Kuspit and Kramer), who reject the coexistence of political art and the aesthetic, ground their dismissal on a purist aesthetic account of art. It has to be noted that these critics erroneously assume that political-critical art is solely a content oriented art, where the message or the subject matter is heavily politicized while the form—which is for them the truly/pure aesthetic component of an art piece—is unimportant (or, it merely follows the political function/message).

Thus, these critics reject the coexistence of political art and the aesthetic on the grounds that what they envision to be "the aesthetic" is a certain understanding of the aesthetic which emphasizes the idea of an autonomous, purist mode of experiencing art. To sum up, this theoretical stand rejects the political from art because the political is detrimental to the aesthetic experience. The other theoretical position, which also finds that there is a gap between political art and the aesthetic rejects the aesthetic as being detrimental to the political. In what follows, I will analyze this assumption as well.

The aesthetic is, for many critical and cultural theorists, a troubled notion. The charge is constant even though the grounds differ. The most frequent

critique of the aesthetic asserts that the aesthetic is an ideological construct. With the advent of Conceptual art[33]—mid of the twentieth century—the concept of the aesthetics is under pressure. This theoretical and artistic reaction "against the aesthetic" is the core of many current neo-Avant-Garde practices. These contemporary neo-(conceptual) artistic and theoretical trends have replaced the old dogma demanding that "art had to be beautiful" with the new dogma that art "does not have to be aesthetic."[34]

The repudiation of the aesthetic is for contemporary conceptual arts and theories the new golden rule of art making and understanding. To look aesthetically is a "defect." It has to be noted that whatever these contemporary trends understand when they use the concept of the aesthetic, their new dogma of "de-aestheticizing art" is just the new hegemony of art producing and theorizing. It is just replacing hegemony (modernist, formalist) with another (the so-called post-aesthetic, beyond aesthetics, etc.). The concept of the aesthetic is for many contemporary political artists and art theorists an "enemy of the people."[35] They understand the notion of the "aesthetic" as an ideological construct created by the upper class, or by the cultural "elite" to define their own taste and to exclude less fortunate people. Thus, they understand the aesthetic negatively because they identify it with complicity with power and with the forces of capital. Roger Taylor, for instance, claimed that "all art is an enemy of the people and aesthetic art is the worst enemy."[36] John Berger also posits that "we can only make sense of art if we judge it by the criterion of whether or not it helps men to claim their social rights."[37] And Pierre Bourdieu argues that "the category of the aesthetic is a bourgeois illusion. The elites dictate what aesthetic value is and make it universal . . . ." It is often said that "aesthetics" is an ugly word, outdated and sluggish and, that moreover, "whoever deals nowadays with aesthetics dissects a corpse."[38] Why do these theorists believe this? What underlies their rejection of the aesthetic?

The detractors of the aesthetic usually invoke Marx's authority but they seem to be more Marxist than Marx. For Marx the aesthetic is not at all an "enemy of the people." Marx not only defended the necessity of art, but he also thought that aesthetic taste can itself be subject to revolution because there is more to aesthetic appreciation than the consensus of the "elite." Of course, aesthetic responses are "socially conditioned." However, there is nothing "bourgeois" about the aesthetic although aesthetic tastes may vary with social groupings.[39] There is nothing "bourgeois" about our "general capacity" to have aesthetic responses and make aesthetic judgments. What these judgments consist of and how are they contextually determined is another issue. As noted, I assume that these rejections of the aesthetic are based on a confusion (the aesthetic is identified with a certain, purist understanding of it) which has led these theorists to jettison the aesthetic from art's theory (see Figure 2.3).


**Figure 2.3** ***Unhealthy Aestheticism, Studio Gallery for Young Artists, Budapest, Hungary*** **(this gallery is well-known for displaying critical art and for rejecting "the aesthetic" as unhealthy).** *Source*: Photo by and courtesy of the author.

This avoidance is also a consequence of the popularity Clement Greenberg had with his so called modernist formalist aesthetics. Greenberg's legacy influenced both theoretical and philosophical aesthetics. His undertakings have been exclusivist and forcefully collated with Kant's aesthetics or, more accurately put it, with Kant's theory of taste (and not with Kant's theory of art). Greenberg's idea of the aesthetic is essentially empiricist: aesthetics is a cognitively uninfected perception at the basis of aesthetic judgment (however, this position owes more to Hume than to Kant). In spite of the irony directed at Greenberg's understanding of the aesthetic, after the 1960s many aestheticians, art theorists, cultural theorists, sociologists, and artists still operate with this understanding of the aesthetic. Some of them assume that the aesthetic is what Greenberg takes it to be.

Pierre Bourdieu, for example, states that the aesthetic has to do with the properties of "gratuitousness, the absence of function, the primacy of form over function, disinterest and so on"[40] and, that high art favors the pleasure in the beautiful over the pleasure in the agreeable (while working-class people prefer to take pleasure in the agreeable). He obviously refers to Kant's distinction between the beautiful and the agreeable. As Zangwill put it, he uses Kant's distinction to make another distinction between "high and low forms of art (suggesting that the aesthetic pleasure in the beautiful is an elitist construct on the basis of which high art is favored over low art). But, Kant's distinction between pleasure in the beautiful and pleasure in the agreeable has absolutely nothing to do with the distinction between high and low art forms."[41] At the same time, the claim that the aesthetic has to do with

gratuitousness, "the absence of function, the primacy of form over function or disinterest" is problematic as well because this view is just a narrow understanding of the aesthetic (for sure, Kant would not agree with it).[42]

Yet, both categories of detractors—the "diehard" conservatives like Kramer and Kuspit and those who find that the aesthetic undermines the political—ground their rejection on a purist understanding of the aesthetic. However, the purist approach to art is no longer acceptable in philosophy of art. In short, the conception of the aesthetic these critics operate with is a straw man. If the aesthetic is tied to a certain set of requirements—e.g., immediacy, disinterestedness, a peculiar kind of pleasure—then of course that there will be a gap between political art and the aesthetic. But there is no need to rely on this understanding of the aesthetic according to which an object is aesthetic or is aesthetically experienced only if it is depoliticized (or the other way around: an object can only have political functions if it is "de-aestheticized").

This is not the appropriate way to speak of the aesthetic dimension of art. The concept of the aesthetic has been conflated by these critics with one version of it (the purist aesthetics account). One of the consequences of this conflation is that we are forced to choose either the aesthetic or the political in appreciating an artwork. But this opposition is a false dilemma.

## THE AESTHETIC AND POLITICAL-CRITICAL ART: BRIDGING THE GAP

It is many times held that we have at our disposal "three grand theories of art": a pre-aesthetic theory (before the eighteenth century), the aesthetic theories of art (from the end of seventeenth century to the mid twentieth century, and postmodern, conceptual (post-aesthetic) theories (after the 1960s). The pre-aesthetic theory of art holds that art is more a matter of skill and it performs various functions (religious, practical, political, etc.). The aesthetic theories of art tend to emphasize art's aesthetic function as its main/primary function (art is created for its own sake "and it is enjoyed for its own sake"). The postmodern theory rejects all traditional aesthetic theories of art and the "grand narrative" of beauty. According to this scheme, all contemporary art is post-aesthetic art. However, not everyone agrees with this. Some theorists claim that we still live in aesthetic modernism while others believe that modernism is already passé and we live now in a post-art/post-aesthetic era (e.g., Hal Foster, Douglas Crimp, and Craig Owens).

Obviously, I don't endorse the view according to which art after the 1960s is non-aesthetic. On the contrary, by extending its boundaries to accommodate "Avant-Garde art" as well, the aesthetic is rather reborn than dead and

buried. Even though for many art theorists the aesthetic is obsolete and irrelevant in contemporary art theory, still we cannot merely get rid of it: "as long as people review and evaluate cultural expressions and make choices about what to preserve, study, and recommend, however, they will seek to define and redefine standards of judgments and thereby fall back into aesthetics."[43]

In spite of all the disagreements regarding the coexistence of critical-political art and the aesthetic, often both the artist and the public are not able to totally step out of such discourse (aesthetic discourse) into some removed critical space only. In other words, the public appreciates in political-critical art the artistic or the aesthetic dimension of it and not only the critical stance that piece stresses. That is why the public expresses its appreciation or support for a political piece of art in aesthetic terms, by saying that the piece is daring, critical, moving, sublime, beautiful, courageous, or witty. This is because they are referring to political art *qua* art and not as social journalism or political discourse with no relation to art.

In what follows, this chapter will demonstrate that the so-called incompatibility between the aesthetic and political art is a false incompatibility. Those who contest this relationship, usually claim that political art exhibits properties which are *not* aesthetic. They claim that political art may present us some valuable properties (like, e.g., the artistic properties of "originality," "revolutionariness," relevance, "aboutness," and other properties of the artworks which are not directly perceivable by the five senses we possess) but this does not make it an aesthetic art. All these properties (revolutionariness, relevance, originality, etc.) are not aesthetic properties in this view, because they cannot be directly perceived by attending exclusively to the work itself since "they are properties the work possesses only in virtue of the relations in which it stands to other things."[44] These "other things" are non-perceptible and external to the artwork.

As already stated, political art exhibits relevant aesthetic properties and these aesthetic properties allow us to experience this art aesthetically. The aesthetic properties play a crucial role in what we call "the aesthetic experience of art." Objects in general and artworks in particular have the ability to occasion aesthetic experiences. There is this tendency in traditional aesthetics to hold that artworks generate aesthetic experience because of their external appearance (form and aesthetic properties understood in the sense as directly perceivable features). For example, for David Prall, the aesthetic, properly understood is "what is apprehended directly and immediately by sensation."[45] But, whatever we define the aesthetic (narrowly or widely) we have to take into consideration the "experience" through which the viewer encounters the artwork (the aesthetic experience). Then, an enlarged conception of aesthetic experience is part of the enterprise of redefining the concept of the aesthetic.

My proposal to bridge the gap between the aesthetic and political art by enlarging the concept of the aesthetic in order to accommodate radical, critical, and edgy art forms cannot overlook the important distinction between (at least) two senses of the aesthetic experience: the traditional, narrow, "affect-oriented" concept of aesthetic experience, and the enlarged, "content-oriented" concept of aesthetic experience. The traditional one exclusively focuses on the specific pleasure and disinterestedness of the spectator and the second focuses on the aesthetic properties of the work. In other words, the aesthetic experience of a piece has artwork's aesthetic properties as its content.[46] All aesthetic experiences of art have content. Content does not refer here to art's content. Content here means: the object or the properties of that object toward which the experience is directed. What is included in the content of aesthetic experience of art? The form and the aesthetic properties are the kind of the most common answers. Yet, as it will be demonstrated in what follows, both "form" and "aesthetic properties" can be understood differently: form can be understood in terms of "meaningfulness" and aesthetic properties can be understood as "non-directly perceptual properties."

Noël Carroll—among others—stresses that not all artworks are pleasurable or valuable for their own sake but sometimes works are valued for their ritual, political, or cognitive value. So pleasure is not a necessary condition for having aesthetic experience. Like Carroll, I don't endorse the conventional understanding of aesthetic experience because if the focus is on a certain type of pleasure—the affect-oriented concept of aesthetic experience—then political art will never be the promoter of that type of pleasure (because political art is a difficult art, many times a displeasing and edgy art). The second sense of aesthetic experience seems to better support the point I want to make. The "content oriented" account of aesthetic experience (Carroll's) is advantageous for the plurality of ways in which the experience of artworks is valuable. By shifting the focus of aesthetic experience from pleasure and aesthetic disinterestedness to "the kind of objects toward which the experience is directed"[47] our aesthetic experience is enlarged in such a way that allows us to value art "morally or politically" not only for its own sake as in the narrow, traditional understanding of the aesthetic experience.

The contemporary debates on the nature of aesthetic experience make room for a wide range of objects which can be experienced this way. Political art is one of them. This is a good thing since the traditional account of aesthetic experience (Hutcheson, Beardsley, and others) is framed in terms of pleasure and the aesthetic experience of some art (including political art) may not be pleasurable on this account. The other crucial point of the traditional account of aesthetic experience (beside pleasure) is the notion that that experience is valued for its sake alone and not for the sake of something else. There have been in the past different focuses on aesthetic experience

(e.g., for Kant, the focus was "the disinterested pleasure," for Bell it was "artistic form"). Now the focus is the content of experience. This content is not necessarily accessed perceptually (or at least it is not accessed through a cognitively uninfected perception).

In spite of all criticism directed against political-critical art, which renders this art as a counterexample to the aesthetic accounts on art, political art does not reject the possibility of aesthetic experience (it rejects only a certain historical version of it). If we consider the second sense of the concept of aesthetic experience (Carroll's, "the content oriented"—where the objects toward which aesthetic experience is directed are the aesthetic properties of the artworks) then, most probably, political art (and even the imperceptible, conceptual instances of political art) can be aesthetically experienced. But then, both "form" and "aesthetic property" have "to be understood differently" if we want to enlarge the concept of the aesthetic. Form does not only refer to the visible/perceivable elements of an artwork, and aesthetic properties are not only those features perceived in the artwork when apprehended for its own sake. But the question is now, how exactly and what counts as an aesthetic property and formal relation. In what do they consist? How do we detect them?

Political art's aesthetic properties cannot be always perceived by the means of the five senses but this does not mean that they lack. As James Shelley points out, a non-perceptual property is still an aesthetic property.[48] He advocates an aesthetic theory of art in which all artworks are aesthetic (including neo-avant-garde, radical, non-perceptual works). Usually, aesthetic theories of art try to explain "what makes x an artwork" by providing a general theory based upon aesthetic properties. These aesthetic properties are defined as properties perceived by the senses that are relevant to their appreciation as artworks. Shelley outlines what he thinks are the three main claims of the aesthetic theories on art in the attempt to make room for imperceptible art and avant-garde art within the aesthetic domain. He also observes that these three main claims of the aesthetic accounts on art are not compatible together and then he envisions possible ways out. According to Shelley, these positions are:

R. Artworks necessarily have aesthetic properties which are relevant to their appreciation as artworks.
S. Aesthetic properties necessarily depend, at least in part, on properties perceived by the means of the five senses.
X. There exist artworks that need not be perceived by the means of the five senses to be appreciated as artworks.[49]

If we agree with the propositions R and S, then avant-garde, non-perceptible art will not be considered art (because R claims that artworks

necessarily have aesthetic properties and S claims that aesthetic properties necessarily depend on properties perceived). But this is not an acceptable solution for aesthetic theory of art because people do consider avant-garde, non-perceptual pieces, art. To accept R and S means to refute X (to refute X means to deny that Duchamp's *Fountain*, literature, and other conceptual pieces are art).

To affirm S and X ("Aesthetic properties necessarily depend, at least in part, on properties perceived by the means of the five senses") (S) and "There exist artworks that need not be perceived by the means of the five senses to be appreciated as artworks" (X) means to refute R ("Artworks necessarily have aesthetic properties which are relevant to their appreciation as artworks").[50] This possible solution does not deny the art status for literature or other conceptual pieces (like Duchamp's) but it divides art in aesthetic and non-aesthetic (Danto's early philosophy of art is close to this view). This implies that the appreciation of aesthetic art is radically different from the appreciation of non-aesthetic art. This claim is also questionable because we cannot decide what does make them art? What makes non-aesthetic art, art? If not all art can be appreciated aesthetically, then we must provide a different general theory of art. Shelley claims that aesthetic theories of art must avoid making this claim (namely that there is non-aesthetic art and aesthetic art).

Another solution would be to refute S and to affirm R and X. To refute S for Shelley means to deny that aesthetic properties are essentially perceptual. In this way avant-garde, non-perceptual artworks are still appreciated aesthetically.

Shelley outlines three possible ways out for aesthetic theories of art but supports only one of them—that is, the third solution. One can affirm R and X and deny S.[51] The first solution denies the existence of non-perceptual art. If we apply Shelly's first solution to political art, then a large part of political art would be nonart, because a large part of political art is not completely perceptual; the second solution denies that all art contains aesthetic properties (in this case we will have political art which is aesthetic and political art which is non-aesthetic); the third solution, that advocated by Shelley, enlarges the aesthetic to such an extent that political art will inhere it. Even if "more work has to be done"[52] to the non-perceptual aesthetic, it is still the most daring and fruitful attempt to integrate avant-garde contemporary art within the aesthetic domain. We can aesthetically appreciate a work for its relevance, braveness, wit, courageousness, politicality, criticality, or relevance without alluding to its purely perceptual aesthetic qualities such as harmony of parts, unity or symmetry, or other qualities which one could experience by seeing or hearing.

The aesthetic properties of an object depend "only in part" on properties perceived by means of the five senses, but this does not mean that they always

depend exclusively on them. The fact that sometimes we cannot watch, touch, or hear critical-conceptual pieces of art does not mean that aesthetic experience is suppressed or impossible. As Shelley claims, we are "struck" with daring and wit and our aesthetic experience is not a matter of focusing our attention (in a disinterested attitude) on the perceptual appearance of the art piece that stands before us. Shelley explicitly points out that non-perceptual aesthetic properties "strike" us and are thus felt "not through the five senses." This means that non-perceptual aesthetic properties (like daring, wit, revolutionariness) are felt properties (but not through the five senses): feeling the power of a novel or grasping that Duchamp's *Fountain* is witty does not come from the sight of the words or surfaces.

Shelley's solution allows to a considerably larger number of political-critical art pieces to be treated as aesthetic pieces. Political art—when is art and not mere activism, improperly called "art"—can be apprehended aesthetically on this account of non-perceptual aesthetic properties. What makes it aesthetic is not the way it appears to our senses but the way it affects us by "striking" us with the "ideas" conveyed (these ideas are nevertheless "aesthetic ideas").

An example of a powerful "aesthetic idea" is offered by Arthur Danto when he speaks of the Hungarian artist Agnes Eperjesi.[53] The artist collects commercial packaging, plastic bags, and wrappings of household products and recreates them as art objects of irony. Her technique is a complex one: she removes these materials from their original context and rearranges them in art series which have a new meaning, both literal and symbolic. She adds to these new images titles/captions which often express ideas that the images alone do not express. As Danto says, the artist "often selects her images with the intention of using them to convey how women in contemporary Hungary regard themselves, and how they think about the housework for which the product designed by the image is intended to be used."[54]

For example, one of her pieces reveals a woman looking like a bride in her veil which also can be a handkerchief. Beneath that image Eperjesi wrote: "Once in a while something gets into my eyes. Then I can let go of my feelings." The image is not necessarily pleasing or clearly shaped and the so-called aesthetic properties of it are hard to trace. We cannot claim that this picture has beauty or, if not beauty, then another aesthetic property (say, elegance). At least, we cannot detect these properties by directly perceiving the image. But even if the directly perceivable surface of this work does not seem beautiful, it does not mean that the idea expressed is not. The idea of this work is aesthetic and it contributes both to the work's meaning and to the way we appreciate this meaning. The aesthetic idea is "merely one meaning given through another, as in irony or in metaphor."[55] Therefore, for Danto the aesthetic idea is not just a meaning but a transfiguration of that meaning.

Then, the innocent, even the placid image of a woman holding a handkerchief (this sole image having whatever possible meaning) is turned into a psychological representation of a hidden feeling and a critical remark on repression of feelings for the sake of appearance.

This transfiguration of the meaning of the initial image takes place when we grasp the idea of the work by reading her sentences beneath images: "Once in a while something gets into my eyes. Then I can let go of my feelings." These ideas alone, without the image of the women holding the handkerchief, would not make a piece of art aesthetic. By the same token, the image directly perceived, without the title/caption, would not be aesthetically relevant. But, the two entities together have aesthetic value because of the ideas—aesthetic and political—they put forth. The fact that we perceive an image with a woman holding (possibly) a handkerchief and some streams of words beneath this image does not make this piece aesthetic.

Then, aesthetic properties don't necessarily depend on properties perceived by the means of the five senses. This does not mean that we don't access artworks perceptually. We do, but this does not mean that we appreciate art aesthetically on this ground. And, even if we would struggle to "purely" perceive an art piece in itself and for itself (without any other external knowledge about the object of our appreciation), this effort would be useless because perception starts from our experiential background. This background influences what we perceive, how we perceive, and so on.

The theory of non-perceptual aesthetic properties helps us to integrate political art within the aesthetic realm even when this art is produced in conceptual/dematerialized[56] forms (Conceptual Arts, Non-Object Arts). Yet, at this point one contemporary art theorist can claim that conceptual, political-critical art has only propositional or informational value (and not aesthetic value) and he can ask how one can distinguish between "aesthetic ideas" and "mere ideas" (political ideas) which have a similar propositional or informational content but are not aesthetic ideas. (This is the main criticism which can be addressed to Shelly's account too, namely that it does not seem clear where lies the demarcation between an aesthetic idea and a regular (non-aesthetic) idea.)

The answer is that political-critical art does not have only propositional or informational value. If it would have had only propositional or informational value it would have not been considered art. That is not to say that art cannot be informative; it is only to say that it is not the main function of art to be informative, that is, not part of what it is to be a work of art. Even conceptual art does not have only propositional value but also aesthetic value. In light of the last one, conceptual art may be able to produce another kind of knowledge—one that is nonpropositional because it also allows us to engage "imaginatively" with the idea it set out to convey. The manner in which we

relate to that idea expressed through art goes beyond the mere propositional knowledge conveyed by it. The aesthetic ideas present indirectly, metaphorically, and imaginatively what cannot be presented directly. Thus, many aesthetic ideas presented in political art are political ideas which are transfigured in a metaphoric, critical, or ironical way.

For example, the political poster "You Write What You're Told" expresses the critical idea that corporate news is not unbiased. This idea is transmitted through the political poster in the form of the ironic sentence declaimed by a journalist: "Thanks, corporate news! We couldn't control the people without you!" This critical-political idea is translated into an aesthetic device which expresses the same thing but in a different form. It does not just transmit information but also it leaves space for public's interpretation and political imagination.

Some philosophers prefer to say that the type of cognitive value that conceptual, critical art has is more "experiential" than propositional.[57] It tells us "what it is like to be this or that" (thus, it has an imaginative component attached to the cognitive) rather that "there is this or that." In other words, we have a first and personal experience of the idea central to the art piece and we don't merely think about that idea (as in propositional knowledge). We grasp, deal, and involve with the idea than merely think of it.[58] Typically but not exclusively, political art (especially in our days) manifests both its politics and its art-hood in conceptual forms.[59] It is more often Performance, Installation, or Body Art than painting or sculpture. I have to introduce a footnote here: the fact that contemporary political art is more a type of conceptual art does not mean that we cannot find relevant examples of contemporary political-critical art which express their politics in traditional forms (like Fernando Botero's paintings of "Abu Ghraib" and different forms of applied art like the Arpilleras).[60]

Conceptual art(s) is that art in which the idea or the concept involved in the art piece takes priority over the traditional aesthetics of art making and consuming. Initially, the conceptual artists used only the language as their exclusive medium. This manner of art making was revolutionary and radically different from the traditional forms of art making. The conceptual artist rejected the traditional ideas of museum, art gallery, genius (as the creator of art), beauty (as sensually pleasant surface or form), traditional painting, or sculpture (figuration, perspective, color) and art seen as commodity. It is not a novelty that the entire conceptual project is "anti-aesthetic,"[61] manifesting its opposition by rejecting the traditional artistic media (like painting and sculpture) in favor of new media of art production like ready-mades, mixed media, film and photography, and so on. Initially, these conceptual, political artists were critical toward the "commodification of art" and this was the reason why they gave up the object (the art object) in the traditional sense

(paintings, sculptures, decorative objects) and they focused on nonmaterial art (ephemeral texts, happenings, performances).[62]

Conceptual arts are relevant examples of art which make critical claims about the successful art of the past and about the role of the artist. Some artists argue that there is no difference between political art and conceptual art because both of them downgrade the aesthetic concerns for a relevant message. Yet, this is only half accurate: political-critical art as conceptual art strives sometimes for transmitting a relevant and critical message but this undertaking does not lower or dismisses the aesthetic concerns. The difference between aesthetic and non-aesthetic artifacts (e.g., a piece of art and a text in a newspaper) lies in the way they respectively make their statements. Perhaps, both of them present us with content or meaning but only art attempts to arrange the meaning in a medium. The arrangement of the medium fuses with the meaning conveyed by that medium. In other words, there is not just a meaning conveyed by a medium but a meaning conveyed by a medium "arranged in a certain form."

Conceptual-political art focuses mostly on ideas but this does not mean that the focus on ideas totally replaces the focus on "form" or the way that idea is put forth. What is challenged by conceptual art is the way in which "form" and its functions are understood—as a physical entity with the function to please the viewer. (Keep in mind that conceptual art does not have a physical form as a painting has and its function is not to please the viewer.) Conceptual art still has a form in spite of having transformed (or transfigured) our expectations concerning what counts as artistic form. The ideas are not just floating in the air. Those ideas are combined in certain ways (unexpected, imaginative ways) in order to make the piece worthy of public's appreciation. Then, we can claim that aesthetic ideas can be detected both in the content of the piece and in the way in which that content is presented.

The conceptual artist may perform a political gesture by the means of art object's dematerialization critiquing, let's say, art's commodification. This dematerialization is seen as a critical attempt directed both against the art market and the art "museification" both of them representing the hegemony. I do not want to suggest that only conceptual, dematerialized art can be political, critical, and oppositional. Nevertheless, there are many instances of political-critical art whose confrontational strength lies in their materialized form and I will discuss this issue at large in the next section. Conceptual art is explored here only as an example of art which performs an "anti-aesthetic function without being non-aesthetic." A conceptual work of art is a kind of proposition "presented within the context of art as a critical comment on art" and the idea or the concept is all that counts.[63]

Then, perhaps, one is inclined to think that the elevation of cognitive values in conceptual art eliminates the aesthetic values as a critical and political

stand. But is this philosophically sound? I don't think that conceptual art should isolate itself from the aesthetic in order to pursue its critical aims. Conceptual and political art are not as non-aesthetic as they may seem to be, even if they perform typically as anti-aesthetics by giving up the purely perceptual. Giving up the perceptual does not mean giving up aesthetic experience altogether. We still can have aesthetic experience of non-perceptual art because the ideas can have aesthetic force and they move us or, to quote Shelly, they "strike" us "with daring, and wit, and with power and beauty."[64]

There are several possible objections to the non-perceptual aesthetic theory of art. One may claim either that it is unclear what makes a non-perceptual property of art to count as an aesthetic property; or that there is no clear line of demarcation between non-perceptual aesthetic properties and the non-perceptual properties which are not aesthetic. What is the difference between an aesthetic idea and a non-aesthetic idea? These objections can be answered as follows. First, a non-perceptual aesthetic property is that feature in art which is not directly available for perception. It means that our access to it is not mediated merely through the five senses. Second, the line of demarcation between non-perceptual aesthetic properties of art and non-aesthetic properties of objects and situations is not easy to draw. Some properties of art objects (non-perceptible, like the chemical composition of painting, cost of sculpture, and perceptible properties like being green, lasting five hours, being rectangular) are obviously non-aesthetic properties.

For some art critics, there is no need to draw this line between aesthetics and non-aesthetic in art since "art is life and life is art." For the reasons discussed in the first chapter, I do not endorse this view. Yet, there are several ways in which we can demarcate non-perceptual aesthetic properties or aesthetic ideas from non-aesthetic properties or ideas. For example, the property of being powerful or daring can be both aesthetic and non-aesthetic. These properties are circumstantial, depending on the circumstances of use: powerful applied to cars is a non-aesthetic property, but to literature is aesthetic. If we talk of powerful ideas, we can say that the idea of justice is a powerful idea expressed in a newspaper, but this does not make it an aesthetic idea. The same idea of justice is expressed in a certain "form" in art then, this idea, becomes an aesthetic idea. The form in which this idea is expressed is not necessarily a perceivable form. For example, the idea of justice can be expressed in art through an original, new, authentic form like in the poetic line: "Justice is a mesmerizing child of hope." This is an unexpected, revolutionary, original form through which the idea of justice might be expressed. This expression transcends the literal meaning of the idea of justice.

Even if Shelley's theory is not free of criticism and more philosophical work needs to be done to the non-perceptual aesthetic properties, at least his proposal highlights the available options for an enlargement of the aesthetic.

The biggest risk of this enlargement might be that the aesthetic is extended to mean and enhance everything. Some criteria of demarcating the aesthetic from the non-aesthetic are necessary. However, perceiving the surface of an object just for the sake of it cannot be a reasonable criterion for demarcating aesthetic from non-aesthetic. Form could be one of these criteria. But the very concept of "form" has to be also rethought to make room for the non-perceptual.

## AESTHETICALLY MEANINGFUL FORM: POLITICAL-CRITICAL ART AS A MATTER OF FORM

Traditionally, "form" is defined as the visible or audible part of a work of art and it refers to style, technique, elements of design as independent of the artwork's meaning and content. Correspondingly, content is defined as that something which is expressed by form: content is what is being depicted, the subject matter. Vestiges of these outdated definitions still persist in art theory and aesthetics. Yet, this understanding of form is not appropriate. Even if form is that which refers to style or design it does not mean that a style or a design has no meaning or even a political meaning.

The aesthetic has been identified with a specific formal aspect of the work where "form" is being treated as a prima facie object of the aesthetic experience, both in the traditional accounts of the aesthetic experience and in the contemporary ones. Shortly put, while the form has been treated as the "locus" of the aesthetic, the content is considered as its non-aesthetic counterpart. In consequence, many art theorists still treat form as the aesthetic conduct while the content is considered as just the container of meaning. Political art is usually defined in a lax way as "art with a political message or content." In this understanding, forms and shapes of an object are paramount to its aesthetic appreciation while the content part is considered to be non-aesthetic yet political.

Thus, because political art is considered to be more focused on its content, it is also seen as non-aesthetic. The formula "content versus aesthetics" is not just a way of demarcating content from form but it is also an understanding of the aesthetic (form) as opposed to art's subject matter (meaning) or the idea it puts forth. In this understanding, form is seen as the aesthetic component of art which is completely depoliticized and the content is considered as the non-aesthetic, political counterpart of the form. In what follows, I will challenge this view. The argument put forth is that the political in art is *not only* expressed through content but through form too.

At this point, we need to introduce a disclaimer: We do not want to suggest that "the aesthetic" and "the formal" are coextensive: both content and

form can be aesthetic or can be aesthetically appreciated but when form is aesthetically appreciated, this appreciation is based on some ideas which form embodies (it is not just a pure appreciation of a pure/meaningless/functionless spatial arrangement of elements). Thus, form is *not* the depoliticized structure of the art piece while content is the aesthetically devaluated political significance of it. For supporting this claim, this chapter argues that not only art's content has a political function and meaning but also art's form. In other words, we challenge the purist claim that "'form' refers to the visible elements of a piece, independent of their meaning."[65]

Before making this claim plentifully clear and offering arguments to substantiate it, let's firstly present the arguments on the basis of which the aesthetic has been identified with a specific formal aspect of the artwork (classical formalism and contemporary formalism). The focus is not only to question the classical or the contemporary formalist views, but also "the influential brand of postmodern art theory" (Hal Foster, Douglas Crimp, and Craig Owens). The latter holds that postmodern art, that is contemporary-conceptual art after the 1960s, is committed to politicized subject matter while the modernist art before the 1960s which, unlike the postmodern art, is supposedly an aesthetic art invested in "formal experimentation" that "bracketed or obscured" the political content.[66] All three theoretical positions—classical formalism, contemporary formalism, and postmodern art theory—assume directly or indirectly that the political is a matter of art's content while the aesthetic is a matter of form and then, on these grounds, political art is non-aesthetic art.

Classical formalism's manifesto, formulated by Clive Bell at the beginning of the twentieth century advances the theory of "significant form" where art appreciation is defined as a response to the purely formal qualities—the line, shape, space, texture, light, and color—of a given work. According to this perspective the artwork's relevance, powerfulness, or wittiness stems from its content, and no matter how empowering or challenging it might appear to the viewer, has nothing to do with the aesthetic. This theoretical stance is known as the classical formalist view: "the aesthetic appreciation of an artwork generally involves an attentive awareness of its sensory or perceptual qualities and does not require knowledge about its non-perceptual properties."[67]

Here, the perceptual qualities are the formal qualities of the piece. To formalism, what characterizes art from an aesthetic point of view is precisely the *indifference* toward content. Contentions like "form is the 'essential' core of art" or "the formal structure is what truly constitutes a work of art" make the content of art unimportant in artwork's evaluation as art.[68] In short, what the classical formalist calls "form" (as the locus of the aesthetic) entails a perceivable arrangement of elements which has "no function" and "no meaning." For the twentieth-century aesthetic formalism (e.g., Greenberg), form

was not allowed to be used in the service of anything else but itself (not even of beauty!). A work is rendered aesthetic on the basis of its form alone. The classical formalist assumes that the aesthetic dimension of an art piece certainly lies elsewhere than in their "meanings." "Form is meaningless" and only the content is the bearer of some meaning, ideology, and message (and this content is obviously non-aesthetic). This extreme formalism has been many times criticized both in art theory and in philosophy of art.

Yet, there are several attempts to resuscitate formalism in contemporary philosophy of art. For instance, Deane Curtain posits that formalism has great merit in philosophy of art on the grounds that in the comparison between form and content, the formal elements are more "satisfying and elevating" because they "inhere in the work itself" while content refers to the representational elements outside of the work of art. Contemporary formalism argues for a "moderate version" of formalism. Moderate formalism is seen as a theory of the aesthetic. According to this contemporary version of formalism there are *some* works of art that have only formal aesthetic properties, but artworks usually have both formal aesthetic properties and nonformal aesthetic properties. This view is different from the classical, extreme formalism. The classical version (the extreme formalism of Bell and Fry) is the view that *all* the aesthetic properties are formal. The moderate formalism holds that while some aesthetic properties of a work are formal, others are not (although at least some aesthetic properties are formal). Zangwill argues that the moderate formalist concedes two things: (a) that representational art pieces have also nonformal aesthetic properties, and (b) that contextual works of art have nonformal aesthetic properties (where contextual works are works that are intended to be seen only in the light of other works, like Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q* in the light of da Vinci's *Gioconda*).[69]

However, Zangwill stresses the fact that there is something which should be conceded to Bell and Fry (to extreme formalism), namely the fact that "the purely formal properties of representational painting should not be ignored even when the aesthetic properties determined by representations are more important."[70] Contemporary formalism concedes the nonformal aesthetic properties (namely that not *all* art has formal aesthetic properties). However, the moderate formalism still focuses on the centrality of a formal aesthetic consideration in aesthetic experience of art. Zangwill claims that to be purely formal, a work of art has to be nonrepresentational as well as non-contextual. According to him, many artworks are like this (even if he also concedes for the existence of some nonformal works of art). What is problematic about this contemporary formalist account? First, if contemporary formalism is taken for granted, only an extremely tiny fraction of contemporary art pieces (if any) will be purely formal, because in our times it is very difficult to find examples of nonrepresentational artworks. Even abstract art is representational.[71]

Furthermore, the way in which Zangwill understands "form" and the formal aesthetic properties is also to my understanding problematic. He comes up with an understanding of form as a "plastic form" that relates to formal properties of pictures that originate in the "spatial relationships" of elements.

Formalism, in both its versions, "extreme" (according to which the value of an artwork as artwork is constituted "exclusively" by its formal aspects) and "moderate" (according to which the value of an artwork as artwork is constituted "primarily" by its formal aspects) negates the importance and the aesthetic relevance of content. These contemporary understandings of formalism claim that the formal elements of art play an important role in the aesthetic realm (even if contemporary formalism, unlike classical, holds that this role is played only partly and not entirely). The fact that formal elements play an important role in the aesthetic realm is a reasonable claim. The problematic part of these accounts is when they attempt to argue for the aesthetics of form as opposite to meaning.

Now let's go back to the initial claim, namely, that the political aspect of political art is expressed not only in the artwork's content but also in its form. Yet, when political art is a matter of form, this form is not merely a spatial relationship of purely formal qualities (like the line, shape, space, texture, light, and color) but a meaningful entity. The aesthetic of form is not opposite to the aesthetic of meaning. What the extreme formalists envision as *form* as the locus of the aesthetic entails: a perceivable arrangement of elements which has *no function* and *no meaning*. The contemporary formalists also see form as a self-enclosed entity without reference to something external to it because only the formal elements "inhere in the work itself" while content refers to the representational elements that refer to the outside. An experience that relies upon content is not considered properly *aesthetic* on this account or it is at best inferior to the aesthetic experience which relies exclusively on form. But is this distinction feasible? In what follows I argue that it is not. The formal elements of an artwork are not necessarily referring to themselves without reference to something external to the work. That is to say that form does not exist only to call attention to itself but also for other purposes, such as critical-political ones.

As stated at the beginning of this section, the claim is that form is not the depoliticized and meaningless structure of the art piece while content is the aesthetically devaluated political significance of it. The purpose here is not so much to argue against classical or contemporary formalist views, but to sustain a particular conception of form, a resistant, political form which can characterize political art and which can afford us an aesthetic experience. Both form and content influence the spectator's aesthetic appreciation and not the form alone, but my stake is narrower: to show that form is not the pure and depoliticized structure of art while content is the aesthetically devaluated counterpart of it.

Especially in the case of political art, form can be critical and resistant without ceasing to be aesthetic or to afford an aesthetic experience. Form is not merely a spatial arrangement of elements but it has a function and a meaning. Having a meaning and a function does not make it less aesthetic. Form is as meaningful (politically) as content is. Content and form are not completely separate components of an artwork, but one is reflecting more or less accurately or successfully the other. Form can become an instrument for art's message being adaptable to the intended purpose. In this way we can talk about a unity of form and meaning and not a separation. The work of art stimulates its public in thinking, feeling, or acting in specific ways, either along with the work or in response to it. Form has an important *function* here. We don't need art to reveal to us what we already know, and in the form we are already aware of. In general, we know that discrimination or injustice toward "the Other" is bad, but what art reveals to us in formal ways is more insightful than the simple acknowledgement of this. Art does not give us information, but special insights about what "really happens." These "special insights" are mediated by art's form.

Can form be political, critical, and meaningful in art without being less aesthetic? The point I want to make by answering this question is that in some cases critical art's form is not void but politically meaningful. We cannot simply separate the meaningful political content from the aesthetic form and to claim that only the content can be politicized while the form remains autonomous, pure, unfunctional, meaningless, or *aesthetic* in the traditional sense of the term. The political potential of form makes the piece of art resist the status quo, but this does not mean that the form alone has a politically liberating impact. Then, Adorno might be half wrong when he argues that "it is not the office of art to spotlight alternatives, but to resist by "form alone" the course of the world, which permanently puts a pistol to men's heads."[72] He is half right because form, however, indeed, can have a resistant and a critical potential; but he is also wrong in assuming that formal innovation "on its own" has a political-critical impact.[73] But even if Adorno's aesthetic enterprise contains several indefensible claims, it is nevertheless an important step toward rethinking the politics of form. With this shift in thinking of the aesthetic of form as political, content is not any longer the single "locus" of the political.

In what follows, this chapter supports with evidence this point by exploring in depth two examples: one from traditional political art and the other from contemporary political art. These examples are evoked here because they clearly illustrate that "form" can have a political meaning and significance both in traditional art and in contemporary art. With the help of these two examples this chapter argues for two things. First, not only content-oriented art is political. Sometimes, form rather than content of art exhibits a critical and political stance. Both in traditional art—where "form" is a spatially

stable entity limited to the physical boundaries of the art object—and in contemporary art—where "form" is not a static, geometric, and fix frame but it comes out into space as a polymorphous entity—form can have a "political" meaning and a "political" function.[74] Second, I attempt to reject the influential theoretical position of postmodern art theory which holds that art after 1960s is committed to politicized subject matter (content) while formal exploration is depoliticized.

The first case study is Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's painting, *The Martyr of Saint Symphorien*, commissioned by the government in 1824. This painting has been one of the most debated pieces of art from the nineteenth century France art criticism. As Ingres's scholar Andrew Carrington Shelton argues, religion played a significant role in French public life in the early 1830s, "only its significance had become less a matter of good versus bad than of Left versus Right."[75] The subject matter (the content) of this painting was the death of Symphorien who was put to death for his religious beliefs (becoming one of the first Christian martyrs of Gaul). As Carrington Shelton notices, such a subject "which was as much nationalist as it was religious was bound to appeal to Restoration officials in Paris, as it advanced their highly politicized efforts to promote the deeply Christian heritage of France."[76]

As already mentioned above, this art piece has been highly criticized and what many of its critics objected to "Saint Symphorien" was not the content, politic as it might be, but the "form." The main complaint was that Ingres with this *ingrisme*—a highly particularized aesthetic system—"attempted to express his deep disappointment with the official, institutionalized system through which art has been produced and consumed in nineteenth century France"; from the content of this painting everyone understood whatever he or she understood, ranging from an analogy between the Romans' persecutions of Christians and the Orleanists' pursuit of the press to an expression of artist's strangeness and individualism.[77] It's worth mentioning that this piece of art was called *Saint Symphorien Affair* and it managed to split the public into two camps: its detractors, the academics, and its supporters the romantics.

However, Ingres's Saint Symphorien could be regarded as a piece of political-critical art only if we know both the aesthetic and the historical context in which it has been created. More importantly, Ingres promotes his own aesthetic agenda as an opposition gesture, making his art a political one. His painting is political above all because of the "politics of form" and not because of its content. The content speaks about a typical martyrdom which could have been taken place wherever in the world without necessarily making a political or critical point about power mechanisms.

But what the artwork looks like, its formal features, its style are a form of criticizing and opposing the established art conventions of the moment.

This does not mean that any new style from the history of art emerged as an opposition to the established conventions of art making. Sometimes it did and sometimes it did not. Only a solid knowledge of history and art history—both from above and from below—will indicate which stylistic innovation has been political (oppositional) and which has not. Contrary to the common sense definition of political art—as art with political content—Ingres's example discussed above shows that the attention to the politics of form is not less significant or essential than the focus on the politics of content. Nevertheless, the content of the piece discussed here could also be seen as political or critical (victims vs. victimizers; freedom vs. despotism; religion vs. secularism; etc.), but this politics is made visible through form. More importantly, even if content is interpreted by some viewers and art critics as nonpolitical or noncritical but just as conservative and supporting the status quo (in this case, Catholicism), still form remains critical, political, and revolutionary in the sense that it is the expression of an opposition to academic painting and its canon.

Ingres system of art making (his style) or his aesthetic program consists in a purposive deprecation of color and in the concomitant evaluation of line. This formal aspect is obvious in *The Martyr of Saint Symphorien* too. He proposes the aesthetics of the forceful and meaningful drawing as opposed to the primacy of color in art making. Saint Symphorien is a work of art in which the line takes priority over the paint, making the piece to look grave and gray like a fresco. Many critics complained the lack of light, reflections, and color from Ingres's painting (for that period the color and not the line was the status quo of painting making). Beside the aesthetics of line over paint, there is in his work another significant item which offers support for the idea of a politics of form: the *excess*. He forced and exaggerated the drawings of many of the characters from *Saint Symphorien*. What does this exaggeration of form mean?

Here the answer is a matter of dispute; but whatever it means, Ingres exaggerated forms are part of his aesthetic-political agenda of opposing an aesthetic regime to another (to paraphrase Jaques Ranciere). As a matter of fact, form is not just "pure," it is not the epitomizer of pure art, as so many theorists from formalist tradition used to claim, but it can be political, critical, and resistant too. Nevertheless, there are so many conflicting interpretations regarding the meaning of Ingres's excess ("musculomania" detectable in the two lictors; the exaggerated pallor of Symphorien etc.). Then, "form" could be both political and meaningful without ceasing to be aesthetic. The fact that there are so many conflicting interpretations of Ingres's excess does not mean that his formal excess is meaningless. The only thing this plurality of interpretations proves is that *Saint Symphorien* has a complicate meaning and not that it lacks any meaning. Ingres pursued willfully "formal" eccentricity

as a political gesture of opposition vis-à-vis of the art making, art evaluation, and art distribution from his time.

The other example of resistant-critical form is from contemporary art: Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA).[78] The activist—artists—clowns refuse the spectacle of celebrity and that is why they cover their identity with makeup and wigs. Their artistic actions include mimicking stupidity and naiveté, mocking capitalist institutions, and other clowning strategies based on the aesthetic strategies of excess and exaggeration. They used to answer to the police's violence with "excessive" tenderness by hugging them and by kissing their shields. These artists deliberately impersonate a "fool" or a clown as an artistic-political gesture.

Exactly like Ingres's *Saint Symphorien*, the artists from CIRCA pursue willfully and deliberately "formal" eccentricity and "formal" excess as a political gesture of opposition. The content of their performance is not as political and critical as it is "the excessive form." Thus, we can talk about both aesthetic and political functions of excess. As we know, excess is a significant feature of camp sensibility and kitsch art, performing a considerable number of functions (besides the decorative one). When it is intentional, excess can function as a critical/oppositional strategy directed against the status quo of the moment. This use of excess is as old as the need to transgress the official culture by disobeying its rules, canons, and practices by the means of carnival, clowns, holy fools, and festivals.

This tactic became a valuable approach for Dada, camp style, political concerned artists, and activists. However, not everybody agrees that excess could be a powerful, critical, and political tool. For some art theorists and critics, excess is just a feature of "bad art," a lack of skill or a neighbor of the Disgusting. The commonsensical understanding of the excess from the point of view of a traditional aesthetic theory of art stresses the fact that the "excessive" is an aesthetic flaw. An "excessive form" is an aesthetic defect because form has to be balanced, harmonious, and so on. But obviously this understanding is not accurate as long as we have so many examples of aesthetic excess from contemporary art which function as a critical-parodic device that can be both aesthetically and politically sounded.

In both traditional political art and in contemporary one, form is political and meaningful but, nevertheless, there are consistent differences between the two in what regards form's fixity in space. The critical artist Dmitry Vilensky, a member of the Russian political art collective "What is to be done?" used to argue that in our contemporary culture it is difficult to list the formal aspects of political art, but we could still define them in opposition with those present in commercial art. Hence, form is not just what the work of art looks like, what we directly and immediately perceive and what pleases at the first sight. On the contrary, form is a meaningful instantiation of an idea which can be

successfully worked out or not. Moreover, it is not a structure limited to the physical boundaries of the art object, but it is a way of constructing the art piece in a principally different and critical manner.

In other words, form is not something which we sense when we encounter visually a piece but a larger "framing" which is intellectual, emotional, or both. This larger construction goes beyond the edge of the art object. Actually, contemporary critical art is very seldom described in terms of "work" or even "piece." Contemporary art's consumers and theorists deal less with "works of art"[79] than with interventions (both in public space and in museums), happenings, and situations. For instance, the artist duo Larisa Crunţeanu and Sonja Hornung initiated a critical intervention—titled *A Conversation between Two Workers and a Rock*—consisting of a forum debate in Stadpark, Graz, Austria (on February 3, 2018). This public intervention is not a "work of art" in the traditional sense of the term (see Figure 2.4).

Then, we may be simplifying things if we could adhere to a view according to which form is not a detachment of appearances converted into "style" that is completely separated from the significance and meaning. "Form" is a significant structure in political-critical art and a way of constructing meaningfully and differently the art piece/situation/intervention. For example, dancing in unconventional places is a way of constructing or shaping differently the


**Figure 2.4 Larisa Crunţeanu and Sonja Hornung, *A Conversation between Two Workers and a Rock*. 2018.** Poster announcing performance event, Stadpark, Graz, Austria. *Source*: Courtesy of the artists.

art piece; or reenacting traditional art masterpieces in an ironical manner; or "open work" in which the spectator intervenes and allows an aesthetics of continuous transformation; or mimicry, poor art, kitsch, self-mutilation, land art (repeated modifications of the ground), computer art, and so on.

"Form" in all these examples is not a static, geometric, and fix frame as in traditional art but it "comes out into space." This non-fixity of form in contemporary political art makes the piece politically meaningful momentarily, in a certain and specific context or situation and not everlastingly. The criticality of a political art happening, for example, makes sense and may be effective in its initial context or situation and not in the museum, art magazines, or reconstructive diorama. This does not mean that a reconstructed or a documented happening kept in museum is void of meaning and politicality. It also has a meaning (not necessarily the initial one) but the grasping of it changes with the changing of the context or situation in which we experience it.

In apprehending art as political, form can be as relevant as content and in some cases the most relevant element. Both form and content can be apprehended as political within certain spatial and temporal contexts and not independently of them. Contrary to some mainstream theories of contemporary art and aesthetics, there is no gap between political-critical art and the aesthetic. The recent widespread dismissal of the aesthetic from political art denounces only a certain understanding of the aesthetic—the purist aesthetic account of art—but, in doing so, unavoidably develops another kind of aesthetics: critical, confrontational, and resistant. What this chapter has put forth thus far should serve to dispel a certain understanding of the aesthetic as purely perceptual (cognitively non-inflected perception). It has been argued that an enlarged concept of the aesthetic as "non-perceptual appreciation" (as in James Shelley's account) would be better to accommodate and make room for conceptual, political, and other contemporary contested art formats. Political-critical art expands non-aesthetic ideas in imaginatively complex ways and this imaginative combination of ideas makes them aesthetic ideas. The way these ideas are embodied in forms is still crucial for the appreciation of political art as art.

The same idea (let's say the idea of social justice) in a different "form" (such as in a newspaper's article) might have another, a different meaning and give rise to another kind of experience than when it is embodied in a "form" as art. Political art is not necessarily an art of content at the expense of form (not even in conceptual art's case). Even the most conceptual piece of political art "makes a 'liminal' aesthetic use of its form . . . despite having transformed our expectations concerning what counts as artistic form."[80]

However, form is not the depoliticized structure of the art piece while content becomes the aesthetically devaluated political significance of it. Both form and content influence the spectator's aesthetic response since both of

them are aesthetically relevant. I have insisted more on the political-aesthetical relevance of form as a response to aesthetic traditions of modernism (Formalism, New Criticism, etc.) which have confined the "aesthetic" to a de-pragmaticized, de-conceptualized and depoliticized form alone. Especially in political art's case form can be critical, resistant, aggressive, wit, courageous, or political without ceasing to be aesthetic and to foster aesthetic experience for spectators.

## NOTES

1. This common definition of "form" can be consulted at: http://arthistory.about.com/cs/glossaries/g/f_form.htm.

2. The contemporary aesthetician Nick Zangwill argues: "A moderate formalism joins forces with extreme formalism in complaining vociferously that anti-formalism misses out on an important point of our aesthetic lives, in which our aesthetic thought and experience is independent of our knowledge of a thing's history and context" (Nick Zangwill, "In Defense of Extreme Formalism about Inorganic Nature," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 45, no. 2 (April, 2005): 186).

3. For instance, Martin Seel argues that the aesthetic should begin with a concept of "appearing" [*Erscheinen*] as the crucial shared property of all aesthetic objects; in consequence an aesthetic experience amounts to apprehending "things and events in respect to how they appear momentarily and simultaneously to our senses" (Martin Seel, "Aesthetics of Appearing" (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 12).

4. See for example Marshall Cohen, "Appearance and the Aesthetic Attitude," *Journal of Philosophy* 56, no. 23 (1959): 915–26 and George Dickie, "The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1964): 56–65.

5. Nick Zangwill, "The Concept of the Aesthetic," *European Journal of Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (1998): 78.

6. James Shelley, "The Concept of the Aesthetic," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetic-concept/.

7. Berys Gaut and Dominic Lopez, *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2013), 247.

8. Though Kant followed the British in applying the term "disinterested" strictly to pleasures, its migration to attitudes is not difficult to spot.

9. James Shelley, "The Concept of the Aesthetic," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetic-concept/.

10. For the definition of "form," see http://arthistory.about.com/cs/glossaries/g/f_form.htm.

11. James Shelley, "The Concept of the Aesthetic," *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetic-concept/.

12. Nick Zangwill, "The Concept of the Aesthetic," *European Journal of Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (1998): 87.

13. Dominic Paterson, "Everything in Its Right Place: Foucault and the Ideology of the Aesthetic," *Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics* 1, no. 3 (2004): 116.

14. Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (New York: Verso, 2013), 67.

15. For example Robert McGregor distinguishes the "aesthetic D" from the "aesthetic C." The "aesthetic D" is "a descriptive sense of the aesthetic understood by some theorists as separated from art. This sense of the aesthetic focuses on the aesthetic experience of an object surface and it excludes the meaning or the content of the object from that experience." On the other hand, the "aesthetic C" is another sense of the aesthetic designating relevant (i.e., good) features, properties, aspects of works of art. In the sense of the "aesthetic C," meaning and content are relevant to the evaluation of the work of art. See Robert McGregor, "Art and the Aesthetic," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 32, no. 4 (1974): 549–61.

16. Kendall Walton, "Aesthetics—What? Why? and Wherefore?" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, no. 2 (2007): 149.

17. Aesthetic experience is understood as perceiving the art object in its own right while all other objects, events, and everyday concerns are suppressed.

18. See for example Dominic McIver Lopes's, "The Myth of (Non-Aesthetic) Artistic Value," *Philosophical Quarterly* 61, no. 244 (2011): 518–36. Lopes claims that there is no characteristic artistic value which is separate/distinct from aesthetic value.

19. For some theorists like Stephen Davies an artistic property or value refers to relational properties, symbolic properties, ("Dove carrying the olive branch symbolizes peace") and to referential properties (artworks referring to other artworks like Duchamp's "Mona Lisa with moustache" referring to Da Vinci's Mona Lisa). Other examples of artistic properties of art are witty, originality, authenticity (and in general, the properties of the art piece which are not directly perceivable). Closely related to these artistic properties are the artistic values of mastery of execution, the force, and relevance of the ideas presented in art and so on.

20. See Malcolm Budd, "Aesthetic Essence," in *Aesthetic Experience,* eds. Richard Shusterman and Adele Tomlin (New York: Routledge, 2008), 20.

21. Malcolm Budd, Stephen Davies, Bohdan Dziemidok, David Best, Cain Todd and many other contemporary aestheticians support this view.

22. Malcolm Budd, "Aesthetic Essence," 20.

23. Glen Parsons, "Moderate Formalism as a Theory of the Aesthetic," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 38, no. 3 (2004): 20.

24. Nicholas Bunnin and Jiyuan Yu (eds.), *Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

25. Maria Golaszewska, "Artistic and Aesthetic Values," *Philosophica* 36, no. 2 (1985): 25–42, http://logica.ugent.be/philosophica/fulltexts/36–3.pdf.

26. Bohdan Dziemidok, "Artistic Formalism: Its Achievements and Weaknesses," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 2 (1993): 188.

27. Ulrike Gerhardt, "Femina Subtetrix: A Feminist Look at the APACA Textile Factory," *Artmargins*, May 6, 2016, http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/exhibitions-sp-132736512/777-femina-subtetrix-a-feminist-look-at-the-apaca-textile-factory.

28. Music without extra-musical content.

29. Artistic (*ars*) = technique, craft, skill and Aesthetic = sense perception (in general).

30. Donald Kuspit, "Activist Art and the Moral Imperative," *New Art Examiner*, January 16, 1991, 19.

31. Hilton Kramer, "Art: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party Comes to Brooklyn Museum," *The New York Times*, October 17, 1980.

32. In the previous chapter I have discussed at large the underlying assumptions on the basis of which these contemporary art theorists support the autonomy of art and the aesthetic.

33. Conceptual art is an art practice and theory that became prominent in the 1960s. Conceptual art attacked the aesthetic definitions of art (based on beauty, pleasantness, and gracefulness) and replaced the focus from art's form to its content. Conceptual art's project is political in the sense that these art practices rejected beauty and sensual surface, hoping to give back to art its critical potential. Art which is conceptual uses language as its medium as a critical-political stance directed against art's commodification.

34. Matilde Carassco Barranco, "The Dogma of Post-Conceptual Art. The Role of the Aesthetic in the Art of Today," *The European Society for Aesthetics*, http://www.eurosa.org/2012/carrasco.pdf.

35. See for example Roger L. Taylor, *Art, An Enemy of the People* (Sussex: Harvester, 1978): 49–50; see also Terry Eagelton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

36. Roger L. Taylor, *Art, An Enemy of the People* (Sussex: Harvester, 1978).

37. John Berger, *Selective Essays* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 213.

38. Urlich Schödlbauer's contention quoted in Michael S. Martin, "Aesthetic Primacy, Cultural Identity, and Human Agency," http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.504/14.3martin.txt.

39. Nick Zangwill, "Against the Sociology of the Aesthetic," *Cultural Values* 6, no. 4 (2002): 443.

40. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), 285.

41. Nick Zangwill, "Against the Sociology of the Aesthetic," 443–52.

42. Several contemporary aestheticians have successfully proved the fact that there are resources in Kant's theory of art as opposed to Kant's theory of taste. Kant is misread by many theorists (including Clement Greenberg, Pierre Bourdieu, and even the young Arthur Danto) for holding a theory of the pure judgments of taste to underwrite a theory of artistic value, as if Kant himself had had nothing to say about fine arts. As Diarmuid Costello points out, Kant should not be seen as "an arch-formalist in art theory" because for him works of art are seen as "expressions of aesthetic ideas, and hence as having a distinctive cognitive function"—Diarmuid Costello, "Greenberg's Kant and the Fate of Aesthetics in Contemporary Art Theory," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, no. 2 (2007): 221.

43. Emory Elliot, "Cultural Diversity and the Problem of Aesthetics," in *Aesthetics in a Multicultural Age*, eds. Emory Elliott, Louis Freitas Caton, and Jeffrey Rhyne (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2002), 9.

44. Malcolm Budd, "Aesthetic Essence," in *Aesthetic Experience,* eds. Richard Shusterman and Adele Tomlin (New York: Routledge, 2008), 20.

45. David Prall, *Aesthetic Judgment* (New York: Crowell, 1967), 19.

46. Noël Carroll has argued for the extension of the traditional, narrow understanding of the aesthetic experience in *Beyond Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

47. Noël Carroll, *Art in Three Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 101.

48. For a convincing development of this idea see James Shelley, "The Problem of Non-Perceptual Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43, no. 4 (2003): 363–78.

49. James Shelley, "The Problem of Non-Perceptual Art," 364.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Angharad Shaw, "Can Aesthetic Theories of Art Be Rescued from the Problem of Avant-Garde and Other Non-Perceptual Artworks?" *Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics* 4, no. 1 (2002).

53. Arthur Danto, "Embodied Meanings, Isotypes, and Aesthetical Ideas," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, no. 1 (2007): 121–9.

54. Arthur Danto, "Embodied Meanings, Isotypes, and Aesthetical Ideas," 122.

55. Ibid, 127.

56. Art's dematerialization (or immaterial art) refers to the creation of a conceptual art piece as opposed to the creation of a material object (see Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, "The Dematerialization of Art," *Artpluse Magazine*, 1968). A conceptual piece emphasizes the thinking process or the idea and considers the art object obsolete. It is said that "the conceptual is superior" or "it over-determines the material in an art piece." For the conceptual artist Sol LeWitt, "the idea becomes a machine which makes the art" (in "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum*, June, 1967). In short, art's dematerialization refers to those art practices (conceptual art) which emphasize the idea communicated by art as idea and not its formal aspects. As Kristine Stiles points out, "the dematerialization of art was more a strategy for repositioning art in relationship to politics—not a shift from material per se, but a shift from an artwork's value as an object of commercial exchange to its value as aesthetic and political interchange" (Kristine Stiles, "Language and Concepts," in *Theory and Documents of Contemporary Art,* eds. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 806.

57. For example, see Elisabeth Schellekens, "The Aesthetic Values of Ideas," in *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, eds. Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 106.

58. Elisabeth Schellekens makes this claim clear when she discusses the aesthetic value of concepts (for her detailed account see "The Aesthetic Values of Ideas," in *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, eds. Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

59. The expression "conceptual forms" refers to the variety of forms in which Conceptual Art can operate. "Conceptual Art" covers different kinds of works, from photographs and films to Body Art, Performance, Installation, Happening and so on.

60. We don't have to underestimate the revolutionary potential of craft and folklore.

61. Anti-aesthetic refers to an art movement which rejects the traditional aesthetics (especially the ideas of aesthetic experience as something which exists without a

purpose; the paradigm of beauty as an immediate and disinterested pleasure; the "art for art's sake" doctrines, the ideas that art has to be beautiful, etc.). Anti-aesthetic art is not non-aesthetic even if it goes against the traditional aesthetics. This anti-aesthetic art manifests its opposition through ugliness, unpleasantness, shock, gore. But all this negative strategies don't step outside the aesthetic domain. As Diarmuid Costello suggests that "one ought to calibrate claims about what counts as 'aesthetic,' 'anti-aesthetic,' and 'non-aesthetic' to the relative restrictedness of the aesthetic theory in question" (Diarmuid Costello, "Danto and Kant. Together at Last?" in *Danto and His Critics*, ed. Mark Rollins (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 156).

62. I have to note that not all the conceptual project is politically and critically engaged. For example, the Briton artist Damien Hirst started to create "conceptual" pieces using skulls, diamonds, and platinum (see "For the Love of God"). He sold his art for millions of pounds.

63. Joseph Kossuth, "Philosophy and Conceptual Art," in *Philosophy and Conceptual Art,* eds. Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 96.

64. James Shelley, "The Problem of Non-Perceptual Art," 378.

65. For the definition of "form" see http://arthistory.about.com/cs/glossaries/g/f_form.htm.

66. Toni Ross, "Departures from Postmodern Doctrine in Jacques Ranciere's Account of the Politics of Artistic Modernity," *Transformations* no. 19 (2011).

67. Glenn Parsons, "Against Moderate Aesthetic Formalism," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 38, no. 3 (Fall, 2004): 20.

68. Bohdan Dziemidok states that "Formalism" in both its versions, "radical" (according to which the value of an artwork as artwork is constituted "exclusively" by its formal aspects) and "moderate" (according to which the value of an artwork as artwork is constituted *primarily* by its formal aspects) negate the importance of content (Bohdan Dziemidok, "Artistic Formalism: Its Achievements and Weaknesses," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 2 (1993): 185).

69. Nick Zangwill, "Feasible Aesthetic Formalism," *Nous* 33, no. 4 (1999): 612.

70. Ibid, 615.

71. Glen Parsons argues that it is not clear that much of abstract art is nonrepresentational. Mondrian's mature work are labeled as "truly abstract" by Zangwill. However, as Parsons argues, Mondrian has given little titles to his mature works (e.g., *Broadway Boogie Woogie*) which undermines their being purely abstract (Glen Parsons, "Moderate formalism as a Theory of the Aesthetic," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 38, no. 3 (2004): 12).

72. Theodor Adorno, "Commitment," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and EikeGebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1982), 304.

73. Amy Mullin argues that form or stylistic technique alone cannot be liberating or resistant to status quo because many times the power gentrifies these formal innovations from arts as in the case of the successful incorporation of avant-garde stylistic techniques within advertising; see Amy Mullin, "Feminist Art and the Political Imagination," *Hypatia* 18, no. 4 (Autumn-Winter, 2003): 207.

74. Contemporary art deals less with "works of art" understood as aesthetic objects than with Interventions (both in public space and in museums), Happenings, and Situations. Then, the form of a Happening is not a fix and static geometric frame because the art happening is not an object. In this case, form is a non-fix entity but a polymorphous one.

75. Andrew Carrington Shelton, "Art, Politics and the Politics of Art: Ingres's Saint Symphorien at the 1834 Salon," *The Art Bulletin* 83, no. 4 (December 2001): 716.

76. Andrew Carrington Shelton, "Art, Politics and the Politics of Art: Ingres's Saint Symphorien at the 1834 Salon," 713.

77. Ibid, 711–39.

78. Originally this was an UK-based art collective, using clowning and nonviolent tactics to act against neoliberalism, corporate globalization and other imposed norms and political economies from above. Now *Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army* has active groups in many countries (i.e., Germany, Denmark, Belgium, Ireland, Israel, Denmark, and France).

79. Understood as physical objects.

80. Diarmuid Costello, "Kant after LeWitt: Toward an Aesthetics of Conceptual Art," in *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, eds. Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 113.

## *Chapter 3*

# Revisiting Disinterestedness in Political Art's Apprehension

This chapter defends disinterestedness against several influential but mistaken interpretations of it. With this defense, I argue that disinterestedness is an important component in political-critical art's aesthetic appreciation and we should not get rid of it as many contemporary voices demand. Before arguing for the great significance of disinterestedness in critical art's appreciation, let's see why the concept of disinterestedness as such is this important. Contemporary aestheticians, artists, and art critics tend to define disinterestedness in purist terms (no interest, no context, no morality, and no engagement in the artwork's apprehension). Seen in this light, disinterestedness is understood almost exclusively in the modernist sense which emphasizes the spectatorial detachment as the "prerequisite for pure contemplative experience."[1] Yet, disinterestedness has nothing to do with that.

Disinterestedness is considered the "paradigmatic concept of aesthetics" and the hallmark of modernist aesthetics. For the twentieth-century aestheticians and for many contemporary aestheticians, art theorists and art critics, "disinterestedness" means "no concern for any ulterior purpose" (following Jerome Stolnitz's interpretation of it).[2] According to this understanding, we pay attention to art disinterestedly, our attention is not "interested" in what the object may say (or not) or do or if the object has a purpose or not. Stolnitz holds that we cannot have an aesthetic experience of an object, unless we perceive the object in a certain, aesthetic way, with a disinterested, contemplative attitude.[3] Disinterestedness entails in this purist interpretation, a contemplative attitude which requires detachment, passivity, and taking distance from daily problems and concerns when appreciating art. If we accept this established understanding of disinterestedness, political-critical art cannot be aesthetically experienced because the viewer will care about "the ulterior

purposes" of this art. Thus, the apprehension and the appreciation will be an interested one.

In this case, we can talk more about an active use of art, rather than a passive response to it. Is it then possible to preserve an instance of aesthetic disinterestedness in attending politically concerned art, or should we concede that political art is that type of art which cannot be experienced and appreciated disinterestedly? Once we accept the idea that political art cannot be experienced disinterestedly, we have to concede that political-critical art cannot be experienced aesthetically. This is so because, we have seen in the previous chapter, aestheticians of the last two hundred years have relied upon an understanding of the aesthetic which has to do with the disinterestedness thesis: an experience of art is aesthetic if is disinterested. At first glance, it seems that political artists are eager to produce a type of art which is intentionally and aggressively directed against "aesthetic disinterestedness," or at least against the paradigmatic understanding of aesthetic disinterestedness which dominates the official discourse of philosophical aesthetics.[4]

But, although in contemporary discourses about art in general, "disinterestedness" has a bad reputation and the contemporary art theorists and critics tend to dismiss it from art appreciation; we can shed a positive light on interestedness in attending art in general, and political-critical art in particular, without radically displacing the traditional, "obsolete," and contested disinterestedness. This does not mean that all categories of the traditional aesthetics should be preserved for political art appreciation.

We need to examine more carefully the various meanings of disinterestedness and only then we will be in the position to suggest which one is more appropriate and which one is unacceptable in critical art's appreciation. Contemporary philosophers of art, such as Arnold Berleant or Lucy Lippard, claim that in appreciating art, and especially politically concerned art, "engagement" rather than "disinterestedness" is more appropriate. Yet, if we want to consider the contemporary grounds for and the suitability of disinterestedness, the very concept needs to be in the first place re-evaluated and revisited. In the perspective I will propose, there is no conflict between "disinterestedness" and "engagement" as to be disinterested does not mean to passively contemplate an art piece without concern for any ulterior purpose and interests free.

Then, this chapter takes issue with both a powerful art critical consensus and with a certain, dominant aesthetic theory. In other words, I am inclined to disagree with two categories of theorists: those who claim that political-critical art cannot and should not be apprehended in a disinterested manner, and those who claim that political-critical art can be experienced in a disinterested manner (where disinterestedness means passive contemplation, no interest allowed, etc.). Both categories, mistakenly assume that disinterestedness

has to do with "no concern for any ulterior purpose," "no interest allowed," a contemplative, aesthetic attitude of disengagement with the world outside of art, and finally with psychological distance.

Political art is usually understood as that type of art which cannot and should not be apprehended in a disinterested manner. This is the contemporary "consensus" on disinterestedness and political art. Yet, there is at least one case, when a contemporary philosopher of art tackles this issue, without trying to completely reject disinterestedness from critical-political art's appreciation. The most significant contemporary attempt to find a middle ground between an interested and a disinterested apprehending of politically concerned art is undertaken by Peggy Zeglin Brand.[5] She holds that she has found a middle ground: we can have both interested and disinterested apprehending of political art with one condition: to switch our attention from a disinterested mode to an interested one, in this way political art is experienced both in an interested and in a disinterested manner.

However, Brand's account may still be questioned especially because of the difficulties resting exactly in the core of her argument—"the switch of attentions." She does not offer a fully viable solution for the disinterested apprehending of politically charged art because she still reduces disinterestedness to attention and perception (the "switch" between interested (political) and disinterested (aesthetic) attention is at the core of her argument).

What can be proposed instead is a rethinking of disinterestedness by changing the focus from disinterestedness as a mode of attention to thinking of it as a matter of motivations and reasons (on the grounds that our motivations and reasons can be interested or disinterested while the attention cannot be).[6] This understanding of disinterestedness echoes Shaftesbury's and the eighteenth-century understanding of the concept) even if it is not completely identical with Shaftesbury's. Unlike the twentieth-century understanding of disinterestedness which eliminates from aesthetic experience all interests (Stolnitz, Bullough, Beardsley, Wismatts), Shaftesbury opposes disinterestedness to a specific type of interest only (like the interest for the sake of a pecuniary bargain or the interest for the sake of self-congratulation).

The first section of this chapter explores both the traditional (the eighteenth century) and the modernist (the twentieth century) meanings of the term "disinterestedness." The second section deals with those contemporary theorists who reject disinterestedness from political art's appreciation. The third section shows how at least cognitive interests cannot be ruled out in disinterested appreciation of political art. Section four discusses the idea of "reflective contemplation" attempting to prove that there is no conflict between "disinterestedness" and "engagement" in political art's aesthetic appreciation. Section five critically evaluates Brand's solution ("the switch of attentions") in political art's experiencing. In the last section, the argument

will be that political art cannot be experienced in a disinterested manner (as that proposed by Stolnitz or Brand), because to maintain the centrality of a disinterested attention means to sustain the aesthetic attitude which means independence of moral judgments and political judgments. The kind of disinterestedness which seems suitable for political-critical art apprehension is to some extent closer to the eighteenth-century understanding of it but, as I will show, it is not identical with it. Disinterestedness is not the lack or absence of all interests, but it is opposed to pecuniary or selfish/self-pride interests. Disinterestedness is a "noble" word denoting an ethical attitude (disinterested in taking advantage, profit, or achieving some morally questionable ends) and not a privative concept as the absence of all interests. The conclusion will be that it is both possible and recommendable to maintain disinterestedness in apprehending political-critical art.

## DISINTERESTEDNESS IN LIGHT OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY AND AFTER

The concept of disinterestedness has a long history in philosophical aesthetics, starting with the eighteenth century. Whatever this concept denotes at different times, a thing is certain: to be disinterested does not mean being indifferent, bored or having lost interest. In a modernist aesthetic understanding, the twentieth century's aesthetics, the concept has come to mean: a special sort of "perception" or "attention" (which is different from regular perception or attention), confined exclusively to the perceivable aspects of the aesthetic object, in which all interests are quarantined. This requirement echoes the purist aesthetic account to art. To have an aesthetic experience of an art piece you need to quarantine all interests which could shadow the purity of the aesthetic response. This elimination of all interests is "prerequisite for experiencing aesthetically" an art piece. A disinterested aesthetic response means to pay attention to the art piece for itself, without having in mind another interests or purposes. This kind of "experiencing" is called "aesthetic."

In order to experience something aesthetically we need firstly to adopt a disinterested aesthetic attitude. What is a disinterested attitude? A disinterested attitude is a detached way of contemplating art in which our attention is focused exclusively on the object of our appreciation without any interests or ulterior purposes. Disinterested attention as part of the aesthetic attitude is something which we *should do* if we want to experience a piece of art aesthetically. It is an attitude we have to adopt if we are to aesthetically experience something. This understanding of the aesthetic disinterestedness is the most popular interpretation of disinterestedness and it has been used very often as

an argument for the aesthetic theories of art (and still is). Aesthetic attitude theorists of the twentieth century[7] have argued that disinterestedness is the prerequisite for any kind of full and correct appreciation of art as art. As we know, disinterestedness is conceptually tied to other terms like contemplation, aesthetic attitude, and psychological distance. Due to its centrality in the aesthetic approach to arts (especially in relation to aesthetic experience), the question of disinterestedness cannot be simply avoided from an approach which attempts to accommodate aesthetically political-critical art. However, this does not mean that we have to understand the concept of disinterestedness in its purist sense (no interest, no ulterior purpose, no emotional involvement, etc.).

The concept of disinterestedness has been developed in the eighteenth century in the writings of Shaftesbury, Addison, Alison, Hume, Burke, Hutcheson, and others from the British school of aesthetics. At that time, disinterestedness has served to identify "intrinsic normative experiences."[8] At the beginning, the concept has been used in the moral context in order to distinguish things and actions that were "good in themselves, apart from their usefulness." Thus Shaftesbury, one of the fathers of this conception, contrasted "the disinterested love of God," a love pursued for its own sake, with the more common motive of serving God "for interest merely." The disinterested love of God has then value that is entirely intrinsic.[9] Let us keep in mind this first understanding of disinterestedness offered by Shaftesbury. Even if this is just the historical background of the concept of disinterestedness, it is nevertheless crucial for the argument I want to put forth here.

In the initial understanding of disinterestedness, upon which aesthetic theory has developed lately, because this initial understanding of disinterestedness in relation to art appreciation is more appropriate for an aesthetic appreciation of political art than the twentieth-century aesthetic theories of disinterestedness. When Shaftesbury tackles this conception of disinterestedness, he integrates it in the sphere of art as well, talking of "the morality of art appreciation." We have to keep in mind that disinterestedness, as the key concept in aesthetics, has its origins in ethics and religion. A first conclusion will be that the concept of disinterestedness in its first usage has nothing to do with disinterested contemplation of art (as some modern aestheticians claim), on the contrary: Shaftesbury does not separate the contemplation of art (aesthetic) from moral concerns in particular.

The next step in aesthetic disinterestedness' history is the "refinement" it received through Kant and Schopenhauer's treatment. For the former, disinterestedness is the first moment of the judgment of taste from which he claims the universality of aesthetic judgment of beauty, and for the second disinterestedness is "pure, will-less contemplation," "no interest allowed."[10] In the twentieth century, Jerome Stolnitz engages again in the theory of aesthetic

disinterestedness dealing with both the origins of aesthetic disinterestedness and with "aesthetic attitude" (a version of aesthetic disinterestedness, which according to the attitude theorist is a necessary condition for aesthetic experience). These theoretical considerations have become the hallmark of modernist aesthetics and its core arguments are still hunting the contemporary aestheticians. The main "usefulness" attributed to aesthetic disinterestedness in the form it has been conceptualized by Stolnitz is that it helps in discriminating aesthetic from non-aesthetic experiences and art from non-art. If this is so or not I will discuss in the next sections. For the moment it's worth mentioning that Stolnitz fails to account for a correct origin of the aesthetic disinterestedness as he understands it (as "no interest allowed in art appreciation" and "no concern for any ulterior purpose").[11]

He assumes that Shaftesbury was the first philosopher to liberate aesthetic appreciation from moral or political concerns. I think that we have strong reasons and historical evidences to doubt these claims. If the historian Preben Mortensen is right, then Stolnitz's claim that Shaftsbury liberates the aesthetic from the moral is erroneous.[12] Mortensen researched Shaftsbury's writings and offered pieces of textual evidence from Shaftsbury's work *The Moralists*, to sustain that "Shaftsbury's aim was to situate the contemplation of art within a morality acceptable to his contemporaries."[13] We can understand this claim if we take into account the fact that Shaftsbury paid a lot of attention to the movement of reforming the manners, a movement which appeared after the 1688 English Revolution.

The idea was to introduce new behavioral ideals among the gentleman, a sort of *Bildungsideal* according to which horsemanship, swordsmanship, dueling and other activities related to the traditional conception of honor should be replaced with "new behaviors" such as "manners" and especially "politeness." Politeness had to incorporate, in England of that time, two ingredients: the possession of taste and a high interest in arts. For Shaftsbury, morality and manners could not be separated, and the content of his moral-aesthetic view should be understood in the light of this *Bildungsideal*. Finally, Shaftsbury opposes "disinterestedness" to a specific type of interests: the interest for the sake of a bargain or, in Shaftsbury's words, "we call interested pleasure: riches, power, and other exterior advantages."[14] This is the eighteenth-century understanding of disinterestedness.

The term "disinterestedness" applied to beauty (and art) in Shaftsbury's conception is very close, as meaning, with the disinterested love of virtue and God. But, as Mortensen suggests and I agree with, Stolnitz applies the term "aesthetic" in the modern sense, as an autonomous experience—"in which it refers to something which is independent of, for example, morality or religion,"[15] and he attributes this meaning to Shaftsbury's concept of disinterestedness. But this is a mistake. Shaftsbury's argument goes in the

opposite direction. He does not separate the contemplation of beauty from the sphere of morality but, as Mortensen points out, "he wants to assert that there is a moral way of admiring things, a way which is not to be identified with luxury, covetousness, avarice, ostentation, and similar—to Shaftsbury and most of his contemporaries—immoral qualities."[16] Therefore, for both Lord Shaftsbury and for contemporary political art's public, disinterestedness is not a category which takes aesthetic contemplation beyond the sphere of morality—but one that situates it exactly within the realm of morality.

Unlike Shaftsbury, Stolnitz holds that the moral aspects and the aesthetic aspects of art are completely separate aspects which require different ways of appreciation. For them, the aesthetic experience of art is an autonomous experience (it has nothing to do with politics or morality) and in order to have this experience the spectator should adopt a disinterested stance (they call it "attitude"). For the modern philosopher of art, disinterested appreciation of art is a requirement which makes aesthetic experience an autonomous experience (a "pure" experience of an object perceived just for the sake of it, outside of any use or purpose). But as Mortensen has argued, the "disinterestedness discourse" about art appreciation as an autonomous enterprise is not apolitical. This particular discourse gained cultural hegemony in the beginning of the twentieth century. The requirement of disinterested contemplation/appreciation of art actually contains social and political beliefs (cultural hegemony's political beliefs). Then, the appreciation of the right kind of art "in the appropriate manner (disinterestedly) become(s) a requirement for and a sign of membership in cultural elite."[17] In other words, there is a cultural politics and an ideology toward which this purist understanding of disinterested contemplation amounts.

## IS DISINTERESTEDNESS ANY LONGER AN OPERATIONAL TERM FOR CONTEMPORARY AESTHETICS AND ART THEORY?

In contemporary art theory, disinterestedness has a bad reputation. Many times it is considered a "modernist" term having to do with detachment and contemplation which cannot be accepted in contemporary art's apprehending and theorizing. It is argued that achieving a disinterested state of mind is not possible. Many theorists ask if: Is there any kind of disinterestedness possible at all? As we can see, the common attitude toward disinterestedness is a critical one, especially reinforced by Pierre Bourdieu's influential rejection of disinterestedness from his theory of action. He posits that human beings cannot act without a sufficient reason (without interests). In an "ethics of generosity," the disinterested act is just a fairy tale since there is always an

interest promoting the disinterested-generous disposition. In other words, for Bourdieu, we have some interests when we pursue disinterestedness. Even behind the act which appears to be the most disinterested action rests an interest for a form of symbolic capital (symbolic profit). For example, the holy man's disinterested actions are in fact motivated by a symbolic form of profit: the achievement of sanctity, the afterlife's recompense, and so on. There is always a form or another of intentional and purposeful disinterestedness among all human actions. Hence, Shaftsbury's "disinterested love of God" and "gentlemen's disinterested politeness" would be regarded just as chimeras from Bourdieu's perspective. The so-called disinterested generosity in an aristocratic context is in fact motivated by a social norm, like "noblesse oblige." You are not generous for the sake of being generous but because you are a noble man and you have to prove it. Bourdieu's conclusion is that the social and aesthetic contexts in which disinterestedness becomes the official norm are not activated by disinterestedness but on the contrary.

Contemporary art, with its elements of shock, trasgresivity, abjection, repulsion, violence, and cruelty seems to pose substantial challenges to disinterestedness by constantly menacing the emotionally and ethically distanced perspective associated with aesthetic disinterestedness (officially understood as detachment and "no interest allowed"). By deliberately provoking visceral reactions, many contemporary art pieces obstinately refuse to be integrated to the disinterested mode of apprehension. On the contrary, they demand visceral reactions and acute moral deliberation. For many contemporary philosophers of art (Arthur Danto, Arnold Berleant, Richard Shusterman, and George Dickie), disinterested contemplation has become an academic relic incapable to account for the new forms of art emerging with the advance of technology. Our visual experience has become more and more multifaceted: a piece of art can be now multiplied, reenacted, re-activated with the help of the computer or rethought and the aesthetic object is often pulverized and converted in aesthetic situations which are context dependent and more or less ephemeral. In these new situations it is difficult to be detached and contemplative and to bracket all interests.

Nevertheless, the sorts of cognitive, emotional, and bodily involvement the contemporary arts require from their attendants make the disinterested aesthetic attitude a troubled concept. To maintain a disinterested mode of experiencing art in the twentieth-century fashion would mean to miss the point of many contemporary critical art productions and practices whose focal purpose is to create a participatory situation in which the art event is the result of the direct interaction between artist and public. Nicolas Bourriaud's "relational aesthetics"[18] is just one example of this sort. In this "new" aesthetics, the art-object-process-practice is experienced in an aesthetic "situation" (the emphasis is removed from the aesthetic object alone). Not only is the

aesthetic object de-emphasized in this new aesthetics but also the very idea of spectatorship. The viewer-spectator is no longer a spectator (in the sense of a passive/contemplative receiver) but an active participant who learns, imagines, and reacts to things instead of being captured by the imagines' apparent surfaces.

However, in spite of all these rejections of aesthetic disinterestedness, it is possible to assess contemporary grounds and suitability for disinterestedness if we revise its modernist understanding. Disinterestedness is not a separate/special sort of experience (as it has been argued). By the same token, attention and perception cannot be divided in special (aesthetic) and regular (non-aesthetic). The same kind of perception acknowledges both the existence of *Mona Lisa* and a cabbage. There are no special perceptual eyeglasses through which we see *Mona Lisa* as a beautiful/aesthetic piece of art. If we regard *Mona Lisa* as a beautiful, aesthetic art piece, it is because we know it is art (or "great art") and not because we pay a special sort of attention/perception to it.

Yet, even if there is no special (aesthetic) perception or attention, there is a sort of "standing back" even when we appreciate relational/collaboration art,[19] but the question is what exactly is this "standing back"? For sure, we regard art in a certain way, which differs from the way we regard everyday objects. We see and appreciate *Mona Lisa* with certain awareness that what we see is a piece of art and not a cabbage. Why is this so? The answer is that gaze is educated to see art in this manner and not that aesthetic perception is a special kind of perception (different from average perception). We don't *just see* something as aesthetic (or art) but we see something as aesthetic if our gaze is educated to see that way.

The first conclusion is that aesthetic disinterestedness, in the way in which it has been theorized by the twentieth-century aestheticians (and also in some contemporary pronouncements) is not a plausible concept for contemporary aesthetic appreciation and evaluation of art. I will explain why I think this is so in what follows.

## COGNITIVE INTERESTS CANNOT BE RULED OUT BY "AESTHETIC" DISINTERESTEDNESS

The twentieth-century understanding of the concept of disinterestedness in aesthetic theory is that disinterestedness "means no concern for any ulterior purpose" and "no interest allowed in art appreciation." This is the paradigmatic sense in which disinterestedness is understood in Western aesthetic theory. Stolnitz makes this point clear when he claims that "we cannot understand modern aesthetic theory unless we understand the concept of disinterestedness."[20] Yet, he misread it and unfortunately his misinterpretation

was not without negative consequences for aesthetics and art theory. The way in which the concept of disinterestedness is understood in the philosophical tradition of modernity has leaded to a consensus in Western aesthetic theories of art that art is something which has nothing to do with use and purpose.

Some interests have to be ruled out by aesthetic disinterestedness but not all interests. We can shed a positive light on interestedness in attending art in general and political-critical art in particular, without radically displacing the eighteenth-century, old-fashioned disinterestedness. Some interests, like the cognitive one, cannot be removed from aesthetic experience and appreciation of art because these interests will always foreground our aesthetic experience and appreciation. We cannot simply impose on us to achieve such a state of disinterested attitude as a necessary condition for experiencing something aesthetically. At the same time, disinterestedness is not a privative concept but an ethical one; to be disinterested does not mean to rule out all interests but something considerably different, namely: to rule out some of our wants, those having to do with personal or selfish advantage, bargain, public recognition and so on.

Among others, Jerome Stolnitz is well-known for his anti-cognitive approach of aesthetic experience and appreciation. His purist aestheticism and autonomist understanding of art and aesthetics forbid both the cognitive and the ethical stance in the disinterested apprehension of art. As an aesthetic attitude's defender, he would say that in order to have an aesthetic attendance of the artwork we should suspend all the "curiosities" and to concentrate our attention only on the purely formal qualities of art. Failing to do so would mean failing to aesthetically experience the artwork. I am afraid that this is not possible (i.e., elimination of all interests, expectations, beliefs, hopes etc.). Involuntarily, our "eye" will safeguard some "curiosities." Robert L. Solso makes a very interesting claim in his *Cognition and the Visual Arts* sustaining that art and cognition have always stood as two "convex mirrors each reflecting and amplifying the other."[21] A further interesting claim is that we see *both* with the brain *and* with the eye. This means that our visual perception is not limited to sensory, but involves the observer's cognitive background, which confers meaning to such experience. More accurately put: "seeing is accomplished through both the visual stimulation of eye and the interpretation of sensory signals by the brain."[22] Solso continues his line of argument by saying that this dual nature of seeing helps us in everyday life to move around in a three-dimensional world without getting killed by cars. If I move the discussion in the direction of visual arts, I believe that this association of "seeing" and "understanding" is unavoidable, both in enjoying and in grasping the meaning of the artworks.

Our eyes think, so to speak. Our "cognitive perception" is not exactly the same thing with what Stolnitz calls "cognitive interest." He suggests that we

should not be interested in gaining knowledge about an object. But, in order to experience an object aesthetically and to enjoy it, the disinterested attitude is necessary for achieving and keeping the pure feeling and perception of it. Thus, the disinterested attitude is needed for the pure aesthetic experience. Yet, the subsequent question that arises can be framed as follows: Is it possible at all to reach it, as long as our perception is cognitive in its nature?

The conclusion is that beauty, ugliness, or elegance of art is more in the mind than in the eyes of the beholder—or, as Solso puts it: "we think art as much as, no, even more than, we see art."[23] So, even if we want to follow Stolnitz's requirement to suspend any "interest in gaining knowledge about an object" when we perceive it aesthetically, we would still not be able to reach this state of mind, because of the way in which our perception functions, involuntarily bringing into reception some cognitive elements. So, "on the surface we appreciate art, literature, music, ideas, and science, but at the core, we see our own mind unveiled in this wonderful stuff."[24] More accurately put, to understand what makes a piece of art beautiful, scary, sublime, neutral, or elegant to us entails an understanding of what makes us *think* that the piece of art is beautiful, scary, sublime, neutral, or elegant.

The aesthetic experience entails, nevertheless, a communication between the art piece and human mind, as well as emotions, moods, idiosyncrasies, convictions, beliefs, prejudices, personal history and so on. Our responses to art are not context independent and disinterested in the senses of "no-interest allowed." On the contrary, we don't respond to a work of art in the same way every time we look at it. A painting that one day seems to express wit and drollness may appear boring and childish the next day. The experiential context and our interests influence our appreciation of art, our use of art and so on. The immaculate perception is a myth while the aesthetic grasping is a very complex enterprise containing semantic and allegorical aspects, historical, art historical, societal, everyday or political dimensions—and, of course, emotional, imaginative, and philosophical experiences too. To just perceive a piece in itself is to entirely miss whatever art means. In political art's case a perception which rules out a cognitive awareness of social conditions is not helpful and it misses the point of this art's relevance.

Having a cognitive interest is a necessary condition of appreciating the art piece without undermining or discharging disinterestedness. A cognitive interest is "the interest in knowing of what the work is about." Knowing of what the work is about entails several cognitive activities like interpreting, labeling, recognizing, or associating. All these activities go beyond the merely attending and cannot be overlooked if we want to appreciate art as art. Moreover, having a cognitive interest of what the work is about lies always within the art historical context and not outside and independent of all art historical factors.[25] For the naïve viewer this requirement may sound not that

pleasant; but unfortunately, there is no way to identify the aesthetic properties which belong to the art piece without knowing what the artwork is about in the first place. I cannot imagine a situation in which a spectator claims that he does not know what the art piece is about but he finds it beautiful and moving anyway. If these situations exist (maybe my imagination is limited) then that spectator misses the point of art. We have to know what the art piece is about, to be interested in its "aboutness"—to paraphrase Danto—and only then we can have a disinterested apprehension of it.

## DISINTERESTEDNESS AND ENGAGEMENT: REFLECTIVE CONTEMPLATION

This chapter commenced with the claim that there is no conflict between disinterestedness and engagement. Now, let's make this claim clearer. As already mentioned, disinterestedness is customarily understood in aesthetic theories of art as entailing no interest in the object of appreciation in terms of what is the object good for, detached appreciation, contemplative attitude, psychological distance and so on. Disinterested contemplation is one of the requirements for apprehending artworks aesthetically. But even if we contemplate aesthetically a piece of art, this contemplation is not a detached, distracted, or passive appreciation. Contemplation can be a disinterested one without being at the same time a "blank cow-like stare" (inactive and a cognitively non-infected perception).

When we experience political-critical art by contemplating it, this aesthetic contemplation requires *both* an involvement/engagement with *and* a detachment from the piece. Contemplation leaves room for an imaginative participation in the work's nature and meaning. When we contemplate something as this contemplation is not a passive one and it already involves our personal background (cognitive, political, or emotional). In other words, a disinterested contemplation does not require "setting aside who we are." Even if the term "active contemplation" seems to be, at the first sight, an oxymoronic construction, we can accept the fact that contemplation is something one *does* rather than something which simply *happens* to one. Diane Collinson calls our attention suggesting that we should question the assumption taken for granted according to which contemplation is passive: "It is arguable that contemplation does not necessary require stillness, that movement is sometimes essential to it, and that stillness does not imply passivity . . . . One needs to move around a sculpture, seeing it to and from distance, looking at it in different angles."[26]

I will take Collinson's suggestion as a starting point in trying to figure out how an "active contemplation" works in attending political art. My contention is that a reflective, "active contemplation" might be accommodated by

political art's public—but an attitude of contemplative detachment is not appropriate at all. It is one thing to attend contemplatively detached a painting which represents flowers and is about "flowers," and it is quite another to experience Goya's *What more can one do?* (from the series "The Disasters of War") in the same detached manner. I admit that some art might be just "functionless" art or, at least, art without a direct function, or art with the function to decorate a place, or to function as a commodity. All these are examples of art which does not have a critical function ("apolitical" art). Thus, the concept of aesthetic disinterestedness (understood as "no ulterior purpose or function" and "no interest allowed") cannot be accommodated by apolitical "art" either because any response to art is, as Gadamer puts it, a mode of self-understanding and not a detached apprehension. Yet, apolitical art does not necessarily require a disinterested apprehension that is opposed to pecuniary or selfish or other ethically questionable interests (as critical art is) because the function of apolitical art is not to make the public aware about social or economic injustices.

If we attend, say, the series of art pieces called "Abu Ghraib," painted by the Columbian artist Fernando Botero, what is the appropriate attitude we have to adopt in front of them? These series of over eighty ravishing paintings and drawings depict prisoners' abuse by American guards at the Abu Ghraib prison, in Iraq. The paintings are made in Botero's cartoonish style: prisoners and guardians are pneumatic oversized figures and the colors used to depict them are really vibrant. But what makes this series powerful is the manner in which Botero visualized "what really happened there," in that prison. The prisoners are vomiting, bleeding, screaming. There are paintings representing dogs which are used to intimidate prisoners. The violence represented in these paintings is so extreme. When I attend these pieces of art I cannot say that my contemplation is still and passive. I cannot say that all interests—especially the cognitive one—are suspended either. My contemplation is active, in the sense that it maintains a dialogue with what is perceived.

Through reflective contemplation I am "transported" into the world of infamous torture, which is not only in Botero's paintings, but also in the world out there. I have an "interest" to understand this world. This interest is neither an imposed obligation, nor a private one in the sense of a desire to poses something—but it is an interest motivated by the will to know how awful, inhuman, and horrific torture can be. Contemplation is not a still and passive stance of an emptied mind but it is more a reflective state. Then, disinterested contemplation is not a disengagement from our cognitive, social, or political background. On the contrary, it involves an active use of our capacities: imagination, understanding, personal associations, and idiosyncrasies. There is no conflict between disinterested contemplation and engagement if we understand contemplation as a reflective and active process.

The question will be in this case: Why is this contemplation disinterested? It is disinterested in the sense that it leaves aside those interests in the object which have to do with using that object to bring us some profit either financial or some personal recognition, self-esteem and so on. Emily Brady claims that disinterested contemplation need not be detached from self and does not require setting aside who we are but only what we want.[27] Yet, what we want is not always directed toward attaining a profit (financial or symbolic profit), but it can be the case that we want to pursue an intrinsic value when we contemplate art like the value of being *just* or *caring*. The point is that disinterestedness means not being self-interested to use the art piece as a means to achieve some profit for yourself, to satisfy your desires, or to use the artwork in an immoral way which could justify a morally questionable behavior. This does not mean that our disinterested contemplation is disengaged from our experiential background, including historical, cultural, political, and social background.

## IS THERE ANY DISINTERESTEDNESS SUITABLE FOR POLITICAL-CRITICAL ART'S SPECTATOR?

In contemporary art theory and philosophy of art, the tendency is to reject aesthetic disinterestedness from political-critical art's appreciation. Political-critical art is many times transgressive and offensive and a disinterested appreciation seems for some theorists impossible and for others, inappropriate: Orlan butchers herself with the help of plastic surgery; Oleg Kulik (the so-called artist-dog) lives for two weeks like a dog in an art gallery, naked, chained, and barking; Maurizio Cattelan produces a satirical sculpture depicting pope John Paul II struck down by a meteorite; Santiago Sierra's film *Los Penetrados* features a mirrored collection with ten geometrically arranged blankets positioned on the floor, on which the various possible combinations of black and white and male and female, engage in anal penetration. Yet, in spite of these disturbing challenges posed by critical art, I argue that it is possible and advisable to experience it disinterestedly. There is another contemporary attempt to show that political art can be appreciated disinterestedly (Brand's) but, as I will show in what follows, this attempt is not an appropriate one.

Peggy Zeglin Brand holds that the transgressive artistic impulse from political art, however grotesque, offending and repugnant it may appear prima facie, can be tamed for disinterested contemplation.[28] Brand's inspiring contemporary defense of aesthetic disinterestedness is worthy since the general theoretical atmosphere is of rejection. Yet, on the other hand, her argument is not fully convincing, precisely because she does not defend the

aesthetic disinterested appreciation of political art but the aesthetic disinterested attitude a viewer has to adopt. The difference between my account on disinterestedness in political art's case and Brand's rests in the way we understand disinterestedness. For Brand it seems to be understood as a matter of attention and aesthetic attitude, while for me disinterestedness has to do with motivations and reasons. Aesthetic attitude is not enough as a description of what counts as disinterestedness. Her position is incompatible with both traditionalist aesthetic theories of disinterestedness of the eighteenth century and with the feminist critics of aesthetic tradition but is compatible to some extent with attitude theorists while mine is incompatible only with aesthetic attitude theories (e.g., with Stonitz).

Generally, contemporary art theorists hold that political-critical art should not be apprehended in accordance with the requirements of aesthetic disinterestedness on the grounds that this art requires engagement rather than passive, "disinterested" contemplation. Yet, against this theoretical background, Brand argues that a disinterested stance in apprehending political art is "not only possible but also advisable" but she does not really tell us why. She proposes an interesting theory according to which we should switch between an interested and a disinterested mode of attention when we experience political art.[29] She meticulously describes how exactly this switch is possible. The core of Brand's argument, namely what she calls the "switch of attentions" recommends both interested and disinterested "attention" in experiencing political art. She does not say, like her feminist aestheticians colleagues, that "interestedness" should replace the obsolete aesthetic disinterestedness in attending political art.[30]

For Brand, we can attend political art both interestedly and disinterestedly if we switch the attention from an interested mode of attention to a disinterested one. This "switch" between the two modes of attention might be, according to her, deliberate or not. As a conclusion, she states that one cannot "see" with both types of attention at once. In other words, one either experiences the political art piece with interested attention or with disinterested attention but not with both "modes" of attention at the same time. Brand uses the example of the duck-rabbit to support her argument (the well-known duck-rabbit optical illusion from Wittgenstein's book *Philosophical Investigations*). Sometimes we can see the drawing as a duck and after few seconds only we can see it as a rabbit. Brand suggests that in an analogous way we can switch from interested to disinterested attention and vice versa when we attend to political art pieces.

Her case study (her "duck-rabbit") is the political art piece *Omnipresence* performed by Orlan. Brand assumes that Orlan's piece of art can be looked at exactly in the way we look at the duck-rabbit drawing: switching back and forth between seeing it in an interested mode and a disinterested one exactly like we

switch back and forth between seeing the duck and seeing the rabbit from the duck-rabbit drawing. Orlan's *Omnipresence* is a highly disturbing piece of critical art in which the artist is surgically rearranging her face in accordance with the cannons of classical beauty. One of the critical points this piece makes is that the hegemonic model of beauty is evil and oppressive to women.[31]

Brand recommends how we should appreciate political art in general and Orlan's in particular[32] and this obligation reminds us the purist aesthetic demands required by the attitude theorists, strict formalists, and autonomists. In other words, this argument says that a political art piece cannot be appreciated both aesthetically and politically or morally at the same time. The "switch of attentions" (from disinterested to interested and vice versa) shows us that we can have both an aesthetic appreciation (disinterested) of art and a political interested appreciation but not simultaneously. In fact, what Brand is arguing for is a separation between two modes of attention (disinterested and interested). In the disinterested mode or, more exactly, what she calls "disinterested" mode, we pay attention only to the intrinsic properties of the work. For example, in Orlan's case we pay attention to shapes, colors, texture, while in the interested mode, we pay attention to the extrinsic proprieties of the piece of art like who the artist is, why is she doing this to her, the feminist art features to be found in the piece and so on.

I do not find this solution particularly compelling on several grounds but, before going into details, I point out that our experiences, the decisions we make, and appreciations of the world we live in (art included) don't typically come in separate packages (aesthetic, political, moral). As Marcia Eaton would say, "we don't look at the world first from one and then from another standpoint. I do not claim that aesthetic experiences or considerations are never separable from other sorts. What I insist is that it is not a requirement of the aesthetic that all other interests or concerns are blocked off or out."[33] Brand's innovative account can be still questioned on several grounds.

First, let's suppose for the sake of the argument that attention can be switched into two modes: interested and disinterested. However, even if we credit the idea of aesthetic disinterestedness as a matter of attention, the switch of attentions in political art's case is not realistic. The duck-rabbit drawing—or any other similar ambiguous drawing—does not equalize the complexity of an artwork, like Orlan's. The switch between interested and disinterested attention (if there exist such things as interested and disinterested attention) would be possible only in the case of ambiguous situations such as "neither duck nor rabbit" or "neither x nor z" situations. Brand claims that sometimes the switch is involuntary, in spite of the attempt to focus on the duck or the rabbit exclusively. But if we are to push the analogy with the switch between interestedness and disinterestedness further on, we can observe that in political art's case, even in Orlan's performance, the "switch" is far from being an

"involuntary" one. In political art's case the "switch" Brand is talking about is not so easily possible because political artworks offer us very powerful experiences in which the viewer is really mesmerized, shocked, or disturbed. The spectator is not a schizophrenic or a non-emotional being who changes the way of looking involuntarily.

Secondly—and more importantly—it makes no sense to divide attention into interested and disinterested, let aside whether you can switch them or not. As Robert McGregor points out, in the language of philosophy of mind, "attention is usually taken to be a primitive, not to be defined by means of other terms, and not to be split up into different kinds."[34] By reducing disinterestedness to attention, Brand seems to remain in the same theoretical boat with Jerome Stolnitz and the aesthetic attitude theorists. What Brand does not seem to note is that attention paid to Orlan's piece is just attention—voluntary or involuntary attention—but not interested and disinterested. It does not make sense to talk of attention *qua* attention as interested or disinterested. The purposes and the motivational factors of the viewer can be interested or disinterested and not her attention. This approach seems to rest on a paradigm which does not distinguish between "motivations for perceiving" with the "way of perceiving." Motivations for perceiving art in a certain way can be interested or disinterested but not the way we perceive art.

At the same time, the motivation for perceiving something will always influence the way we perceive that something. Brand's "switch of attentions" model of explaining disinterestedness in political art's case does not work in the case of art which is ephemeral. (If art is ephemeral there is no switching back and forth between seeing it disinterestedly and then interestedly.) In the best case, it could work for static political-critical art (sculpture, painting) but even then attention alone cannot count as a disinterested stance.

Someone could ask if a misogynist's apprehension, who views Orlan's work from his viewpoint, counts as an immoral, selfish, bad motivation. And, if so, how does it differ from a feminist who looks at Orlan's work from her feminist point of view? If the feminist's viewpoint and motivations are accepted as disinterested then the misogynist's viewpoint should also be accepted because it is not as if he is gaining a personal benefit from appreciating Orlan's work. The answers to these queries will be that ethical motivations are not separated from the aesthetic ones when political art is apprehended. Orlan's piece is certainly political and typically it ensures the right kind of political engagement. I don't think that a misogynist will be willing to attend to feminist art, but even if we concede that he might be attending his apprehension cannot count as a disinterested one even when he is not motivated to apprehend Orlan's piece for gaining personal profit. Misogyny manifests as hatred, discrimination, or violence against women. Therefore, a misogynist apprehending of feminist art would be prompted by

his evil interests and motivations which will ensure the wrong kind of political engagement (hegemonic politics). For the feminist public, Orlan's performance is both "good" and "truly beautiful" because it tells the truth about women's struggle for loveliness, prettiness, and other superficial "beauties." As Bernstain posits, both the good and the beautiful require disinterestedness to be valued: "the terms sometimes change, but the idea that the experience of beauty involves transcendence of the evils of self-interested individuality remains the same."[35] A misogynist's apprehension does not transcend all the evils to count as disinterested.

Orlan's political objective, among others, is meant to distress and to make the attendant say "this is wrong, there is no perfect, universal formal beauty!" But this ethical reaction to her art does not inhabit in the disinterested stance envisaged by Brand's theory but on the contrary. Perhaps, a defender of aesthetic attitude would persist in claiming that an artwork should not be approached from an ethical or political point of view if we are to appreciate it aesthetically. However, many political art pieces have ethical value and the appropriate aesthetic response to them may include ethical assessments. To maintain the centrality of a disinterested attention means to sustain the aesthetic attitude which means independence of moral judgment and idiosyncratic personal emotions, among many other interdictions. Struggling to achieve this attitude—if possible to be achieved—would mean to totally overlook the point of this performance.

There is another path to follow, if we want to account for a disinterested aesthetic appreciation of political art. We cannot look at Orlan's artwork "for no reason" (or just to gaze at the vibrant red blood and symmetrical rearrangements of her face under surgical reconstruction). If we pay attention only to these so-called internal properties of the work does not mean that our appreciation is disinterested. There is no doubt that our attendance has some reasons and motivations behind it, but the crux of the matter rests in whether the reasons underlying our grasping are disinterested or not. Our reasons and motivations can be disinterested or interested and not our attention or perception. Another necessary step will be to discern the various ways in which the reasons and motivations guiding our apprehending of art are interested or disinterested. I claim that this is the appropriate understanding of disinterestedness for the reasons that I will discuss in detail in what follows.

## RETHINKING DISINTERESTEDNESS IN POLITICAL-CRITICAL ART'S APPRECIATION

The kind of disinterested appreciation which seems suitable for political-critical art apprehension is to some extent closer to the eighteenth-century

(more precisely Shaftesbury's) understanding of it than the twentieth-century and contemporary interpretations. Disinterestedness is not the suppression or absence of all interests, but it is opposed to pecuniary or selfish interests. Disinterestedness is a "noble" word denoting an ethical attitude toward art appreciation and not a privative concept as the absence of all interests excepting the aesthetic one. The so-called aesthetic interest is just an interest among others. To call only this interest "disinterested," as the aesthetic tradition of modernity does, is misleading and mistaken. Disinterestedness has nothing to do with attention or perception but with peculiar motivations. In other words, there are individual motivations[36] for disinterested acts and disinterested reasons to act, apprehend, and think in certain ways. Shaftesbury would agree that disinterestedness does not mean to rule out interests but to guide and correct our interests by reflecting upon which one is morally condemnable and which one is directed toward "truth" and "good." Shaftesbury's disinterestedness has nothing to do with a purist, detached aesthetic attitude and therefore it is not opposed to critical and moral evaluation.

The idea of disinterestedness I defend is rather that in which disinterestedness is inseparable from some kinds of interest than a radical separation of interest from disinterestedness. There is no such a thing as "complete disinterestedness," in the sense of "no interest allowed." Both Leibniz and Shaftesbury would agree that there is no apprehending or perception without something motivating them. What does it mean then, to be disinterested when apprehending political-critical art? Does it mean that we are not interested in the real existence of the object as Kant claims? Does it mean that we voluntarily eliminate all the interests except the aesthetic one? Obviously, we cannot be disinterested in Kantian sense in the real existence of the artistic object. We would not appreciate the relevance of a political piece, like Oleg Kulik's *I Bite America and America Bites Me* or Orlan's *Omnipresence* if they were life-size holograms or mannequins and not the artists themselves performing the painful task they perform.

Moreover, the appreciation would be different if we know that the situation depicted in the art piece is totally invented and it never actually took place. We cannot concentrate on the formal aspects of a piece while disregarding the real existence of the artistic object precisely because this required "disinterestedness" is an unethical one. We cannot simply gaze at the chromatic composition of Orlan's performance while her real human face is surgical transformed without any worries regarding the real body involved in the art practice and for the politics it exhibits through this artistic gesture. Nevertheless, disinterestedness denotes something else than focusing exclusively on the internal or compositional features of the art piece.

First of all, disinterestedness is independent of anything of economic value which would transform critical-political art into a commodity. The desire

for possession of the art piece is again objectionable and it has no place in the state of mind appreciating political-critical art. In general, political art's public is committed to appreciating a sort of "good" in ethical sense, in terms of doing justice for those oppressed, marginal, or excluded, disinterested consideration for others' welfare or one form or another of egalitarianism.

The commitment to this ethical "good" gives rise to a peculiar type of disinterestedness. The sense in which I interpret this term is not necessarily a Kantian one even if it could have some reverberations from Kant's aesthetics regarding the enjoyment of something for its own sake and not for benefits that it confers on the observer, but owes much more to Alain Badiou. For the French philosopher, "interest" is quintessentially animalistic—a struggle for survival and this is what the human species has in common with all living creatures. It is exactly that which the ethical subject struggles to transcend. An ethical subject is interested not only to preserve his being in an animalist way but also—or more specifically—to participate in an "event of truth."[37] Then, she surpasses the interests for survival (common to all living creatures) and pursues different interests: "disinterested interests." Disinterestedness, then, is not based upon a lack of interests, but as Rubinstein claims:

> It is only when we have learned how to look with love upon the gifts life puts into our open hands without closing those hands in a futile undignified attempt to clutch them as they slip away, it is only when we can view with unregretful appreciation the loss of those homes to which we had no natural right, those friends who were not destined to be ours, it is only then that we may be said to have achieved the truly philosophical attitude-the attitude of disinterestedness.[38]

By the same token, "disinterested interest" in Badiou's sense is not directly connected to the personal advantage or self-preservation but with pursuing some intrinsic values. Usually, we will guide our life under conditions in which we can try at any rate to pursue all our interests—those that derive from self-preservation (or maximization of profit) and those that derive from some conception of "good," "just," or "true." In certain extreme circumstances—martyrdom is perhaps the most striking instance—the course of action that is required by one's conception of "good" conflicts with one's self-preservation interest.[39]

The interest in pursuing these intrinsic values is the cornerstone of the accurate understanding of disinterestedness in political-critical art's appreciation. As already mentioned in the previous chapters, political-critical art (oppositional art or art of resistance), strives to arouse viewer's awareness of the mechanism of domination turning her in a critical agent. The disinterested motivations which guide the spectator of this art to have the experience are located outside any pecuniary agenda.

Therefore, disinterestedness denotes the non-self-interested motivations or morally questionable motivations which foreground our apprehending and appreciation of art (and not only art). Until this point, my position does not essentially differ from Shaftesbury's. Still, Shaftesbury contrasts the disinterested stance toward an object with using that object for some purpose. He assumes that a disinterested apprehension is that apprehension which considers the object in its own terms, in a moral way, without selfish, pecuniary, or symbolic advantages motivating the apprehension. At the same time, his disinterestedness is not permeable to the idea of using the object for some ulterior purposes. At this point, our conceptions of disinterestedness are no longer alike. I don't endorse the view that pursuing an ulterior purpose makes our attendance or appreciation less disinterested. Still, pursuing certain ulterior purposes can destroy the disinterestedness of appreciation, but this does not mean that all ulterior purposes are detrimental to disinterestedness.

For Shaftesbury, an individual will not have a disinterested apprehending of an object (in our case a piece of critical art) if she has some peculiar, personal, self-serving utilitarian interest in it (or if she intends to use the object for an ulterior purpose). Let's illustrate that with an example: a spectator apprehends a theatrical performance dealing with the cruel treatments applied to the irregular migrants in a host country. The interests behind this apprehension are not selfish as the spectator is not motivated to sell the representation, to gain whatever prize or reward, to impress his partner and so on. Yet, if the spectator is a teacher and he/she wants to "use" this piece of art as a didactic tool in his/ her class with the motivation to increase the others awareness, Shaftesbury would claim that this utilitarian interest has to be contrasted with disinterestedness. In other words, disinterestedness is for him not only something which denotes the suppression of the selfish or self-serving interests but also something opposed to "utility" in general.

Although disinterestedness has to do with apprehending something without selfish or "bad" interests or motivated by interests in gaining some public recognition or prize, I don't endorse the view that all the ulterior purposes for which we may use the object are shadowing disinterestedness. As already stated, not all utilitarian purposes are self-interested in a negative sense. If I "use" a work of art with the purpose to help some people to escape modern slavery or with the purpose to increase awareness or self-awareness about, let's say, seeing dignity in poverty, this approach of the art piece is not less disinterested. If a piece of art has instrumental or utilitarian value does not necessarily mean that this instrumental value cannot be an intrinsic value.

I suppose that Shaftesbury eliminates utility from disinterestedness just because in his days, the philosophical tradition used to hold that X's intrinsic value must depend solely upon X's intrinsic properties. By the same token, we appreciate X for its intrinsic value and this value[40] depends solely on the

intrinsic properties of X. That is why Shaftesbury contrasts "the disinterested love of God" (a love pursued for its own sake) with the more common motive of serving God "for interest merely." The disinterested love of God has then value that is entirely intrinsic[41] while "serving God for interests merely"[42] has just relational or instrumental value but not intrinsic value. This contrast between intrinsic value and instrumental value is also a corner stone in aesthetic theory of art. According to this view, art has aesthetic value (intrinsic value depending solely upon artwork's intrinsic properties) and instrumental value (the good or bad effects of the piece on those who experience it or what the piece of art does).

But, as Shelly Kagan points out, in the majority of the cases, the traditional contrast between intrinsic value and instrumental value is mistaken.[43] X may be both instrumentally valuable and intrinsically valuable. Shaftesbury contrasts the disinterested stance toward an object with using that object for some purpose because he assumes that using the object for a purpose means to appreciate its instrumental value but not its intrinsic value. But, in some cases, there is no need to radically distinguish between appreciating something for its instrumental value from appreciating something for its intrinsic value.

We can appreciate/value something intrinsically and part of the reason that we do so lies in the fact that we appreciate that object's usefulness. An example would be helpful again: a culinary skill is the ability to cook a meal. We can appreciate/value this skill for merely instrumental reasons (cooking food as means for pleasure) but, as Kagan argues, it is not an unusual view to hold that such skill is intrinsically valuable too (that they are valuable both as an end and not merely as a means.[44] We value the culinary skill for some reasons and an important part of the reasons we appreciate it lies exactly in the fact that this skill is useful: "that is to say, it is the usefulness—the instrumental value—of culinary skill that provides part of the intrinsic value of that skill."[45]

This is so because if the culinary skill loses its instrumental value (because food is no longer needed or it does not give us pleasure anymore) then it will lose its intrinsic value too as what is a culinary skill if that skill serves nothing? Same with critical art: some art pieces seem to be merely instrumentally valuable while in fact this instrumental evaluation is part of the artwork's experience (the intrinsic evaluation). We can value an artwork for its own sake, but part of this evaluation entails the derivation of other good things from it. In Shaftesbury's terms this would not be a disinterested apprehension/evaluation because only the intrinsic evaluation is disinterested. Everything which has to do with use or purpose (instrumental value) is not disinterested.

Yet, I argue that Shaftesbury's disinterestedness is to some extent more appropriate in critical-political art's apprehension and appreciation than modern and contemporary interpretations of it but this understanding is not

completely satisfactory either. If a piece of art has an ulterior purpose and we use it to achieve that purpose it does not mean that our apprehending and our appreciation are no longer disinterested. We don't have to contrast appreciation of art as "means" (interested, instrumental) with appreciation "for its own sake" (disinterested, non-instrumental). Having an ulterior purpose in our appreciation of critical art is still a disinterested appreciation if that purpose (or purposes) is not morally bad, selfish, or motivated by immoral desires.

Our interests in apprehending critical-political art pieces are directed toward some values like social justice, compassion, rightness, care and so on. These values are both instrumental and intrinsic values. Thus usefulness is still unavoidable in disinterested aesthetic appreciation of critical art but this "utility" is not understood in economic or egoistic terms. The disinterested stance which suits the apprehending of politically concerned art involves an utilitarian agenda but this agenda has nothing to do with profit or selfish interest of any kind not only in economic terms but also in terms of prestige, public recognition, elitist belonging, awareness of the benefits of a good reputation, and self-pride. It is possible for human beings to act in a truly disinterested way without violating the rules of maximization of utility. Even though, from a strictly utilitarian economic rational point of view, disinterestedness looks irrational,[46] disinterested motivations "are all the same rational."[47] A disinterested motivation has to do with our personal commitments and concerns directed toward some intrinsic values—like care for other's condition. When this concern for other's condition is not motivated by the mechanisms of social recognition we can talk about a disinterested or intrinsically motivated stance. The commitment to appear in our own eyes and not in the eyes of others as disinterestedly motivated for pursuing the well-being of others is not an egoistic motivation but a matter of self-respect and respect for the dignity and the welfare of others.

To conclude, this chapter has advanced a possible revision of disinterestedness in a way that is appropriate for political art's aesthetic appreciation. It has defended disinterestedness in its historical understanding against several mistaken but influential interpretations of it. The chapter suggested that we should not overlook the importance of the sense in which we understand "disinterestedness." In other words, we cannot disregard the question of what kind of understanding of disinterestedness we employ. A rigorous analysis of the concept may help us in employing it correctly. The kind of disinterestedness which seems suitable for political-critical art apprehension is to some extent closer to the eighteenth-century (Shaftesbury's) understanding of it than the twentieth-century and contemporary pronouncements. Disinterestedness is not the lack or absence of all interests or "no concern for any ulterior purpose" but it is opposed to pecuniary or selfish or other ethically questionable interests only.

"Disinterestedness" is a dignifying term, denoting an ethical attitude (like disinterested in taking advantage or profit) and not a privative concept as the absence of all interests. To appreciate art disinterestedly does not mean to bracket what we are but what we want. Yet, not all of our wants or interests directed toward these wants are in opposition to disinterestedness. To appreciate disinterestedly does not mean placing the object of your appreciation outside of an utilitarian agenda ("no concern for any ulterior purpose"): just "utility" should be understood in non-economic, non-selfish terms. Something can be still useful for us outside of any advantage, economic, or symbolic. The motives of appreciation (other than those self-interested) are crucial in the disinterested mode of appreciation of political-critical art. The commitment to appear in our own eyes and not in the eyes of others as disinterestedly motivated to pursue the well-being of others, social justice, or carrying is not a selfishly motivated interest but a "disinterested interest." Thus, ethical motivations are not separated from the aesthetic ones when political art is apprehended.

## NOTES

1. John Andrew Bernstain, "Shaftesbury's Identification of the Good with the Beautiful," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 10, no. 3 (1977): 308.

2. Stolnitz claims that there are two kinds of attentions: "disinterested attention" and "interested attention." According to him, it is only the disinterested attention which underlines aesthetic perception and which makes ordinary perception aesthetic.

3. For these theorists aesthetic attitude is a necessary condition for aesthetic experience. Aesthetic attitude is an attitude we have to adopt in order to have an aesthetic experience. (That attitude consists of suspending all interests, contemplative apprehension, and psychological distance.)

4. Political-critical art is many times a transgressive, offensive, or violent art, meant to provoke a reaction. It seems to contradict the very idea of "aesthetic disinterestedness."

5. Peggy Zeglin Brand, "Disinterestedness and Political Art," *Paradoxa* 8 (November, 1998).

6. Robert McGregor holds that attention is primitive, that is, attention does not divide up into different kinds (Robert McGregor, "Art and the Aesthetic," *Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism* (Summer, 1974): 549–59).

7. Especially Jerome Stolnitz, Eliseo Vivas, Edward Bullough, Francis Coleman, and Veron Lee.

8. An intrinsic normative experience is that experience of immanent value. An immanent value cannot be used in order to achieve something else because it doesn't have exchange value. For example, the love of God is for some people an intrinsic

value pursued just for the sake of it, without expecting any recompense in exchange (like the afterlife, sanctify, etc.).

9. See Arnold Berleant and Ronald Hepburn, "An Exchange on Disinterestedness," *Contemporary Aesthetics* 1 (2003), http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=209.

10. Schopenhauer, for example, greatly admired Dutch interior paintings, but stipulated that they should be of flowers rather than food, complaining that realistic depiction of herrings and the like made him feel hungry and thereby disrupted the purity of his response—see Norman Kreitman, "The Varieties of Aesthetic Disinterestedness," *Contemporary Aesthetics* 6 (2006), http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=390.

11. Jerome Stolnitz, "On the Origins of Aesthetic Disinterestedness," in *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, eds. George Dickie and Richard J. Sclafani (New York: St Martin's Press, 1977), 607–25.

12. Ibid, 609.

13. Preben Mortensen, "Shaftesbury and the Morality of Art Appreciation," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 55, no. 4 (October, 1994): 631.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid, 635.

16. Ibid, 637.

17. Preben Mortensen, *Art in the Social Order: The Making of the Modern Concept of Art* (Albany: State University of New York, 1997), 109.

18. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Les Presses du Reel, 1998).

19. Relational art is that art which takes as its point of departure the whole of human relations and social contexts. Usually it is a collaborative art practice in the sense that the art piece is the result of the interaction between artist and public.

20. Jerome Stolnitz, "On the Origins of Aesthetic Disinterestedness," in *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, eds. George Dickie and Richard J. Sclafani (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977).

21. Robert L. Solso, *Cognition and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1994), 1.

22. Ibid, 4.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid, 7.

25. Arthur Danto insists that we cannot make sense of the work itself without at least partially knowing the artistic vocabulary of the artist, the issues the piece talks about and so on (Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983)).

26. Diane Collinson, "Aesthetic Experience," in *Philosophical Aesthetics*, ed. Oswald Hanfling (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), 132.

27. For more on disinterestedness see Emily Brady, "Don't Eat the Daisies: Disinterestedness and Situated Aesthetics," *Environmental Values* 7 (1998): 97–114.

28. Peggy Zeglin Brand, "Disinterestedness and Political Art," *Paradoxa* 8 (November, 1998).

29. Drawing on Wittgenstein's aspect seeing: namely, using the duck-rabbit drawing.

30. Brand is a feminist aesthetician who does not reject disinterestedness from aesthetic appreciation of art. Unlike Brand, some other feminist aestheticians question the ideal of disinterested appreciation of art and nature. For example, Hilde Hein posits: "the concepts we reject are not just passé or irrelevant to feminism but are deeply implicated with a system of gender theory that is dysfunctional and repressive of women. The doctrine of disinterestedness is a case in point" (Hilde Hein, "Refining Feminist Theory. Lessons from Aesthetics," *Hypatia* (1993): 10).

31. Actually, this is not the only critical point this piece intends to make. Unlike political-propaganda art, critical-political art is politically polyvalent. The critical points can be considered to be the refusal of hegemonic cannon of beauty, the critique of medium specificity and purity (Orlan is combining video art with performance, happening, etc.), and the critique of the male gaze. There is no single criticism.

32. Kieran Cashell makes a similar observation: "there is a subtle but not an imperceptible shift in her analysis from a description of a situation in contemporary art practice to the prescription of how we ought to experience such situation" (Kieran Cashell, *Aftershock: The Ethics of Contemporary Transgressive Art* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2009), 10).

33. Marcia Muelder Eaton, *Merit, Aesthetic and Ethical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 62.

34. Robert McGregor, "Art and the Aesthetic," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 32, no. 4 (1974): 551.

35. John Andrew Bernstain, "Shaftesbury's Identification of the Good with the Beautiful," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 10, no. 3 (1977): 309.

36. Motivation is understood as the mental process which sustains goal directed behaviors. There are many types of motivations: social, cognitive, emotional, and psychological but I will not go into that here.

37. For Badiou, both "event" and "truth" are used as technical terms. An "event" is a singular occurrence "which compels us to decide to adopt a new way of being" (Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay of the Understanding of Evil* (London: Verso, 2001), 41). He gives examples of this kind of events which compel us to invent a new way of being: political, scientific and artistic revolutions, religious transformations, and so on (the French Revolution, the work of Galileo in physics and Schonberg in music). "Truth" does not designate some property of a proposition that could be tested scientifically (like "The Water is $H_2O$," "An hour has sixty minutes" or "the cat is on the mat") but the exemplary life as fidelity to an event which makes us new, better beings. A truth is sparked by an event and it is more like a subjective epiphany (Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay of the Understanding of Evil* (London: Verso, 2001)).

38. Annette Rubinstein, "Disinterestedness as Ideal and as Technique," *The Journal of Philosophy* 28, no. 17 (1931): 462.

39. "Martyrdom, one might think, is an infrequent occurrence, but the very fact that it is possible, even if rare, shows that self-preservation and its interests cannot be the whole story about human beings, and that disinterested interests exist" (Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London: Verso, 2001), 46–8).

40. For some ethical theorists, value is contingent upon being awarded to an object by a valuer.

41. See Arnold Berleant and Ronald Hepburn, "An Exchange on Disinterestedness," *Contemporary Aesthetics* 1 (2003), http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=209.

42. The interests in serving God can be very different: a good place in the afterlife, achieving a saint's aura during the life time or after, being afraid of God's punishments if you don't serve him, and so on.

43. Shelly Kagan, "Rethinking Intrinsic Value," *The Journal of Ethics* 2, no. 4 (1998): 277.

44. Ibid, 284.

45. Ibid, 285.

46. This is so because in a rational choice theory understanding, the rational subject will always strive to maximize profit. In this view, every action we take or we don't take is motivated by maximization of utility.

47. For a convincing argument regarding the rationality of the disinterested motivations, see Jon Elster, *Le désintéressement. Traité critique de l'hommeéconomique* (Paris: Seuil, 2009).

## *Chapter 4*

# Beauty and Political Art

We often fail to make clear what we mean by "beauty," even if we use it quite frequently, in all kinds of occasions, related to art or not.[1] Something slippery is happening with "beauty" when we try to define it, something which comes close to the old Augustinian apothegm regarding time: "If you do not ask me what time is, I know it; if you ask me, I do not know."[2] Beauty is to some degree like that, even if philosophers, artists, and art theorists have struggled to capture it with a definition. There is no agreement on what beauty is, where beauty lies, or if we can define it at all. We face the inability to find a quality in all art pieces we find beautiful that is the same in each of them. It has been a favorite issue for philosophers to find the common ground or "essence" which the word beauty denotes, but their effort has not solved the problem.

The fact that the meaning of words change over time is beyond doubt. The meaning of the word "beauty" may vary as well, creating difficulties when we try to explain it. Still, at least we can agree that "beauty" is an inherently evaluative concept. When we appreciate that something has beauty we implicitly accept that X is a source of "positive" aesthetic value or "positive" aesthetic appreciation. In the history of philosophical aesthetics, there are many theories and definitions of beauty. Despite differences, most of these theories connect the experience of the beautiful with a certain type of pleasure and enjoyment. Starting with "the aesthetic era," in the eighteenth century, beauty is taken to be a propensity in some objects to awake in viewers a distinctive type of unmediated pleasure—aesthetic pleasure. This ability to occasion pleasure is the only purpose (or function) of beauty.

Many contemporary political artists deliberately produce an art as unappealing to the senses as possible and their attitude could be called *kalliphobia* (in English, beauty phobia). In doing this, they hope to distance their art both from the mainstream art world and from the art market.[3] Thus, the question is

to what extent is the category of "beauty"—as commonly understood—still valid and workable for political-critical art? Since the end of the 1960s—and with Duchamp earlier—we have witnessed a turn away from beauty in contemporary art and theory. Under the influential strands of Conceptualist's rethinking of aesthetics, Marxist's critiques of aesthetics and Postmodern art theory and criticism, beauty was avoided on the grounds of a series of political complains against it. Beauty's avoidance and critique surfaced from a range of perspectives: from feminist "interrogations of woman as sign" in representations of female beauty (Griselda Pollock) to the analysis of beauty as skewed by late capitalism (Frederic Jameson) and the questioning of beauty in terms of the critical values of the avant-garde (John Roberts)."[4]

The movement of conceptual art (1968–90) emphasized the idea, the concept of the piece of art over its aesthetic appeal and value. Thus, Conceptualism should be also understood as a critique against the commodity status of art. This critique had a momentous effect on the attitude toward beauty: to produce and pursue beauty became equated with superficial and bourgeois values.[5] In line with these views, critical Pakistani artist Rasheed Araeen also contests beauty on the grounds that beauty has been colonized by the West and imposed on the East.[6] Conceptual artists—from Marcel Duchamp to Robert Smithson—turn against beauty in their attempt to produce an art about ideas, politics, and the sublime. By the same token, at the theoretical level, the philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard draws on the concept of the sublime (as opposite of the beautiful) to describe his position vis-à-vis of what political art should occasion in attendants.[7] The history of the replacement of beauty by the sublime in contemporary political art and theory is also documented by Hal Foster[8] and Wendy Steiner[9] and analyzed by Elaine Scarry.[10]

However, even if beauty in critical art's case seems to be a difficult one and not easily recognizable, this does not mean that it is absent or is at odds with critical engagement (as many politically engaged artists and critical theorists claim). Critical art does not endeavor to conform to a paradigmatic concept of beauty because this art typically exhibits complex beauties, "odd beauties," and obscure beauties which do not occasion an immediate pleasure and, even if, in some cases they occasion an immediate pleasure, this does not mean that pleasure nullifies critical engagement. The philosopher Bernard Bosanquet—in "Three Lessons on Aesthetics"—identifies two classes of things that are beautiful: easy beauty, which is pleasant to almost everyone: things that yield straightforward pleasure and difficult beauty which requires from the spectator effort and concentration.

Critical-political art is usually an edgy, disobedient art and its beauty is not immediately perceivable. It usually fits Bosanquet's "difficult beauty" because it is not the kind of beauty which one just sees. On the contrary, the beautiful in critical art is rendered by cognitive and ethical concerns. What we

know about an object and our beliefs and moral values always determine our opinion and our perception about what is beautiful and what is not beautiful. In this sense, we could say that critical art's beauty is a "difficult" beauty and not easily recognizable because we arrive at it after a process of deliberation.

In line with this, this chapter will demonstrate that beauty should not be restricted to an immediate type of pleasure if we want to account for its social and political relevance. Nevertheless, beauty can work politically and critically if we consider it not only as a specific kind of aesthetic pleasure. Yet, in order to act critically and politically, beauty needs in the first place to be revisited and reevaluated. Following Nehamas, this chapter claims that not everything that looks beautiful is actually beautiful.[11] Nor does every beautiful thing look good at first sight.[12] I hope to liberate beauty from the narrow cage of aesthetic appearance and immediacy which still rules the day in aesthetic theory and to show that beauty and critical art are not at odds.

Many contemporary political artists, critical theorists, and radical feminists posit that beauty is at odds with critical awareness and consequently, there is no place for beauty in critical-political art. These theorists have strong reasons to argue that beauty is at odds with critical awareness since the most well-known aesthetic theories of beauty deal exclusively with a narrow and purist understanding of it. However, beauty is not in fact at odds with critical-political awareness but only the narrow aesthetic views of beauty are. These narrow views have become the paradigmatic understanding of beauty in aesthetic theory of art and nature. But, as Bosanquet posits, these narrow understandings of beauty refer to only the existence of "easy beauty" (things that generate straightforward pleasure, which are pleasant to almost everyone like roses, harmonious patterns or green fields). The fact that this narrow understanding of beauty is taken for granted by many does not mean that beauty is exclusively what these theories claim it to be.

## NARROW AESTHETIC THEORIES OF BEAUTY

What is the narrow view of beauty? The narrow view of beauty typically takes beauty to be a propensity in some objects to occasion in viewers a certain kind of pleasure (immediate, disinterested, etc.). Further, not all properties of art objects can occasion this special kind of pleasure, but only immediately perceivable properties such as (shapes, colors, or sounds). This view is supported by empiricist philosophers such as John Locke and Edmund Burke and in some insights of Immanuel Kant on "free beauty." Something is considered beautiful if it is pleasant at sight immediately and disinterestedly without taking into consideration the function/purpose or meaning of a beautiful thing.

According to this view, we do not have to understand or reason of why something is beautiful but to just "sense" that it is. The big problem is that, in the narrow aesthetic theory, beauty is attributed only to those perceptual properties of objects and not to ideas, thoughts, customs, speeches, mathematical objects and proofs, behaviors, or stories. In other words, a shape can be elegant or symmetrical, a color or a sound can be delicate and we are allowed to say that forms, colors, or sounds have aesthetic value and beauty but it is not appropriate to claim that ideas are elegant, or thoughts or discourses are beautiful in an aesthetic sense. The narrow view of beauty is dependent on sensual appearance. This narrow theory of beauty has several points which need opposing.

As already mentioned, this section takes issue with those narrow approaches from traditional and contemporary aesthetics which mistakenly identify the "locus" of beauty in unmediated pleasure, and disinterested experiences; it also takes issue with the view that beauty and function are mutually exclusive; beauty has no other purpose/function beside the pleasure it gives when contemplated for its own sake.[13]

Contemporary aestheticians contend that the concept of beauty is a difficult and vague concept. That is the reason why it seldom receives attention. When it receives attention, either beauty is completely rejected from art's appreciation on the grounds that art can be good art without being beautiful (in Danto's spirit), or the "official," narrow understandings of beauty are taken for granted. In the history of Western aesthetics there are many theories of beauty; it would be difficult and pointless to list them all here. Yet, I will take into account at least two approaches very popular among philosophers of art and aestheticians: the objectivist view of beauty and the subjectivist view.

Let's first elaborate on the objectivist view of beauty: Many theorists and philosophers define beauty as a property of an object that causes in perceivers a pleasurable experience; of course, perceivers should be suitable persons in the sense that they must possess "delicacy of taste." But the question is what exact property from the object produces this special kind of pleasure in viewers? There are various philosophical answers, but one of the most common interpretations has been that "balance," "proportion," and "symmetry" are the kind of properties in art objects which produce a pleasant experience in viewers.[14] If Ernst Gombrich is right, this view of beauty "was so dominant in the sixteenth century that artists introduced pattern books, offering pictorial elements that artists could copy and combine with each other to create beauty."[15]

The subjectivist view of beauty ("*de gustibus non estdisputandum*" or "beauty is in the eyes of the beholder") does not emphasize certain properties from objects—like balance, proportion, contrast, or clarity—which produce a certain kind of pleasure in perceiving subjects. This approach stresses that *anything* can be beautiful if it pleases the senses.[16] The two approaches

(objectivist and subjectivist) still have something in common: beauty is related in both approaches to the feeling of immediate pleasure, even if this feeling is differently occasioned in each approach. It seems that beauty is typically understood as that which gives us pleasure. Now the question is: What kind of pleasure? The kind of pleasure involved in beauty is not the pleasure we take in finding solutions to puzzles, problems, or in volunteering for the Red Cross. It is an "immediate pleasure" void of any reasoning or utility: we just like X for the way it looks to our senses; we don't feel pleasure in apprehending what X does, means, suggests, enforces, or symbolizes.

If we follow this philosophical aesthetic tradition, we can suggest that the most popular definition of beauty as immediate pleasure without any reasoning owes much to Thomas of Aquinas ("*quod visum placet*"). Yet, as argued in what follows, "what gives pleasure at sight" is not always beautiful and, vice versa, what does not give pleasure at sight is not always ugly. When we talk about something which gives us immediate pleasure we rather talk about prettiness, pleasantness, loveliness than about beauty per se. Ruth Lorand was right to repeatedly claim that "beauty is not always nice and 'soothing'; it can generate pain and restlessness, as well as great joy."[17] Keep in mind that beauty is an evaluative concept connoting a positive aesthetic quality.[18]

Sometimes—especially in traditional aesthetics—beauty used to refer to all positive aesthetic qualities (unified, delicate, balanced, symmetrical, elegant, dainty, graceful, etc.). Appreciating a thing as beautiful typically expresses a good-making quality. The appreciation that X is beautiful means that X is valuable for its beauty: then beauty is also an aesthetic value, not only an aesthetic quality. Still, even if in this conception, beauty is understood as a "too wide" concept, referring to all positive aesthetic qualities mentioned above, it still remains a narrow view of beauty. What makes it narrow? The beauty of an object depends exclusively on its perceptual appearance. Unified, delicate, balanced, symmetrical, elegant, graceful—all these have to do with perceptual appearance because all these properties are sensed properties.

The narrow understanding of beauty which emphasizes only the perceivable properties and the pleasure they occasion in us disregards the aesthetic value of an artwork as a whole. An artwork typically has aesthetic value as a whole. We cannot consider only certain perceivable properties (form), or only the subject matter when appreciating aesthetically a piece of art. Of course that we can consider the value of the perceivable properties and the value of the subject matter separately but we should not confuse the aesthetic values of the work as a whole with the value of its constituent parts. As Lorand suggests,

> The beauty of the components and the beauty of the work as a whole do not directly determine each other. This crucial distinction has been disregarded by contemporary aestheticians (. . .) the fact that a work distorts conventional

beauty images and presents "ugly" images does not make the work itself ugly, just as a work that portrays beautiful objects is not necessarily beautiful.[19]

Let's move now to another narrow approach of beauty: Kant's "disinterestedness." More than others, Kant's concept of "purposiveness without purpose" gave a new turn to the theory of beauty. The modern aesthetician, following rightly or wrongly Kant's aesthetics wants to connect the idea of beauty to a quality of the visual or auditory appearance of an object, namely, its capacity to provide certain kinds of "pleasant perceptual experiences." In very general lines the modernist aesthetics holds that either the concept of beauty is appropriately used when it is advanced in connection with the so-called aesthetic experience of the form/surface of an object, or the concept of "beauty" is ambiguously or incorrectly used on other, non-aesthetic occasions (a beautiful fight for human rights, a beautiful roast pork, a beautiful demonstration in mathematics, a beautiful solution for diminishing the starvation). In other words, the design of a forest—in, let's say, a painting—is beautiful in aesthetic sense, while a demonstration in mathematics or a behavior cannot be beautiful in aesthetic sense, because beauty has to do only with immediately perceiving a surface of an object and feeling an immediate pleasure.

In traditional aesthetic terms, beauty is taken to be a "disinterested" apprehension of the directly perceivable properties of objects—like proportion, balance, symmetry, rhythm—which gives us a special sort of pleasure, namely the aesthetic pleasure. This pleasure is not just a pleasure among other pleasures, but a disinterested one, that "just happens to us." In its pure (free), Kantian understanding, beauty is "conceptless" and "useless"; it is that which without a concept pleases universally (conclusion from the second moment in the definition of the beautiful).[20]

Kant claims, "The beautiful is that which, apart from concepts, is represented as the object of universal delight" (in the "Third Critique," paragraph 6). This definition is deduced by him simply from the previous definition of beauty as an object of delight apart from any interest. He wants to totally eliminate interest from judgments of taste because in his view interest implies desire, want, prejudice, pre-understanding and all these are "impure" and corrupt the contemplation of pure beauty, which should be disinterested.

This requirement of complete disinterestedness raises the demand of universality for all men and women. But absolute disinterestedness is not possible at all, as I have argued in the previous chapter. So, on which grounds is he deducing universality? First, even if we struggle to suspend all our interests nothing guarantees us that we can really eliminate all of them, even those we do not know about. Second, our struggle to achieve disinterestedness, in order to fulfill the purist aesthetic imperatives, is to some extent a sort of interest, namely the interest to achieve the state of disinterestedness.

However, Kant seems to endorse the fundamental disinterestedness in aesthetic pleasure of free beauty but not in dependent beauty, which in Kant's aesthetic theory characterizes only art. Moreover, he seems to admit that beauty in art engages our interests. It does so differently in nature and art, and the comparison between natural beauty and artistic beauty opens up this theoretical problem. He speaks about a "disinterested pleasure" and not of our disinterest in judging the beautiful (as he is often wrongly understood). From the doctrine of the "ideal beauty" in which morality is involved he derives an advantage of natural beauty over artistic beauty: in a first instance he favors natural beauty over art's beauty. But, even the interest in natural beauty is moral. However, Kant's followers do not make any distinction at all. For them beauty in art disengages any interest (as the aesthetic attitude theorists argue).

Finally, there is another narrow account of beauty I would like to oppose: according to it, beauty has no function apart from that of triggering aesthetic pleasure. Starting with the eighteenth century, many rejected the link between beauty and utility/functionality in art appreciation.[21] Beauty and function are seen as mutually exclusive. A beautiful object is that object which has no use or function. In Augustine's view the male nipple has pure beauty because it serves no function. It is beautiful *because* it is functionless.

By the same token, beauty in art is thought to have no function; it has to be contemplated and valued for its own sake only. Theophile Gautier (the first theorist of art for art's sake doctrine) used to claim that "nothing is really beautiful unless it is useless; everything useful is ugly, for it expresses a need, and the needs of man are ignoble and disgusting [. . . .] The most useful place in a house is the lavatory."[22] This dismissal of the connection between function and beauty had been almost unconceivable in the pre-aesthetic era.[23] Jonathan L. Friedman posits that "listening to music for pleasure was an unknown concept in the ancient world."[24] Music has been used in certain contexts (e.g., religious, public rituals, or festivities) to perform certain functions. Outside these occasions, little attention has been given to listening to music merely for pleasure.

Starting with the aesthetic era, a powerful view developed in post-Enlightenment Western Culture: "only fine art qualifies as aesthetic arts and have aesthetic value." Fine arts are those nonfunctional arts appreciated for their own sake (arts meant just to be beautiful and to occasion aesthetic pleasure). These arts are not made to serve art extrinsic functions, as functional arts are (religious art serves the function of glorifying God; architecture serves the primary function of offering shelter; political art serves a critical function; textile arts serve to construct practical and decorative objects, etc.). Functional arts are not regarded in traditional aesthetics as properly aesthetic precisely because they serve a practical, art-extrinsic function. In short, "uselessness" started to become central to the modern concept of art and beauty.

Thus, beauty in aesthetic era is paradigmatically understood as formal beauty of an item, which is the beauty of a thing merely in virtue of how this thing appears to our senses directly without regard to what kind of thing it is or what it does (purpose or function). Functional arts (religious art, political art, architecture, crafts, etc.) are regarded in this purist (narrow) aesthetics as impure arts or at best second-class arts, lacking aesthetic value. Then, several contemporary aestheticians are right to reject this narrow, nonfunctional theory of beauty by arguing that this tension between beauty and function is "not real."[25] Beauty is an aesthetic value—a positive aesthetic evaluation—which can be related to function in the sense that we can judge a functional object as beautiful when its aesthetic properties contribute to the fulfillment of the function of that object. For example, a tragedy is beautiful in a functional way if its aesthetic properties appear to fulfill the function of a tragedy.

Even if some aesthetic properties are directly perceivable (like elegance, simplicity) and they seem beautiful to us this does not mean that their beauty is always apprehended apart from utility as modernist aesthetic requires. Actually it may be the case that in some instances there is a conjunction between simplicity/elegance and utility in considering something beautiful. Like in the case of a beautiful discourse: a discourse can be functionally beautiful. It may have some aesthetic qualities—let's say simplicity, strength—which make it approachable, convincing, and empowering. But we cannot appreciate that the discourse is beautiful just because it is simple and we like it. By the same token, the function of a discourse is to convince but this alone does not make it beautiful, even if it is really convincing, but the discourse is beautiful both through the manner in which it fulfills its function (to convince) and as a result of fulfilling its function in that way (with simplicity and strength).

Still, conceding that beauty and function are not mutually exclusive does not mean that every object's functional effectiveness has aesthetic value and is functionally beautiful; there is just one kind of beauty (beauty in virtue of a function); or beauty is to be explained solely in terms of function or utility. But, even if not all beauty is functional (although, in art's case, the majority is) we have no reasons to ignore the cases in which beauty is functional. In the aesthetic appreciation of beauty (a cognitively rich appreciation, of course), it is relevant not only the object's form or shape but also considerations about its function or purpose.

## THE DELIBERATE AVOIDANCE OF BEAUTY IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL ART

This section demonstrates (against the common view held by contemporary political artists and theorists) that beauty is not at odds with critical-political

engagement. It responds to those contemporary political artists' and theorists' claim that beauty is at odds with the struggle for social justice. As already mentioned, their distrust is a direct consequence of the way in which beauty has been conceived in the mainstream aesthetic theory of art. At the same time, I want to stress that putting beauty back on the agenda, as several contemporary theorists have done, is not enough for beauty's rehabilitation, unless we re-appreciate the significance of what is considered beautiful; the relationship between beauty and function and the understanding of beauty.

There is a theoretical tendency which places the concern with beauty in art in a totally different dimension than the concern for social justice. Political art is art with critical function (or purpose); art which typically does not look pleasant at sight. Beauty is then for many contemporary artists a discredited aesthetic category. They hold that political art does not need to be beautiful to be good, relevant, effective, and significant. Moreover, beauty has to be deliberately avoided in contemporary political art because beauty does not help the art piece to fulfill its critical point but, on the contrary, it may occasion the wrong kind of experience in spectators (distanced, disinterested, passive).

Yet, even if art is not and should not be necessarily beautiful, this does not mean that beauty (when it is present in art) damages somehow the art piece's impact and significance, as some theorists are inclined to suggest. In trying to deal with the issue of beauty in critical-political art and its impact for philosophical aesthetics, I have realized the predominance of two main conflicting theoretical attitudes: one considers beauty to be useless (without purpose or function), powerless, just that "which is pleasant at sight"; the other one treats beauty as quite the opposite: beauty is too powerful, a force which harms the object looked at and overwhelms our attention so much that we cannot take our eyes from it long enough to look at social injustices. Regarding political art's relation to beauty, it seems obvious that none of the above positions offer a justification for why beauty matters in critical art.

In the first case, beauty comes to mean "merely" beautiful. In other words, it occasions a certain kind of pleasure in beholders which does not help fulfilling political art's functions effectively. It is too weak to count for political art's purposes, it does not matter, it is not righteous, and it is a demoted aesthetic notion which can be anytime replaced by sublime (which is great, it moves the soul, it is righteous, etc.).

In the second case (beauty is too powerful), beauty is totally rejected. Some hold that beautiful things distract our attention from injustice, pain, moral crimes, and sufferance. Adorno famously declaimed the barbarism of "lyric" poetry after Auschwitz.[26] These considerations did not remain without consequences and beauty tends to be avoided from political art. The argument runs like this: beauty is immoral because it preoccupies our attention, distracting

it from wrong social arrangements. Danto explained his worries regarding the inappropriateness of beauty in contemporary art and the way in which beauty threats to conceal injustice, sufferance, and other social diseases.

Besides these two categories of criticism there are also other secondary critiques of beauty: Another suspicion of beauty—closely related to the "beauty is too powerful" claim—comes from feminist aesthetic theory: when we look at a beautiful object/person we actually damage the object or person by turning it into a mere object that we feel superior to (like in the case of the "male gaze" at female's beauty); Passmore further points the contention that beauty expresses the wrong social values (the bourgeois' values);[27] and Peter Benson accused beauty of being nondemocratic (it is distributed unequally among people and those who can produce it or buy it are a valued minority, a favored elite).[28] All the above diatribes have contributed to the view that beauty has no place in political-critical art production and strategies. Thus, beauty is at odds with critical-political awareness and engagement.

After noticing these contemporary critiques of beauty one could argue that there is no way to reconcile beauty and political-critical art since each of them nullifies the other. It is the aim of this chapter to suggest the contrary. Beauty does not prevent one for standing up for justice. It is also true that all these worries regarding beauty's negative impact are not necessarily chimerical. They are grounded on a certain, "official," narrow conception of beauty which still lingers on in aesthetic theory of art—in which beauty is defined as being indissolubly united with surface and appearance, with immediate perception and disinterested pleasure, totally independent ("pure" beauty) from other values, attitudes, moral judgments, and so on. If we accept this paradigm then of course that beauty will never matter for political art, and moreover it will be deliberately avoided and rejected by political artists, and they will be right to do so. Yet, we have significant reasons to consider that beauty matters for political art. The reservations and worries regarding beauty's presence in critical art depend on what we take beauty to be.

The first "critique" of beauty—according to which beauty is "too weak" or "merely beautiful" to be helpful for political art's purposes—is so obviously wrong that it does not even need too much opposing. It would be enough just to mention the concrete situation of music therapy, color therapy, and so on (so beauty is not too weak). Then, I would suggest that beauty is not "too powerful" either; it does not prevent us from seeing and condemning social injustice. When we see a beautifully depicted sufferance of a child wounded in war we are aware that beauty is inappropriate in presenting that drama but that image also reminds us of our own inappropriateness—to experience that piece in that way—and this acknowledgement of our own inappropriateness when experiencing that piece increases our awareness regarding human suffering. The compelling impact of beauty, even in miserable conditions,

rekindles our sensitivity and allows for further development of the moral insight. In this sense, it becomes political—"because we can bring about changes in our conception of beauty" by contextualizing it.[29]

The other "danger" of beauty—namely, "beholders are all powerful and persons beheld are powerless"—announced by feminist critiques is also untenable. The simple act of looking is not by any definition a bad thing. I don't see how our "looking" would damage/offend the person or the object. Elaine Scarry argued that this argument is totally faulty because it just assumes that we are incapable of generous acts of looking. She offers the example of Dante (so, a masculine gazer) staring at Beatrice in *Vita Nuova*. His contemplation of beautiful Beatrice makes him vulnerable and even weak (he is awed and humbled in front of her beauty). Dante's example is not unique. All the poets from *Dolce Stil Nuovo* have seen the woman as possessing an excessively divine beauty like "a bridge to God." This means that the viewer is "affected" by what he sees and not vice versa. On the other hand, we should rather assume a certain degree of generosity in human looking than to always suspect the presence of the power relations in terms of beholders beheld.

For contemporary political artists "beauty" is a vague, deceptive, and ultimately a futile concept (if not even an offensive one). As stated at the beginning, my intention was to offer an account of beauty that will not be at odds with critically and politically concerned art. It seems that the commonsensical way of understanding beauty in art (as immediate pleasure, disinterested pleasure, non-functionality, etc.) makes critical art a non-beautiful art. But this approach is actually unacceptable. It cannot be the case that the most remarkable and characteristic problem of aesthetics is that of beauty understood as perceiving the form alone, independent of any meaning or art-external concerns and purposes/functions. My point here is that approaching beauty in art without interests, preconceptions, or at least curiosity is not to approach an art object/situation at all. The pure form of an art object that is presented directly before us (to our senses) is never enough to account for beauty. How the object looks is not enough to appreciate it as beautiful because beauty is not that easy (as prettiness or lovingness are).

Traditionally (following mainly but not exclusively Kantian aesthetics), beauty has been defined as the agency of disinterested pleasure. According to this main approach, art is necessarily associated with something meant to be beautiful, or at least with something that we attend just in order to enjoy ourselves, but not in order to get involved with or nervous with. Political art could be, and many times is beautiful, without striving to be beautiful in the first place. In other words, political art does not struggle to be beautiful (this is not its main purpose or function) but in spite of this, many times, it is beautiful. Perhaps many contemporary aestheticians and even political artists

would discredit the idea on the simple ground that conceptually "beauty" has nothing to do with critical, social, or political art and, moreover, the very idea of avant-garde art rejects "beauty." Many contemporary voices maintain that being "too aesthetic" or "too beautiful" is a detrimental appreciation of political art. For instance, the artist Shirin Neshat expresses her critical stance both in form and content, and is politically engaged vis-à-vis both Islam and gender issues. Her art has been criticized for being too aesthetic and too beautiful to matter as political art.[30]

As already mentioned, in contemporary art practice there is a tendency which places the concern for social justice in a totally different sphere than the theoretical concern with beauty. Simply put it, if a political message is at stake beauty should disappear since beauty blocks the forcefulness of the message. Arthur Danto pronounced his indictment of engaged art stating that there is always a danger in activist art: "I can understand how the activist should wish to avoid beauty; simply because beauty induces the wrong perspective on whatever it is the activist wants something to be done about."[31]

Some theorists explicitly state that both the sublime and the political or "real" are the enemies of beauty and today's writing on beauty is deeply apolitical: "it is mostly unwilling to contemplate the legitimacy of artistic practices that take a stand and bring together the aesthetic, the cognitive, and the critical, preferring instead to value artworks that operate independently of any practical interest."[32] I entirely disagree with these claims. On the contrary, I would suggest that it is the very beauty of a political/critical art piece that makes its message powerful and empowering. The fact that so many times beauty is rejected from political art's strategies and tactics is due to a huge misunderstanding and misconception going on around the concept of beauty.

Another powerful claim is that political artists deliberately destroy or avoid beauty in their production as a sort of artistic-political statement against the official aesthetic discourse of academia, art market and so on. The main anti-beauty movement in contemporary art is based on the conviction that beauty has been one of the most important art's institutional discourses which is a sign of power and exclusion. We have reasons to accept this argument only if we endorse an understanding of "beauty" which emphasizes immediate pleasantness, purity, and "disinterestedness" (in the sense of no interest allowed, no ulterior purpose) but, in the real world of art, beauty is none of these. Many theorists follow Gertrude Stein in holding strongly that beauty has to be avoided in contemporary political art because its traces would redirect viewer's attention from social injustice. She once said that to call a work of art beautiful means that it is dead (because beautiful has come to mean "'merely' beautiful") and this dictum seems still powerful and convincing for many.[33] That is why "beauty" has never been a central aim of contemporary political art which has tended to focus on meaning and politics rather than on formal values.

Arthur Danto has described this reaction against beauty as *kalliphobia* (beauty phobia) and repeatedly argued that "beauty is in exile" and, moreover, "the discovery that something can be good art without being beautiful was one of the greatest conceptual clarifications of the twentieth century philosophy of art."[34] I have no doubts that this argument has its strength and importance especially because on its basis the very concept of "art" is enlarged considerably (making room for conceptual, ready-made, performance art in it) and non-perceptual works come into picture (since, according to Danto "X is art if it embodies a meaning").[35] At the same time, I'm totally sympathetic with Danto's great contribution to contemporary philosophy of art in what regards his arguments against the necessary link between art and beauty. Indeed, nowadays it is a merely historical view, belonging to the History of Aesthetic, that art is paradigmatically and essentially concerned with the creation of beautiful objects only.

Yet, on the other hand, there is one thing to realize that beauty is no longer a necessary quality of a work of art, and good art need not be mandatorily beautiful (which Danto did), and there is a totally different thing to posit that "beauty had disappeared not only from art, but from advanced philosophy of art."[36] This claim may be too harsh. It could be the case that beauty is a discredited philosophical notion, as Nehamas posited,[37] but what seems without doubt is the fact that beauty has never been in exile. If we observe people's reactions in front of various kinds of beautiful objects of everyday life, in front of natural beauties, mathematical proofs, and theorems, in front of the beauty of a courageous act or sacrifice and, yes, in front of the most diverse art forms and productions, we can notice that on many other levels beauty has been/is present in our lives and we have never ceased to pursue it.

I disagree instead with the narrow views according to which beauty is that which gives to our senses immediate and disinterested pleasure, and beauty has no other function or purpose, excepting the pleasure it affords. We have no reason to question beauty or to give up pursuing it, basing our denial on a narrow aesthetic theory whose recommendations convert beauty into something which expresses the wrong social/political values. It is also beyond any doubt that beauty, as it is traditionally theorized, many times serves and expresses wrong social "values"—like racism, anti-feminism—but it does not follow that beauty always does this and, as a consequence, political art should avoid it on purpose.

In the same vein, we have no reason to dismiss beauty as the postmodern, anti-aesthetic theory, and art demands[38] grounding our refutation on a narrow aesthetic theory whose requirements and cannons convert beauty and its impact on perceivers into something which expresses the immoral political values. Terry Eagelton presented convincingly in his *Ideological Aesthetics* avant-garde's choice to stay away from beauty:

> The avant-garde's response to the cognitive, ethical and aesthetic is quite unequivocal. Truth is a lie; morality stinks; beauty is shit. And of course they are absolutely right. Truth is a White House communiqué; morality is the Moral Majority; beauty is a naked woman advertising perfume. Equally, of course, they are wrong. Truth, morality and beauty are too important to be handed contemptuously over the political enemy.[39]

As we can see, the problem is not with beauty but with what "beauty" is taken to be. As Kant and Elaine Scarry rightly pointed out, the desire of beauty is inexhaustible: any other pleasure we get exhausted by (too much food, sex, good wines) but beauty is never too much. I don't deny that beauty—as it is traditionally conceived and defined—has limits as a moral arm, and Danto is right to hold that artistic beauty is thoroughly inappropriate in some art instances like the depiction of a concentration camp as beautiful or sexy. But even if these instances are not to be neglected we cannot claim that beauty is suspect and detrimental to human values, including the political ones.

I contend that all these critiques directed against the appropriateness of beauty in contemporary critical-political art are triggered by a misunderstanding of beauty in the sense that beauty is taken to be that which occasions merely sensuous pleasure, its source being identified in pleasant looking forms. It seems that contemporary political artists attempt to avoid just one kind of beauty, Kant's type of "free beauty" (unmediated pleasure, useless beauty, conceptless beauty). Curiously enough, Kant also talks about "another beauty" (dependent beauty), but this kind of beauty is less popular in both aesthetic theories of art and in common thinking about beauty.

## REVISITING THE KANTIAN THEORY OF DEPENDENT BEAUTY

Let me first sketch Kant's distinction between free beauty (*pulchritude vaga*) and dependent beauty (*pulchritude adhaerens*): "free beauty" is a beauty whose judgment is grounded in the subject's aesthetic pleasure. This judgment is "pure"—a "pure" judgment of taste based on the subject's aesthetic pleasure. Objects which are freely beautiful have no intrinsic meaning; "they represent nothing" (like in Kant's example with the designs *a la greque,* music without a theme or without words, flowers, birds).[40] In this understanding our taste for beautiful (the pleasure we take in beautiful songs without words) is a disinterested pleasure. A pure (free) judgment of beauty is based solely on the purposiveness of the form of an object. Free beauty is self-subsistent, we like it freely on its own account. In conclusion, free beauty is

independent of concerns with conceptual classification (the beauty a thing has as a thing of a certain kind) and functionality (beauty a thing has as a thing with a certain function).

"Dependent beauty"—also called by Kant as "adherent," "accessory" beauty—is a beauty which gives us intellectual pleasure. Objects which are dependently beautiful are always *about* something, represent something and have an intrinsic meaning of "what the thing has to be." The "dependent" beauty of a thing is "the beauty that it has 'as a thing with certain function.'"[41] Nick Zangwill convincingly shows the importance of understanding Kantian dependent beauty in terms of function. He holds that something has a function only if it has a history, unlike the free beauty of a thing which is independent of its function and of its history (a thing has free beauty at a time just in virtue of how it is at that time): "Many of those who discuss Kant's distinction between free and dependent beauty miss the crucial teleological dimension of the distinction. They think that dependent beauty is just a matter of subsuming a thing under a 'concept'. But the crucial thing is subsuming something under a 'concept of its function.'"[42] Later on, I will make clear what "a concept of a function" entails.

In sum, dependent beauty touches upon aesthetic ideas rather than aesthetic perceivable forms. All representational art is in this Kantian picture dependently beautiful. It is not possible to judge artistic beauty non-dependently. All judgments of art are dependent at least in the minimal sense (judgments of are judgments in the light of the concept of art). Kant explicitly states in the paragraph 48 of the third "Critique" that all artistic beauty is dependent beauty. It seems that he felt the need to distinguish between the two beauties—but why? Perhaps he realized that in some instances—in art's case—cognition cannot be eliminated from aesthetic experience. Eliminating it from the aesthetic experience of art simply means to miss art's point. All art has a meaning and a purpose in a more direct or indirect way—and political art in the most obvious way. In this case, we cannot view art as freely beautiful unless we deliberately disregard its concept and purposes.

In what follows, I argue that Kant's "dependent beauty" can adequately account for beauty in political-critical art's case and in art in general. I claim that in political art's case—and in art's case more generally—we judge an object dependently beautiful without judging it freely (purely) beautiful. Before developing this argument, let me recall that the few contemporary discussions of beauty in conjunction with politics touch mainly upon Hegel's aesthetics (since Kantian aesthetics is seen by many as too purist/formalist to do justice to beauty in critical art's case). Referring to Hegel seems a legitimate choice since he was one of the first philosophers holding that works of artistic beauty display a fusion of sensuous data with the meaning intended by the artist, including a political meaning. Arthur Danto also takes Hegel's

aesthetics as the starting point of his contentions regarding what he calls "internal beauty."

There is an enigmatic phrase in Hegel's writings on beauty, namely "beauty of art is beauty born of spirit and born again" which comes to be explained by Danto in his article "Beauty and Morality."[43] This "twice born" of artistic beauty may be understood as two intermingled instances: beauty is internal to the concept of the work in artist's mind, and beauty is then enacted in the work itself. So, first we have the idea and second the embodiment of the idea. In this way we could talk about "beauty in"—internal to the meaning, content, idea, or concept—rather than about "beauty of" (beauty that is not internal to the meaning).[44] Nevertheless, Hegel's insights on artistic beauty allow the political art theorist to deal with the issue of beauty within politically concerned and involved art, since it is obvious that beauty, as Hegel sees it, has to do more with something cognitive rather than merely sensualistic.

When we come to Kant's aesthetics, we can straightforwardly observe how political art theorists usually reject the entire Kantian aesthetic project on the grounds that the aesthetic pleasure we take in capturing beauty and critical engagement are fundamentally irreconcilable.[45] But is this so? Is this rejection of Kant's aesthetics reasonable? I will show that Kant's aesthetic understanding of "dependent beauty" is not at odds with critical-political art. Those theorists, who reject Kant's aesthetics of beauty tout court, fail to keep in mind Kant's dependent beauty or hold that dependent beauty is a subspecies of free beauty and that we can't judge an object dependently beautiful without judging it freely beautiful in the first place.

It is generally acknowledged that the modern stream of aesthetic formalism directly derives from Kant's aesthetics. This direct legacy seems a justifiable one since whatever else beauty is taken to be in Kant's Third Critique, an invariant feature remains firm: beauty is always formal. What does this mean? It means that the aesthetic judgment of beauty must concern itself with form in the object—shape, arrangement of parts, and surface—and not with the content because the latter could be connected with interest. Even a color could be infected with interest and downgraded to the status of agreeable, according to classical formalism.

However, the formalists—Clive Bell, Roger Fry, Clement Greenberg, and Jerome Stolnitz among others more or less moderate formalists in the contemporary philosophy of art—seem to be more Kantian than Kant himself. They reject the relevance of cognitive and moral judgments in art appreciation and don't distinguish between beauty in art and natural beauty. Unlike them, Kant acknowledges this distinction between natural beauty and art's beauty and reserves the "free beauty" (pure beauty) only for the aesthetic appreciation of beautiful things in nature (with several exceptions like the designs *a la grecque* and music without a theme or without words). He also

introduces "dependent beauty" as a legitimate kind of beauty which can be encountered in art only.

When he refers to free or pure beauty he always points to natural, pure beauty and not to art (his well-known examples are: flowers (especially roses), birds (the parrot, the bird of paradise, and the hummingbird) and a lot of crustaceans in the ocean. This does not mean that the whole Kantian philosophy of art is identical with his theory of beauty even if a consequence of this theory, which became popular later on, is that art had to be "by definition" beautiful or aesthetically pleasing.

Unlike the "Kantian" formalists, Kant distinguished between beauties of nature ("pure beauties") and beauties of art ("adherent beauties"), and recognized that cognitive and moral judgments can be relevant to artistic evaluations (to judging beauty in art). Even political engaged artists and theorists (e.g., Adrian Piper) would say that what Kant's aesthetic theory holds regarding the status of art—except the part concerned with "the pure judgment of beauty"—is in fact very generous.[46] From Kant's acceptance of moral and cognitive in the evaluation of art (but not of natural beauty), "we can infer exactly nothing about what sorts of objects get to be identified as art. We can have Kantian-style aesthetic experiences of all sorts of things, including agitprop political art, without violating Kantian strictures."[47]

Adrian Piper is right: Kant himself has pointed out that "all artistic beauty is dependent beauty" (see section 48 in his *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*). Beauty is conceptless and functionless for Kant only in nature. We don't need any concept of what kind of thing is the object meant to be. But with art is different. Kant says that when we encounter beauty in art "then we must first base it on a concept of what the thing is [*meant*] to be, since art always presupposes a purpose in the cause (and its causality)."[48] This shows that Kant's "aesthetics of art" differs greatly from his "aesthetics of nature." The treatment of "the aesthetic" in Kant's philosophy of art is certainly far from conclusive, but one thing is without doubt: "it is epistemological as well as political through and through. Several intellectuals . . . have been able to claim the reverse and to assert that the aesthetics of Kant is 'free from cognitive and ethical consequences,' but this is their problem not Kant's."[49] Political art could be theorized within a Kantian philosophy of beauty, as a relevant example of "dependent beauty" but not as free (pure) beauty. In order to aesthetically judge a piece of political art we need to unavoidably take into consideration its conceptual content: the ideas it embodies, its "aboutness"—which actually makes it a dependent beauty—and the teleological aspect of it (its functions). In other words, political art is dependently beautiful in the sense that a certain function of a thing and the way in which that function is fulfilled makes us grasp that thing as beautiful. Dependent beauty is not only a matter of subsuming a thing under a concept (as some interpret Kant's

aesthetic theory) but it is closely connected with properly fulfilling a function in a certain manner (just fulfilling the function would not be sufficient).

Some contemporary aestheticians claim that only the judgment of free beauty remains within the aesthetic realm, while the judgment of dependent beauty, being an impure judgment, does not. Several questions are unavoidable: Is dependent beauty a concept that is superfluous for aesthetic theory? Is dependent beauty a subspecies of free beauty? Can we judge an object dependently beautiful without judging it freely beautiful? My short answers are "no" for the first two questions and "yes" for the third one. The detailed answers will be developed in what follows.

To start with, the aesthetic judgment of dependent beauty we made need not be grounded in the first place in any judgment of free beauty and this independence still remains within the aesthetic realm. From the fact that something (political art in our case) may be dependently beautiful without being freely beautiful does not follow (as it is held by many) neither that the judgment of dependent beauty is made on non-aesthetic grounds nor that it is a non-genuine aesthetic judgment.[50]

We cannot reduce our pleasures in experiencing art to immediate/pure pleasure because there are other kinds of pleasures that count. Kant also admits that "something must be more than merely tastefully pleasant in order to please as a work of art."[51] As Gadamer puts it: "this thesis shows clearly how little a formal aesthetic of taste corresponds to Kantian idea . . . Kant's demonstration that the beautiful pleases without a concept does not gainsay the fact that only the beautiful things that speak meaningfully to us evokes our total interest."[52]

But Kant still insists in the paragraph 48 from his Third Critique that in order to judge natural beauty we need no concept of what kind of thing an object is meant to be. Even if I don't agree with this requirement and I will have more to say about this issue later on, it should be mentioned that the term "beauty" must amount to something different in art cases than in other cases, nonart cases but still aesthetic cases. We need to clearly state that natural beauty and beauties which we find in art are not experienced identically and their effects on us are quite different. In the appreciation of natural beauty, there is little connection with thought or thinking that explains its existence; whereas with art pieces the beautiful is explained by the thought that is necessary to be grasped in order to appreciate their beauty.[53]

The relationship between free and dependent beauty seems to be controversial enough, inspiring Kant's critics to react from both analytic and continental philosophical aesthetics. Some critics see the distinction totally misplaced (a mistake) in Kant's systematic philosophical aesthetics. Depending on their orientation, some hold that the privileged aesthetic position given to the free beauty is "dangerous" on the grounds that "it concentrates on aesthetics to the

point of leaving us without an adequate philosophy of art."[54] Also Gadamer argues that it

> seems impossible to do justice to art if aesthetics is founded on the 'pure judgment of taste'—unless the criterion of taste is made merely a precondition . . . Here (in Kant's paragraph 16) the standpoint of taste is so far from being a mere precondition that, rather, it claims to exhaust the nature of aesthetic judgment and protect it from being limited by 'intellectual' criteria.[55]

Other theorists, like Ruth Lorand, Nick Zangwill, or Christopher Janaway tend to stress the primacy of free beauty over the dependent beauty in the sense that "we must be able to appreciate free beauty if we are to appreciate *any* beauty."[56] There is even a more radical position stating that dependent beauty is not beauty at all. (But, nevertheless, this conception is obviously unacceptable since its consequence would be the removal from Kant's aesthetics of almost everything we would designate as works of art.)[57] Nick Zangwill argued that,

> We must be able to appreciate *free* beauty if we are to appreciate *any* beauty. The primacy claim is that without a conception of free beauty, no other beauty would be accessible to us. We can only conceive of one because we can conceive of the other. There could not be people who cared only about dependent beauty but not about free beauty. Our love of free beauty is, as it were, the ground from which our love of dependent beauty springs.[58]

Zangwill fails to provide an explanation of why the dependent beauty cannot be appreciated without any mediation of free beauty. He clearly states, "I'm not sure how to argue for the primacy thesis" but continues to argue for works of artistic merit which excel in free beauty in the first place.[59] It is not satisfactory to find out that free beauty is always prior to dependent one and we all begin to respond aesthetically only to what confronts our senses directly and immediately. Art abounds in example of works of artistic merit without excelling in free beauty. For a meaningful beauty (political art's beauty) the pleasure type of response we ascribe to free beauty is not enough. However, Kant does not claim that dependent beauty is based on free beauty. All Kant says is that dependent beauty is somehow inferior to pure/free beauty (otherwise why would he say that a church is "merely" a dependent beauty?)

Fortunately, there are theorists like Denis Dutton who acknowledges that Kant is "burdened with a contradiction" and proposes to discard the idea of free beauty. He seems to gain some support from Gadamer's considerations presented in *Truth and Method*, according to which "Kant's deepest philosophic difficulty is not with dependent, but with free beauty."[60] One might propose at this point to reconcile free beauty and dependent beauty by the

means of a sort of Wittgenstein "aspect seeing": the receiver pays attention to formal purposiveness—in the case of free beauty—and attention is switched for whatever the dependent beauty entails. It does not matter how "peaceful" and diplomatic this solution may appear, since it is totally inconsistent with the Kantian project concerning beauty in *Critique of Judgment*: "The free/dependent distinction cannot be wholly a matter of mode of attention, apprehension, or choosing a viewpoint, because this would amount to psychologizing the beautiful, which for Kant is unthinkable."[61]

We can confidently say that pure beauty (free beauty) is indeed almost "mythical." It is impossible to imagine how we could appreciate a beautiful something—no matter if it is from art or from nature—in a conceptual vacuum. It seems almost awkward to say: I don't care what X is, but it is beautiful. People are hardly heard saying after visiting an exhibition: I don't care who painted it or what it was but it was so beautiful! Or even if what I thought it was a dove turns out to be a rat, it is still beautiful! When we call something "beautiful" we normally reflect on what kind of an object X is, or possibly could be, or how it could be related to its context. There is no "mere," self-subsistent, decontextualized, presuppositionless beauty. To be able to pursue this burdensome beauty (free/pure/self-subsistent) one has to be for the first time on earth and even then, some context will matter in apprehending beauty, like the background in which she/he sees the flowers she likes.

In Dutton and Gadamer's spirit, I believe that the concept of "free beauty" is unmanageable and even unnecessary. As Dutton puts it, "In the fullness of his investigations, Kant comes to the view that such experience for a cultivated, intelligent human being is an impossible ideal . . . free beauty is ultimately lost in the infinite complexities of art's dependence on its human context."[62] The impure judgments of beauty are still aesthetic judgments. The conceptual deliberation is unavoidable when we apprehend beauty of any kind. Just to put some flesh on these theoretical bones, Yasumasa Morimura's beautiful political art would be helpful here as a clear example of conceptual and contextual beauty which cannot be apprehended as free/pure beauty at the same time. This proves that the fluctuation between free and dependent beauty is not easily possible as many Kantian commentators have thought.

Yasumasa Morimura is a Japanese appropriation artist many times labeled as the masculine/Asian version of Cindy Sherman. He borrows images from historical art (ranging from Leonardo da Vinci to Frida Kahlo to Rembrandt and Monet) and over-imposes or inserts his own face or body into them. This operation is also undergone with photographs of Hollywood's pop stars. Morimura's art is nevertheless politically loaded. It raises questions regarding gender issues, masculine-feminine identity, opposing heteronormativity, cultural identity, Western-Eastern dichotomies

and prejudices, and challenges the beauty cannons of the Western world. The artist's own body becomes a "locus" of the political. Morimura is not performing in the first place a show by the means of his impersonations—he is rather performing a task: to make you aware about the unjust distribution of success (all the stars he is impersonating are icons of the Western film industry or art history's masterpieces). The act of over-imposing his face on these pictures or paintings acquires a political significance: it confronts the viewer—especially the Western viewer—with the otherness' beauty and determines her to think more about the cannons of ideal beauty and artistic success. Had Mona Lisa been an Asian man, would we have found her still beautiful?

Morimura's impersonations are intended to be at least two things: art and instances of a critical beauty, which somehow questions the iconic metaphors of beauty. To appreciate these art pieces as "beautiful" we need to understand the concepts and ideas the artist has employed, the context (the cultural tradition, art history, the artist belonging to a specific culture), and so on. For instance, I do not find Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa beautiful, even if I struggle to attend its formal qualities following the requirements of a purist aesthetic reception. It does not strike me as beautiful either at first glance or at the second or third.

But Morimura's Mona Lisa is beautiful for me in a Kantian, dependent way and by no means could it be apprehended as freely beautiful. To apprehend it as being freely beautiful would mean to miss its point entirely. Morimura's *Mona Lisa* is beautiful precisely because of what it represents, because of what it means. What this *Mona Lisa* means is strikingly different from da Vinci's one: from the formal point of view they resemble, but they are not really indiscernible as Duchamp's *Fountain* and a regular toilet are. Morimura has just appropriated da Vinci's image but the meaning of his work is a totally different one. However, it is very plausible for some of us to find da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* non-beautiful and Morimura's beautiful. Morimura's impersonation is beautiful because it lets us know what it means, what we see (and it also lets us know from where, with what purpose, and how could we understand the author's artistic gesture).

Morimura forces da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* to become a self-portrait of the artist in drag "injecting a Western icon with the spirit of Onnagata—a Japanese Kabuki theatre's tradition of cross-dressing."[63] Apprehending the "new," Morimura's Mona Lisa is still pleasurable, but it is a different kind of pleasure, an interested one: informed by what the new portrait comes to mean and why. Morimura's *Mona Lisa* is beautiful because it is such and such. If we experience it in a conceptual vacuum—as the purist beauty requires—then we miss its point and its beauty altogether. In other words, if we see it without any conceptual content and without having a purpose of its function in

mind, it does not seem beautiful at all, not even freely beautiful. Same with Eszter Kinga Deli's piece *Crying* (35 × 10 × 5 cm, bread, wire). What the artist displays is a feminine figurine made of black bread—impersonating hunger—whose beauty rests in understanding its function as an artwork (see Figure 4.1).

What I have set forth until now was an attempt to reconsider the Kantian theory of beauty. What I intended to illustrate is that the beauty of political art can be understood by means of Kant's theory of "dependent beauty" without judging it in the first place as freely beautiful. Dependent beauty is not a subspecies of free beauty but a different kind of beauty. In other words, the spectator's intellectual pleasure in appreciating this beauty can stand alone as an aesthetic judgment of dependent beauty. There is no need for the pure judgment of taste to complement the cognitive judgment. In this case, free beauty does not have any primacy over the dependent beauty; actually I'm wondering if such a thing as free beauty really exists.

I am not sure whether Kant was so mistaken in his theorizing the beautiful—in what regards the dependent beauty. His philosophy of aesthetic judgment has been attacked many times in contemporary art theory (sometimes rightly but sometimes unjustly). Marcia Muelder Eaton talks about two senses of "beauty" entrenched in our language: contextual beauty and

**Figure 4.1 Eszter Kinga Deli, *Crying* (35×10×5 cm, bread, wire). 2012.** *Source*: Courtesy of the artist.

Kantian beauty.[64] She holds that the attributions of beauty to objects or events are mediated and contextual: "beauty is a contextual property deeply connected with factual beliefs and moral attitudes," and "the pleasure required for the judgment that something is beautiful diminishes, disappears, or even is replaced by displeasure as one's beliefs or values change."[65] For example, I used to consider X beautiful but after learning or discovering that X is dangerous or immoral, I no longer consider it beautiful, it does not give me pleasure anymore.

Eaton rightly argues that beauty is not an immediate feeling, disinterested, and unchanging. If something is beautiful, then the pleasure in seeing it is not enough to account for its beauty. Our ethical and cognitive considerations do matter in considering something beautiful. These considerations can replace the pleasure we take in admiring beauty both in nature and in arts. She uses a well-chosen example meant to undermine Kant's universalistic theory of natural beauty. As we have seen, Kant talks about "free beauty" only referring to examples from nature and not from art. Eaton invokes the purple loosestrife—an exotic, flowering plant—which for her seems so beautiful and "eye catching" while her landscape designer friend finds it ugly and repulsive (the fried has even a poster with this plant on her office door urging us to wipe it up because it endangers other plants).

With this example, Eaton wants to show that there are always conflicting perceptions of beauty (even in nature, where free beauty is supposed to rule the day) and what we consider beautiful depends on our set of beliefs, prejudices, previous knowledge, and the context—social, economic, and so on—in which we encounter that object: "and then I think again of my ecologist friend. Does she not see what I see when she looks to the purple loosestrife? Is she truly unseduced by the lush color? How, if Kant is right, does she see ugliness where I see beauty? And how, if Kant is right, do changes in my beliefs or moral assessments sometimes produce a change in my aesthetic views?"[66] I can hardly disagree with this point; indeed, it has been a mistake for aestheticians to take the purist, "free" sense of beauty (conceptless, functionless, and disinterested) as the paradigmatic aesthetic concept.

However, it is not accurate to hold that we should learn to live with this duality: contextual beauty and Kantian beauty, as Eaton suggests. When Eaton refers to Kantian beauty, she mainly touches upon that part from Kant in which the eighteenth-century philosopher discusses the "free beauty," mainly the moment of universality and disinterestedness. So what she calls "Kantian beauty" and opposes to "contextual beauty" is just an incomplete picture of the Kantian theory of beauty. Kant claims that a pure aesthetic pleasure is always "unmediated," but this is not all that he holds. An aesthetic, dependent, non-pure pleasure is still aesthetic and is still pleasurable.

## FUNCTIONAL BEAUTY: BEAUTY AND FUNCTION IN POLITICAL ART

In what follows, I will focus on functionality in relation to beauty (that is dependent beauty X has as a thing with a certain function). A traditional, conservative aesthetician would be eager to argue that political art is neither beautiful nor aesthetic art: because of its unappealing look, generally, political art does not give us immediate/aesthetic pleasure, with several exceptions, like *Guernica* by Picasso, which might give us immediate aesthetic pleasure.

Thus, the kind of pleasure political art occasions in us (if it occasions) is not a disinterested one. "Political art is a functional art." Political art's main function is to criticize hegemony and to increase awareness about the abuses of power. In doing this, political art exhibits aesthetic properties which are not beautiful because these properties just follow the realization of political art's main function/purpose. Its main function is not to provoke an aesthetic experience but to increase awareness. Then, in general, political art is not an aesthetic art. Even if in some cases (with some exceptions) political art may possess other relevant aesthetic qualities, political art lacks the most important one: beauty (the paradigmatic category of traditional aesthetics).

Up to this point, this chapter has argued that in spite of its unappealing look, political art is many times beautiful and that the aesthetic pleasure (as dependent, non-pure pleasure) in apprehending political art is still aesthetic and is still pleasurable. This means that political-critical art is dependently beautiful. Dependent beauty of a thing (according to Kant) is among other things, the beauty that it has "as a thing with certain function."

Beauty in political art's case is a form of functional beauty; it is a combination of what this art does (the proper function it fulfills) and of the way in which it fulfills that function (with daring, wit, courage, force, relevance). Daring, wit, and courage (as I have argued in chapter 2) are also aesthetic properties, non-perceptual but still aesthetic and still beautiful. We do not appreciate dependent beauty just for the sake of it or for the pleasure it occasions but for what it does and for what is meant. The fact that we don't appreciate it for what is customarily prescribed (immediacy, disinterestedness, uselessness) does not make it less aesthetic. There are various species of beauty (not only that accepted in official aesthetic theory). A beauty which is conjoined with function is still a kind of beauty and is still aesthetic.

This does not mean that all art is functional, but political-critical art certainly is. If for other arts (let's say "fine" arts as opposed to functional arts—even if I don't endorse this distinction) is difficult to identify their proper function this is not the case with political art. We identify political art as political art with respect to its function (otherwise, why call it political art?). We can appreciate/evaluate individual instances of political art and reason

how well they express (work out) their proper function. Political art is both functional and beautiful. Function does not nullify beauty. On the contrary, the fact that we know that a disharmonic feature is displayed in a piece of art with the purpose of rekindling our hearts makes that feature a beautiful one, even if it does not look so at first sight. Functionality informs (in the end) the way the object looks to us. X can look beautiful to us if we know that its function is to do something good and healthy. A horrifying face of someone suffering depicted in a movie is not pleasant to look at but looks beautiful to us once we know its purpose in that piece of art.

The fact that an aesthetic property is displayed in a certain way (even in an unappealing one) is meant to fulfill the function of political art. Once we understand that function, and the ways in which that function is achieved through those features which are displayed in the way they are displayed, we can see the work of beauty.

In the pre-aesthetic era (before the eighteenth century), in classical philosophy's tradition, beauty has been understood as fitness for a purpose/function. In classical Greek thought an object might be called beautiful (*kalos*) with reference to a purpose and non-beautiful with reference to another purpose. In this paradigm, what makes something beautiful is the fitness for purpose. A house is beautiful if it keeps warm during the winter and cold during the summer; a shoe is beautiful if the foot feels good in it, and so on. As Allan Parsons and Glen Parsons have recently documented the obscured tradition of classical thought regarding the beauty issue, we can clearly distinguish between strong and weak versions of functional beauty.

The strong version holds that beauty is fitness for function: "all things are good and beautiful in relation to those purposes for which they are well adapted, bad and ugly in relation to those for which they are ill adapted" (Xenophon in Memorabilia) and "whatever is useful we call beautiful" (Plato in Greater Hippias).[67] The weak classical version of beauty posits that fitness for function is "one beauty among the others"; though fitness it is not necessary for an object to be considered beautiful, it could be sufficient for this. In other words: if the object X is fitted for function Z, this is a sufficient (though not necessary) condition to consider X beautiful.[68] Yet, both strong and weak classical versions of functional beauty seem to me inappropriate to offer an account of functional beauty in political-critical art.

Unlike other things in this world which may not have a specific function, political-critical art has one but this does not mean that the simple achievement of its function (functions) renders it automatically beautiful. Nor does it mean that fulfillment of function alone is a sufficient condition for political art to be appreciated as beautiful. In short, functional beauty is not merely fitness to function (x is looking fit for its function) as some contemporary aestheticians claim (Glen Parsons, Allan Carlson, and Stephen Davies).

There are many things which exhibit properties which look fit for their primary function, but we cannot claim that they are beautiful solely on this ground. Not all concerns with functionality are also aesthetic concerns. But there are objects which are both clearly functional and possess beauty. Stephen Davies posits that we judge a Swiss watch as functionally more beautiful than a quartz watch even though they both fulfill the same function of time showing.[69] The Swiss one is aesthetically and functionally more beautiful because of the manner in which its properties fulfill the function of time showing. (Davies says that we consider the Swiss model functionally more beautiful because of the skill and craftsmanship that "goes into its achieving that function.") This means that merely fulfilling the function is not the only reason of why a Swiss model is functionally beautiful. Anyway, according to Davies, this idea of our reaction to beautiful Swiss watches fits Kant's dependent beauty better than Parsons and Carlson's internalist approach. Davies does not find Kant's position particularly convincing because he conceives functional beauty differently. For Parsons, Carlson, and Davies fitness for function is not a necessary condition but a sufficient one for an object to be considered as functionally beautiful. For Kant, fulfilling the function would never be sufficient for an item to be called functionally beautiful.

Knowing the function of an art piece must change the way the object looks to us. Knowledge of function affects the aesthetic appearance of the object. Not anyone agrees with that. Even starting with the eighteenth century, any possible connection between beauty and utility is seriously questioned. Burke's study *The Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) is an important piece of textual evidence. He contends that looking fit for a function is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for beauty. Looking fit is not a necessary condition for beauty since objects can appear beautiful without appearing fit—so the strong version of functional beauty is false.

The weaker version is also false for Burke: to look fit for a purpose is not even a sufficient condition for something to be considered beautiful. Here is why. He offers the famous counterexample of the pig's snout. A pig's snout is so well adapted and it looks well adapted for digging and rooting, but it cannot be considered "beautiful." There is no logical connection between beauty and looking fit. A pig may not be considered (by some people) beautiful.[70] But Alison (one of Burke's early critics) is offering a counterargument: the pig's snout may displease for its dirty appearance and smell (in other words it is not immediately beautiful or immediately pleasant at sight) but nonetheless contains a beauty, even if it is one that is obscured, in its suitability of form to function: "We fail to call pigs beautiful because they lack those varieties of beauty that strike us immediately."[71]

Political-critical art is somehow like Burke's pig. We have to look at it with a kind of awareness and not immediately to be struck by its beauty. It is not an immediate pleasure we take in its apprehension but a pleasure which arises from a reflective contemplation and deliberative thinking. It is always important in our aesthetic experience to understand the function of the object we perceive. This understanding of the function of that object will alter/change our perception of it. Fitness for function can produce a kind of aesthetic pleasure once we understand the way in which the object looks fit for the function. Now, I am aware of the fact that in this perspective of beauty we could end up with some strange-looking examples of beauty (like the pig's snout). But, on the other hand, I see nothing unacceptable about that (neither for political art nor for beauty).

An odd-looking appearance may be very supportive for the reemergence of beauty as a "critical category"—like Yanagi Miwa or Morimura's impersonations are. The beauty of this impersonation rests exactly in the political critiques of the Western idea of beauty (X is beautiful because it is critical). Morimura uses a Western image of beauty (Marilyn Monroe) just to subvert it and criticize it. In doing this he actually produces a "new" beauty, a critical beauty ("Marilyn Monroe with Asian face of the artist") with a critical function. The beauty of this impersonation does not occasion in the viewer an immediate and disinterested pleasure but on the contrary. We experience it as a beautiful piece of art for the function (political-critical) it performs. Then, beauty is neither conceptless or immediately pleasant at sight nor separated by functionality.

Beside the critical function of beauty within political art, I argue for the political relevance of some other functions of beauty, namely healing, inspiring generosity, allowing sentiment and emotion to express (perhaps even to bring forth tears), and a rhetorical function as well. Unlike the commonsensical understanding of beauty in traditional aesthetic theory as distanced, useless, immediately eye catching and pleasing at sight, contextually and conceptually informed beauty is purposeful and its impacts are detected in our responses to it. Beauty is always meaningful and only understood as meaningfulness does matter in political art pieces. As Marcia Eaton has pointed out, "If we make beauty pure it stops mattering."[72]

Political art is beautiful for what it does, for how it acts and for the reasons it acts how it acts. For example, several contemporary artists recycle plastic bottles from the ocean or from New York streets and turn them into artistry, even in beautiful forms.[73] The beauty of these pieces lies not necessarily in the objects themselves or in the way these objects are arranged and displayed to meet spectators' eyes, but also mostly in our reflection about those objects. The fact that we know what they are made from, for what reason they are displayed as they are displayed, and with what purpose renders them beautiful

and not the mere appearance of them or the immediate pleasure they occasion in our senses. We know what the function of these artistic forms is and the fact that we know their function renders them beautiful to us. They are "dependently" beautiful things that are beautiful as things with certain functions. Their functions are to express certain ideas of social or environmental justice. Beauty of an idea always has consequences in our lives in a way in which the beauty of the mere appearance has not.

As Kathleen Higgins suggests, beauty may exactly serve the goals from which it seems to distract by creating an indispensable mental awareness which is unavoidable for political-critical art.[74] Even in the case in which the art object of spatial and perceptual appearance is replaced by the work of art as analytic proposition (via Conceptual Art), the beauty of the concept is still in place and we still find the idea beautiful if we have reasons enough to find it so. At the same time, the conceptual art piece is political and beautiful because ideas do have aesthetic qualities and value exactly like some nonart objects have. This does not mean that these ideas are universally beautiful. Some people's beautiful art is for others just plain vandalism (as in the case of political graffiti). Elaine Scarry wants to connect beauty with symmetry and with distributive justice (in loving beauty we love symmetry, and in loving symmetry we love justice which consists in the "symmetry of everyone's relation to one another"). But this is not accurate because "what counts as symmetry in aesthetics is constantly changing and secondly, if the symmetry varies, then the symmetry that pleases me in a beautiful object may represent an oppressive arrangement to you."[75]

Politics becomes beauty's adversary. It seems right to consider this as long as beauty is envisaged as symmetry, surface, shared values which defend and promote the reproduction of subject consumers conditioned by the normative inclusions and exclusions. As Nehamas puts it, "the reason we cannot answer the question why is beauty valuable is that it is a bad question, forced upon us because we take beauty to be a distinct feature of things, something like symmetry or grace: How can we love a feature that often characterizes objects that serve oppression or falsehood?"[76]

It cannot be the case that beauty's main function is to powerfully and superficially attract in the detriment of its relevance or purposiveness. How beauty looks is less noteworthy in comparison with what beauty does and means. Political art usually exhibits difficult beauties, queer beauties, and obscure beauties which, nevertheless, do not seem to be pleasant at first sight. But all these strange-looking beauties comport themselves like a reminder for tolerance, acceptance, and understanding. Sometimes their purpose/function is to heal a wounded consciousness, to quicken the viewer's mind or to repair injustices. Something truly beautiful could be seen in many and, sometimes, even conflicting ways, but not as just a cataleptic pleasure. Beauty is often

not easy to recognize at the first glance needing to pay a closer reflection and deliberation. Works that don't look beautiful may turn out to be beautiful once we understand *why* we appreciate them. My suggestion is that beauty is not "useless" and "merely pleasant to look at" but can be political and critical through and through.

Beauty is not meant for being merely looked at and be pleased because beauty can change something in the world if it changes something in the mind of the beholder. Beauty is not at odds with critical awareness but on the contrary, it could be one of its legitimate expressions if we understand beauty differently. In general lines, beauty is that which occasions an evaluative and worthwhile experience in virtue of the way something looks, sounds, functions, or is configured. There are many kinds of beauty and it would be a mistake to conceive that there is a single, peculiar quality which all kinds of beauty have in common (like unity, symmetry, simplicity, and whatever else aestheticians have pointed out over the years). If we love something we will find that something beautiful in spite of its unpleasant look because beauty always emerges from this kind of interaction between a person and an object. This does not necessarily mean that beauty is a subjective impression. Bad things are not usually lovable. I don't know if aesthetics and ethics are one as some contemporaries, following Wittgenstein, posit, but perhaps aesthetic values and ethical values are parts of the same approach without pretending that they are in harmony with each other or that they are always compatible. Beauty's pursue may not be much different from acquisition of virtue.

## NOTES

1. This chapter is derived, in part, from my article "Beauty and Critical Art: Is Beauty at Odds with Critical-Political Engagement?" published in *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 7, 2015, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.3402/jac.v7.27720. The author would like to thank *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* for permission to reuse some fragments of the article.

2. Aurelius Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1992).

3. Max Ernst used to claim that my art is "not meant to attract, but to make people scream" (see Arthur Danto, *Unnatural Wonders: Essays from the Gap between Art and Life, Unnatural Wonders: Essays from the Gap between Art and Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005)). The historical avant-garde has opened up a conceptual gap between art and beauty into which other aesthetic qualities might enter.

4. Dave Beech, *Beauty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 13.

5. For anti-beauty positions see: Arthur Danto's "Beauty and Morality," in *Uncontrollable Beauty*, eds. Bill Beckley and David Shapiro (New York: Allworth Press, 1998), 25–38. Danto claims that postmodern art theory (of the 1990s) privileges

a certain kind of "political" art (accusatory, oppositional). In this framework, beauty was an inappropriate response to a disturbing social reality because beauty was regarded as a sort of consolation. Yet, as Danto points out "it is not art's business to console if beauty is perceived as consolatory, then it is morally inconsistent with the indignation appropriate to an accusatory art" (Danto, "Beauty and Morality," 34). An anti-beauty stance is also detailed by feminist aestheticians Peggy Zeglin Brand and Wendy Steiner. Peggy Zeglin Brand makes several political complains against beauty by arguing that "since antiquity, gender played a significant role in discussions of beauty with beauty traditionally associated with the body, the 'frivolous' concern with appearances, and sentimentality, denigrated terms which in turn were considered the province of the feminine" (Peggy Zeglin "Brand, Symposium: Beauty Matters," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (1999): 3).

6. Dave Beech, *Beauty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 12.

7. Lyotard places the aesthetics of the sublime against those of the beautiful in an attempt to escape the capitalist aesthetic of the beautiful, envisaging the sublime as a negation of the consensual aesthetics of the beautiful. See Jean Francois Lyotard, "After the Sublime: The State of Aesthetics," in *The States of Theory: History, Art and Critical Discourse*, ed. David Carroll (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

8. Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993).

9. Wendy Steiner, *Venus in Exile: The Rejection of Beauty in 20th Century Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

10. Scarry posits that "the sublime (the aesthetic of power) rejects beauty on the grounds that it is diminutive, dismissible, and not powerful enough. The political rejects beauty on the grounds that it is too powerful, a power expressed both in its ability to visit harm on objects looked at, and also in its ability to so overwhelm our attention that we cannot free our eyes from it long enough to look at injustice. Berated for its power, beauty is simultaneously belittled for its powerlessness" (Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 3).

11. Not always a thing that looks good and "beautiful" at first sight is in fact truly beautiful. A mushroom, for instance, may look good and beautiful but may be poisonous. A torture device (like the lead sprinkler) looks beautiful at first sight reminding a holly water sprinkler, but once we know its functions and purpose it does not strike us as beautiful anymore.

12. In this journey I follow Alexander Nehamas, "The Return of the Beautiful: Morality, Pleasure, and the Value of Uncertainty," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58, no. 4 (Fall, 2000): 393–403.

13. Just to give an example of a narrow theory of beauty, Edmund Burke used to claim that beauty "strike(s) us without any reference to use, and even when no use at all can be discerned" (see Edmund Burke, *The Works of Edmund Burke: With a Memoir* (New York: George Dearborn Publisher, 1836), 75).

14. Other beauty-making properties are contrast, clarity, complexity, and so on.

15. Rolf Reber, Norbert Schwarz, and Piotr Winkelman, "Processing Fluency and Aesthetic Pleasure: Is Beauty in the Perceiver's Processing Experience?" *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 8, no. 4 (2004): 364.

16. Rolf Reber, Norbert Schwarz, and Piotr Winkelman, "Processing Fluency and Aesthetic Pleasure: Is Beauty in the Perceiver's Processing Experience?" 364.

17. Ruth Lorand, "In Defence of Beauty," *Aesthetics Online*, http://www.aesthetics-online.org/articles/index.php?articles_id=34.

18. Goodman claims that there are two important ways to understand the word "beauty": beauty as an inclusive notion that is equivalent to the aesthetic value, and beauty as aesthetic praise (see Nelson Goodman, *Language of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976)).

19. Ruth Lorand, "In Defence of Beauty," *Aesthetics Online,* http://www.aesthetics-online.org/articles/index.php?articles_id=34.

20. According to Kant, there are four "moments" in the judgment of beauty: disinterestedness, universal pleasure, detachment from the concept, and beauty speaking to common sense (Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987)).

21. For example, David Hume advocates an early art for art's sake position by stressing that the only function of beautiful art is the pleasure it affords. Edmund Burke, Roger Fry, and Jerome Stolnitz claim that attributions of beauty have nothing to do with considerations of functionality.

22. Theophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (London: Penguin Classics, 1981).

23. In classical Greek thought an object might be called beautiful (*kalos*) with reference to a purpose, and non-beautiful with reference to another purpose. What makes something beautiful is the fitness for purpose. A house is beautiful if it keeps warm during the winter and cold during the summer; a shoe is beautiful if the foot feels good in it, and so on (for a detailed argument, see Allan Carlson and Glen Parsons, *Functional Beauty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008), 23).

24. Jonathan Friedman, "Beauty and Function," online article on *Thinking on Music*—Exploring Music in the Human Experience, http://thinkingonmusic.wordpress.com/2012/11/12/beauty-and-function/.

25. See Glen Parsons and Allan Carlson, *Functional Beauty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008) and Stephen Davies, "Aesthetic Judgments, Artworks, and Functional Beauty," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 56, no. 223 (2006): 224–41.

According to these contemporary aestheticians there is no juxtaposition between beauty and function. *Functional Beauty* is a new theory in contemporary aesthetics meant to rehabilitate the relationship between beauty and function which has been under attack in aesthetic theories of art.

26. Theodor Adorno, "Commitment," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and Dike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1982), 82.

27. J. A. Passmore, "The Dreariness of Aesthetics," in *Aesthetics and Language*, ed. William Elton (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954), 36–55.

28. Peter Benson, "On Beauty and Being Just by Elaine Scarry," *Philosophy Now*, http://www.philosophynow.org/issue44/On_Beauty_and_Being_Just_by_Elaine_Scarry.

29. Dave Beech, *Beauty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009).

30. See, for example, Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, "Speaking through Silence: The enigmatic Beauty of ShirinNeshat's 'Identified,'" *Hillman Photography Initiative:*

*Carnegie Museum of Art*, http://www.nowseethis.org/thispicture/posts/1597/essay/22. In an interview for *Washington Post* (January 31, 2014), ShirinNeshat mentions that her movie "Women without Men" disseminated through piracy in Iran for one week triggered "a lot of criticism, of course, on it being too artistic" (the interview is available online at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/she-the-people/wp/2014/01/31/exiled-iranian-artist-shirin-neshat-looks-at-the-egyptian-revolution/).

31. Arthur Danto, "Beauty and Morality," in *Uncontrollable Beauty*, eds. Bill Beckley and David Shapiro (New York: Allworth Press, 1998), 36.

32. Ibid, 36.

33. See Susan Sontag, "An Argument about Beauty," *Daedalus* (Fall, 2002): 22.

34. Arthur Danto, "The Abuse of Beauty," *Daedalus* 131, no. 4 (Fall, 2002): 49.

35. Arthur Danto, "The Artworld," *The Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (1964): 571–84.

36. Arthur Danto, "The Abuse of Beauty," 37.

37. Alexander Nehamas, "The Return of the Beautiful: Morality, Pleasure, and the Value of Uncertainty," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58, no. 4 (Fall, 2000): 402.

38. The turn away from beauty in contemporary political art (especially after World War II) is usually associated with postmodernist theory and art. Postmodernist critics and conceptual artists have started to be influenced by Marxist critiques of aesthetics and feminist theory of art. While feminist critiques understood "beauty" as an instrument for women's objectification (and recommended its avoidance), postmodern critics, and conceptual artists have started to repress both beauty and aesthetics on the grounds that to produce beautiful works of art became equated with supplying the market with what it demanded.

39. James Smith, *Terry Eagleton* (London: Polity Press, 2008), 372.

40. Philip Mallaband, "Understanding Kant's Distinction between Free and Dependent Beauty," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 52, no. 206 (January, 2002): 66–81.

41. Nick Zangwill, "Beauty," *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 333.

42. Ibid.

43. This statement appears at the beginning of Hegel's *Aesthetics: Lectures of Fine Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). The line immediately follows Hegel's claim that beauty of art is higher than the beauty of nature (since it is born in spirit).

44. Arthur Danto, "Beauty and Morality," in *Uncontrollable Beauty: Toward a New Aesthetics*, eds. Bill Beckley and David Shapiro (New York: Allworth Press, 1998), 25–38.

45. There are, of course, few exceptions from that "rule": for instance Adrian Piper defends the appropriateness of Kantian aesthetics in theorizing political art (interview with Adrian Piper, conducted by Maurice Berger for *Afterimage* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 226).

46. Interview with Adrian Piper, conducted by Maurice Berger for *Afterimage* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 226.

47. Ibid.

48. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987).

49. Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 106.

50. For instance, Malcolm Budd holds that an object cannot be judged dependently beautiful without being first judged freely beautiful: "the judgment of free beauty is a 'pure' judgment of taste, so any aesthetic judgment must have at its heart a judgment of free beauty which is based upon nothing but the 'hedonic response' in the object caused by a conceptually thin experience of the object" (Malcolm Budd, quoted in Philip Mallaband, "Understanding Kant's Distinction between Free and Dependent Beauty," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 52, no. 206 (January 2002): 72). Christopher Janaway claims that if a person experiences something aesthetically then he will allow a free play of his/her imagination and understanding which causes the feeling of "pleasure—aesthetic pleasure" (based on the perception of the formal purposiveness without a purpose which the subject experiences in that thing). So aesthetic pleasure is the appropriate hedonistic response caused by the experience of the object's aesthetic qualities. This is the ground for the aesthetic judgment of free beauty. In short, Janaway believes that dependent beauty (an intellectualized response) starts from the perception of the object's aesthetic qualities which gives aesthetic pleasure (free beauty). So the judgment of dependent beauty is based both on hedonic response and intellectual response. (The intellectual response is not enough in responding to dependent beauty.) Philip Mallaband, "Understanding Kant's Distinction between Free and Dependent Beauty," 72.

51. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), paragraph. 48.

52. Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 42.

53. Arthur Danto, "The Abuse of Beauty," *Deadalus* 131, no. 4 (Fall, 2002): 53.

54. Denis Dutton, "The Experience of Art is Paradise Regained: Kant on Free and Dependent Beauty," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 34, no. 3 (July, 1994): 231.

55. Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 1989), 42.

56. Nick Zangwill, "Beauty," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 334.

57. Denis Dutton, "The Experience of Art is Paradise Regained: Kant on Free and Dependent Beauty," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 34, no. 3 (July, 1994): 231.

58. Nick Zangwill, "Beauty," 335.

59. Ibid, 336.

60. Denis Dutton, "The Experience of Art is Paradise Regained: Kant on Free and Dependent Beauty," http://www.denisdutton.com/kant.htm.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. From *White Cube,* http://www.whitecube.com/exhibitions/morimuraphotographs.

64. Marcia Muelder Eaton, "Kantian and Contextual Beauty," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 1 (Winter, 1999).

65. Marcia Muelder Eaton, "Kantian and Contextual Beauty," in *Beauty Matters*, ed. Peggy Zeglin Brand (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 33.

66. Ibid, 28.

67. Allan Carlson and Glen Parsons, *Functional Beauty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008), 2.

68. For a detailed distinction between weak and strong versions of beauty in classical philosophy see Allan Carlson and Glen Parsons, *Functional Beauty*, 2.

69. Stephen Davies, "Functional Beauty Examined," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 40, no. 2 (2010): 315–32.

70. In the same vein, "How well fitted is the wolf for running and leaping! How admirably is the lion armed for battle! But will anyone therefore call . . . the wolf and the lion beautiful animals?" (Edmund Burke, *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, quoted in Allan Carlson and Glen Parsons, *Functional Beauty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008), 18).

71. Alison, quoted in Allan Carlson and Glen Parsons, *Functional Beauty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008), 23.

72. Marcia Muelder Eaton, "Kantian and Contextual Beauty," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 1 (1999).

73. See the artworks online in the article "Artists Recycle Waste into a Beautiful Enigma," *Art Threat*, November 5, 2010, http://artthreat.net/2010/11/convergence-lumenhouse/.

74. See Kathleen Higgins, "Whatever Happened to Beauty? A Response to Danto," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54 (1996): 281–84.

75. Alexander Nehamas, "The Return of the Beautiful: Morality, Pleasure, and the Value of Uncertainty," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58, no. 4 (Fall, 2000): 393–403.

76. Ibid, 402.

## *Chapter 5*

# The Effectiveness Question

## *Is Critical Art Politically Effective?*

This chapter discusses several interrelated questions.[1] Each of which has to do with the issue of "effectiveness" in political-critical art's case. In order to grasp the meaning of "what does it mean to make effective political art" it is necessary to answer first to several interrelated questions. There is no single or simple answer to what does "effective" mean. In order to clarify whether political-critical art is effective or not, this chapter addresses the following set of questions: In the *first* section, I investigate what does "effective" mean, and whether there are different types of effectiveness. The *second* part asks what the reasons for denying or affirming the political effectiveness of critical art are. The *third* section questions whether political-critical art is most effective within an institutional setting, or on the contrary, outside of it. The *fourth* part explores the subjects to whom political-critical art must be addressed in order for it to be most effective. The *fifth* section looks into the kind of mechanisms of production and distribution of political-critical art which makes it most effective. I will investigate how political art is done or, in a Marxist spirit, how the piece is done in this or that mode of production. Finally, the *last* section deals with the question of political-critical effectiveness within social movements and revolutions.

Political-critical art can be effective in many ways and that is the reason why the question of "effectiveness" should be addressed from many perspectives, because to be politically effective does not only mean, for example, "to stop a war," to defeat hegemony or to make a politician resign. Political-critical art can be effective even when it does not change concrete states of affairs because political engagement can take place in different force fields: not only in the streets and institutions, but also in the remote zones of our sensibility.

## POLITICAL ART'S EFFECTIVENESS: WHAT DOES "EFFECTIVE" MEAN?

The Vera List Center for Art and Politics (in New York City) organized in October 2012 a conference where the leading question was "How Can Art Affect Political Change?" The speakers addressed several crucial issues regarding the complex relationship between activism and artistic production. They also have addressed several questions regarding the issue of effectiveness in political-critical art's case, such as: "Is political art effective when it fulfills basic needs (food, accommodation, etc.)" (Marisa Jahn) or "Why are we asking art to effect political change? Why don't we ask artists, art workers or citizens? Why this displacement of agency from people to art? What is the current relationship between creative practice and political activism?"[2]

However, before clarifying these convoluted issues it has to be firstly stated what counts as "effectiveness" or as "political effectiveness." It seems that this question has not been answered within "The Vera List Center for Art and Politics" conference. The problem is that the question of effectiveness cannot be answered in general. We cannot simply claim that X is politically effective than Z, because being "effective" can signify more than one thing. Then, the question is can there be a stable point of reference to assert if something is politically effective or, rather what counts as "effective" has more than one stable point of reference? This is an important step in my argument because there is no consensus on the examples of politically effective art. For example, a recent issue from the mainstream art magazine *Frieze* attempts to survey the answers from political artists, curators, and art educators regarding "what constitutes an example of politically effective art."[3] The examples of politically effective art range from Pussy Riot—the Russian group of political artists protesting against Putin-Medvedev's political authority—to Laurie Jo Reynolds who has worked successfully with prison reform activists to close a maximum security prison in Illinois and to handmade decorations from remote rural areas which act critically in the sense that they emphasize "the suffocating female role models."[4] Thus, political effectiveness is not of one type and different instances of art count as politically effective. What does "politically effective" mean then? It seems that being politically effective means more than one thing, and in fact at least three things.

In the *first* place, being politically effective means "to change states of affairs" in the world, as a consequence of political art's campaigns, like closing the Illinois prison down by the governor after many artistic actions so-called Legislative Art (art that intervenes in the government system with the aim of "concrete" political change) organized by Laurie Jo Reynolds and other artists and activists.

*Second*, nothing concrete is done or changed but more and more people are aware of a troubled situation and attempt to do something in this respect: for example, Pussy Riot's performances in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow against President Vladimir Putin did not make Putin resign but increased awareness around the world about Putin's abuses of power and about how human rights are infringed. The hegemony is not defeated, but "its abuses are made visible to the outside world." Art is effective in this case in the sense that it initiates conversations about social justice issues.

*Third*, some political-critical forms of creativity from artistic practice may be effective in the sense that they bring to the fore a moral dimension of a concrete situation (nothing "concrete" will change but our sensibility will be rekindled in such a way that opens our mind to imagine what if we would be in a difficult position, similar to that we acknowledge in political-critical art piece). In other words, political art can be effective if "it fosters useful emotions and empathy."

The tripartite classification of political effectiveness presented above might not be complete. However, besides the different senses in which we can understand that critical art is politically effective, another important issue needs to be detailed at this point: independent of the sense in which we understand "political effectiveness," it is not clear yet whether political-critical art has some consequences in inspiring people to act in new ways and to change the state of affairs or, rather political-critical art is merely reenacting what has already happened in the street (an artistic reenactment of a public revolt that already took place in the public sphere). In other words, is political art "critical" and revolutionary when "something troubling happens as a direct reaction to that worrying situation or its criticality and revolutionary character consists in reenacting what 'has already happened' in terms of revolution and critical reaction in the street"?[5]

## WHAT REASONS ARE THERE FOR DENYING OR AFFIRMING THE POLITICAL EFFECTIVENESS OF POLITICAL ART?

Contemporary political-critical art is many times evaluated and judged in terms of social-political usefulness and effectiveness, disregarding the questions of aesthetic/artistic value. Curator Nato Thomson has recently argued that the question for political-critical art is no longer "But is it art?" but a different one: "Is it useful?"[6] The "is it useful?" question actually means "is it effective as political-critical art?" Many activists and critical theorists claim that it does not even matter if political art is art or not, as long as it fulfills its political-critical function effectively.[7] In other words, for some theorists,

political-critical art is effective if it fulfills a political function successfully. (For instance, it is effective if it gives food to the poor; if it provides "a good model of collaboration" among artists who work in an art collective as opposed to the successful format of the individual, 'genius' artist; if it brings to the fore the hidden racism and so on.)

Yet, there is also another tendency to question critical art's political effectiveness on the grounds that art is powerless or functionless and "it would never stop a war" because it has no chance to succeed in stopping injustices and raising awareness, as long as it is still preached in official museums and other art institutions as "a commercialized repetition of its historical precursors."[8] Art as resistance or critique is said to be just as meaningless from the point of view of its political effectiveness as commercial or decorative art is.[9] Yet, even if this assertion is something heard frequently, I don't believe it is accurate. As Hubert van den Berg convincingly argues, "Resistance, a revolt or a revolution, is not necessarily meaningless, when there is little or no chance of success or victory. The fundamental question rises here, whether the relevance of resistance should only be measured by its chance of success. Does not resistance, does not revolt possess always a moral dimension as well?"[10] This means that a revolution or a revolt has to be done when abuses of power and injustices are at stake, even if its chances to change that state of affairs are small or limited. The fact that a revolution is not successful in changing something does not mean that it is completely "ineffective" politically because, as I argue, political effectiveness is not just of one kind.

## EFFECTIVENESS: WITHIN AN INSTITUTIONAL SETTING OR OUTSIDE OF IT?

One may ask if critical art is effective, if it is produced and exhibited within the mainstream art institutions or if it is produced outside of them. Also, one may ask if critical art is most effective as activism or rather as exit or reclusiveness. (We have to acknowledge that not all arts produced outside of the mainstream art institutions are critical arts.) In other words, when is political-critical art effective? The answers are (a) when it acts progressively against power's mechanisms of domination from within that power, or (b) when it refuses any way of dealing directly with that power (art might be critical precisely because it refuses to seek to document, intervene, or reflect the bad politics of the moment).

Let's take an example: Guerrilla Girls or Ai Weiwei's art are instances of the direct social and political activism while Miroslav Tichý's art did not overtly criticize the totalitarian regime through his photographs with naked or semi-naked women, even if he criticized the regime very harshly by refusing

the official canon and preferring the mental institution instead of an artistic carrier.[11] His refusal to produce an art which respects the ideology of the communist party is more a form of critical "exit" than a form of direct form of "activism." His resistance and "criticism" reside in his willingness to live and create an art which is free of any ideological constraints. The women in bathing suits or in negligees are not what Tichy's art is all about. His art is motivated by his visceral and painful struggle to live and to "see" freely and without distortion the two irreconcilable worlds: that imposed from above and that which he saw naturally, through the lens of his improvised camera.

Is his art critical and "effective" politically then? If we understand political-critical art's "effectiveness" only in terms of defeating the mechanisms of power, then Tichy's critical-"exit" type of political art is not effective. Yet, as I have argued, "effectiveness" does not exclusively mean defeating that which political art is critical about. In Tichy's art example, it is obvious that he did not overtly criticize the communist regime but what he did is slightly different: his photographs are documents of resistance in the sense that they capture the normality of human life with its romanticism, eroticism, and innocence under the pressure of an abnormal political reality.

Another crucial question would be whether it can be effective to make political work that functions within the mainstream art world. A very interesting phenomenon, known as the "institutionalization of dissent," started in the 1980s: the political, opposition art was gentrified by mainstream culture and by its institutions. What at the beginning was intended to be "critical" suddenly becomes a pretended "mainstream." This is not such a big surprise since the "enemy" looks familiar, being the hand that feeds the contemporary critical artists. In other words, there is a tendency to consider that critical art is depoliticized as soon as it is appropriated and integrated into the art world. But is this so? Is the art world a homogeneous field? Some political artists and critical theorists—like Oliver Ressler and Max Andrews—claim that there is no homogeneous artworld. Some of them are commercial and some are not; some are mainstream and others are marginal; some art worlds encourage more participatory art and others encourage traditional painting and sculpture and so on.

However, political-critical art continues to coexist with the art of a globalized mainstream art world which is fully developed providing distribution systems which integrate artists into the global market. But if a conventional distribution organization rejects what it considers to be inopportune art pieces both on political and aesthetic grounds, there will always be achievable to arrange a *Salon des Refusés* more or less fully developed in providing dissemination. In other words, artists can opt for diverse distribution systems, not necessarily the museum, university, gallery, or the art magazine, which serve them best or restrict them least.[12] Artists who are interested in the

political effectiveness of their work would be rather satisfied that their public is not the emblematic public of contemporary art galleries which has only a professional interest in art.[13] It is difficult to criticize the art market while you are a prominent part of it. On the other hand, the separation between art market and critical-political art is not always a radical one because artists sought to express "varying degrees of opposition and autonomy toward the marketplace."[14]

Critical-political art can be politically most effective in various ways both within the institutional settings and outside of them as long as the artists' critical attitude is not dictated by what cultural hegemony wants them to be critical of. "Outsider" art, also called more or less accurately art brut, raw art, informal art, amateur art, folk art, naïve art, self-taught art, visionary art or, in an expression which seems to be seldom used today, "primitive art," often carries some political connotations emphasizing an alternative culture of resistance. "Outsider" art operates, according to Alain Badiou in terms of "a different *durée* to that imposed by the law of the world," displacing hierarchies and cultural norms.[15] "Outsider" art is not "another" artistic genre or artistic technique but an untapped resource of economic, social, political, and historical data.

## TO WHOM MUST POLITICAL-CRITICAL ART BE ADDRESSED?

Even if political-critical art is exhibited/performed in the public space, we still have to ask to whom must critical art be addressed in order for it to be effective? As I have already stated, political-critical art's main purpose is to awake the awareness of the viewer making her/him "conscious of the mechanisms of oppression and domination."[16] If that art manages to stir up the spectator's awareness, then it fulfills its political purpose successfully. But, as I have argued, political-critical art cannot effectively accomplish this goal if it functions within a privileged, autonomous aesthetic realm only. Then, the politically concerned artist usually uses the anti-aesthetic strategies hoping to produce an art which criticize and mocks the art of "pure forms," art appreciated in the mainstream art institutions or in the mainstream Aesthetics and Art Journals.

The kind of aesthetic experience expected from the public is not the kind of experience which is valuable in its own right (autonomous experience) but comingled with some other expectancy. The goal of some political-critical artists has been to produce an art piece which is not a matter of prestige but rather it is a thing in the world which is undifferentiated from other common things. Many contemporary critical artists just pick up garbage

from the street, offer food to the poor, or offer English courses for irregular immigrants.[17] All these artistic-political actions seem indistinguishable from similar quotidian activities. Their purpose is obviously to bring the idea of injustice to the spectator but the question is then why these actions performed by political artists would bring the idea of injustice to us in a way that other quotidian feedings of the poor and helping the immigrant cannot. Obviously, we appreciate the idea of these art projects and the "caring" altogether, if we are trained to understand them as such.

The indistinguishableness of these artistic actions from regular actions is a political-critical strategy only for those trained to identify it as such and to consider it an anti-aesthetic establishment strategy. In reality, this indistinguishableness makes these kinds of works unreadable as art by any public other than that trained in complex contemporary aesthetics or art theory. Then, the answer for the question "for whom is political-critical art effective?" is, unfortunately for those who share the artistic "vocabulary" or the "cultural code." In other words, some critical art instances, a part of how much anti-aesthetic and anti-elitist is their strategy intended to be, remain inaccessible to nonspecialist viewer. Perhaps, in some cases, the political stance of the piece is comprehensible and transparent for the viewer but this apprehending could be realized in front of any other product from mass communication, not necessarily artistic. Nevertheless, there are pieces of political-critical art reasonably accessible to a general public, while revealing "further complexities to those able to set it conceptually within its art world context."[18] "Criticality" can take many forms (among which are the highly abstract ones). As Martha Rosler points out,

> Criticality that manifests as a subtle thread in iconographic details is unlikely to be apprehended by wide audiences across national borders. The veiled criticality of art under repressive regimes generally manifesting as allegory or symbolism, needs no explanation for those who shared that repression, but audiences outside that policed universe will need a study guide. In either case, it is not the general audience but the educated castes and professional artists or writers who are most attuned to such hermeneutics.[19]

Yet, on the other hand, there are many examples of critical art which don't belong to established and mainstream art worlds and don't need the vocabulary and the specialized knowledge of the mainstream art theories to do their job effectively. For instance, very little has been written and researched about the political import of decorative artifacts. Folk arts are typically isolated in the area of the "ornamental"; they are seldom seen as "political" or "critical." By the same token, the artifacts of political expression are not seen as belonging to a tradition of art-making. The decorative artifacts I am concerned with

here are "outsider art" which deals both with beauty and politics or social change. Their producers are artisans with little or no exposure to art media. They have no professional interest in arts; they don't call themselves "artists" and have no idea of art institutions, aesthetic theories, or alternative art worlds. However, even if their products are not typically called "art," this does not mean that these forms of artistic creativity from outside the mainstream art institutions cannot act critically and progressively. In some cases, the handmade decorative pieces are not just "freely beautiful" artifacts but functional beauties which take part in a culture of resistance.

These decorative objects are rather cheerful and raw than sublime and elaborate pieces, but this does not mean that they don't perform effectively their political function for the people from that community (the community in which they have been produced). Not only the biggest biennales or museums of contemporary art exhibit pieces which are politically concerned and engaged but also the peasant's kitchens from the remote corners of the world. We can look for political involvement in unexpected places, like in handmade ornament or decoration from peasant's houses. For instance, in the rural areas from Eastern and Central Europe, women used to decorate their kitchens with handmade wall hangings through which they attempt to express their feelings and daily concerns.

Many of these decorations repeat animalistic, vegetative, or geometric patterns and cheerful messages, such as: "Who is clean and tidy makes a palace out of a hut"; "It is easier to eat than to cook." Besides these merry messages there are also critical ones like: "I love my pipe when I have tobacco, and the wife when she is baking a turkey"; "I married you to clean your house" or "My oh my, it wouldn't hurt if it got better." The messages inscribed in fabric are cheerful and distressing; humorous and sad; silly and thoughtful. Many art "connoisseurs" find them grotesque, kitschy, or heartbreakingly touching because they are often associated with triviality, domesticity, or "popular culture." There is also a tendency to consider them as a raw form of artistry, a childish and naïve one, which has to do more with a dumb beauty then with art as such, politics or social justice. But the issue I want to address here is not to decide whether an activity associated with "work of craft" can be called art. Many times it can be, but I will not go into this debate here. My aim is a different one: to argue that some handmade decorative artifacts, which could be labeled as "art brut," perform a critical-political function effectively.[20] All these examples of homemade political critique illustrate how an inoffensive activity and its end products can bring about changes at social or personal level, even for those who never thought about it that way.

A piece of homemade decoration can be politically effective if it empowers the maker or if it rekindles the viewer's sensibility when issues of injustice are at stake. Perhaps for many crafting is not revolutionary (in the sense that

a wall hanging decoration will never stop a war or make a politician resign). But not always a critical engagement attempts to achieve or means that. As Hans Aarsman rightly suggests, what we need

> is a template model for what critical engagement should try to achieve in our day and age: forget the 'winners' and 'losers' and provide examples of people who operate in a different force field. People, who are not grasping, not filled with self-importance and not embittered, people with a profound understanding of who they are and what they stand for.[21]

Anonymous, predominantly women, undertake these works of craft both for politics and pleasure. They are not animated by the same ideals as craftivist contemporary artists.[22] These "innocent" decorative pieces are not seeking to react as an alternative to the blindly buying consumer goods. There is another ideology at stake: to empower the maker. So, these pieces of handmade political art are effective by empowering the producer. Still, the conclusion is not that political-critical art must be addressed only to the "excluded" or "outsider" publics (which exist alongside with the official, conventional art world). As the Romanian art collective *H-arta* posits,

> Thinking about the social concerns of our projects, we are not interested in 'saving' the ones who are marginal and excluded in a paternalistic, hypocritical way by projecting the problems that need to be solved elsewhere, in the realm of the exotic other. We wanted to address our art both to those marginalized—in the hope that it will become an instrument of analysis and change—but also to those in the majority, who need to become aware of their own privileged situation, whether we talk about the privilege of being 'white,' male, of higher class, etc. Examining our own inherent hierarchies and manifestations of hidden racism, thinking about the ways in which we all contribute to a society which marginalizes and exploits large categories of people, are the first steps for acting in solidarity with the ones that are excluded.[23]

## THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION

The politics of a piece of art is in a way grasped if the piece is a painting hanging in a museum, and in a different way if the piece is a photograph or a video available on the internet. The medium in which an artwork is presented and distributed is also important for political art's effectiveness. These factors make a piece of art what it is and influence the spectator's aesthetic and political response.

For instance, for Walter Benjamin, not only the context matters, both spatial and temporal, in art's apprehending but also the way in which art is

produced and disseminated. He would contend that the means of productions (mechanical reproduction) determines the "politics of reception": "The gradual preference of technical media by the mass public signifies for Benjamin a radical shift in arts to the political."[24] This is so because with the advent of mechanical reproducibility the art pieces are no longer seen as aesthetic objects and the spectator's attention will not be focused anymore on the formal properties but on content and on the way this content is disseminated. In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Benjamin details his "anti-aesthetic" understanding of the aesthetic. He distinguishes what he considers the values of art (mechanical reproduction, politics) from traditional aesthetic values (those of "creativity and genius," eternal value and mystery). Technological reproducibility is one of his new aesthetic categories which confronts the traditional aesthetic values of uniqueness and genius or what he calls "aura."

What is "aura"? Benjamin quite explicitly equates it with what he describes as "the unique phenomenon of distance however close it may be."[25] I understand this assertion in the following way: even if a viewer in a museum is relatively close physically to a painting, this does not mean that any distance between him and painting is vanished. Still there is an authoritarian distance between him/her and the painting. This distance has to be understood not only in spatial terms but also in temporal ones. Moreover, in museums, on (or beneath) the original paintings of the great masters of art history is usually written "don't touch the painting!" This "don't touch!" could be understood literally but also symbolically: the "aura" of the painting is its "unique appearance." This "unique appearance" should be preserved as it is. Besides the literal meaning, we could understand the imperative "don't 'touch the painting!" as another imperative—"don't try to make it approachable!" The cult value of that painting rests in the fact that it transports the viewer into a distant and unfamiliar province. As Benjamin pointed out, the presence of the original is the "prerequisite of the concept of authenticity."[26] Anyway, for him it is more important to make many reproductions of the original then to aesthetically celebrate the original. The unique existence of an object or its authenticity establishes an authoritarian rule. That's why a plurality of copies would substitute the tyranny of the unique: "to ask for the 'authentic' print makes no sense." This is the beginning of what Benjamin calls "the decay of the aura."

Photography and film are privileged mediums for Benjamin. There is a piece of textual evidence in which Benjamin claims, in fact, that the representation of reality by film is "incomparably more significant" than that of the painter. This observation occurs in text when he discusses the double comparison between painter and cameraman and between magician and surgeon. The painter is considered by Benjamin a sort of magician because he "cures"

the sick person "by the laying on of hands." In this practice Benjamin sees a sign of authority especially because the painter like a magician maintains a distance between himself and reality. On the other hand, the cameraman like the surgeon penetrates into the sick body (or reality).

Benjamin thinks that one is entitled to ask from a work of art a meticulous penetration of reality which is achieved by cameraman but it is not achieved by painter. He claims: "there is a tremendous difference between the pictures they obtain. That of a painter is a "total" one while that of the cameraman consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law."[27] This "new law" suggests that art ceased to be art as it was known before.

What is changed in this new law of art? On the one hand, the context of reception is changed. On the other hand, with the advent of mechanical reproduction we assist to a sort of promotion of the anonymous (both in terms of the subject matter and authorship). The receptive apparatus of the public is no longer disguised in a contemplative attitude and obedience. This perceptual habit (contemplative) has vanished because the art object is no longer a unique and "auratic" one. Benjamin seems to totally neglect an artist's presence. For him the presence of an artist is a sign of authorship/authority. The artist is never a creator but a builder. Since life belongs to the sphere of creation and art to that of formation we can understand why Benjamin rejects the idea of "the artist as creator." His anger is directed against the ideas of genius, the artist as creator, and the tradition of cult art.

But let's go back now to the question of effectiveness. Benjamin has hoped that the mechanical reproduction will bring into being a critically and politically engaged viewer and in this way art would become politically effective. He tried to replace "the cult value of art" with "the exhibition value" (art is accessible to everyone). Yet, this replacement by the means of mechanical reproduction makes art more manageable, more approachable, and more visible for the masses but it does not necessarily turn the viewer into a politically and socially aware agent. What the advent of mechanical reproduction obviously does is to prove that art's appreciation cannot be radically separated from the appreciation of its social and cultural context of production. Once we accept these non-perceptual factors as artistically relevant, we no longer value "auratic" art only.

The exhibition value of political art is clearly more easily and democratically distributed by the means of mechanical reproduction, but I am not sure whether these means of production trigger the politics of reception too (at least not the politics oppositional to the status quo). It is worth noticing that, on the contrary, these means of production gave rise to the "cult of star and a new aura of originality perfectly suited to the capitalist enterprise."[28] Yet, the means of production support nevertheless, an anti-"auratic" mode of aesthetic appreciation which could be called to some extent "political" or

"political response," but this is not the whole story. This politics ought to be counter-hegemonic to the interests of the dominant institutions; otherwise art will be just swallowed up by the technological apparatus of those in power. The technological way in which an art piece is produced and distributed is a double edged sword: on the one hand it could be an important factor in the post-auratic aesthetic reception through the politicization of both production and the reception of art but, on the other hand, the same means of production could function as a tool in the hands of the status quo. In the second version the result is very close to a merely propagandistic function which is not the goal of political-critical art. By the means of mechanical reproduction art could support the rise of Hollywood-type stars, political VIP's, corporatist leaders and many other "celebrities" of the capitalist enterprise known as "culture industry." Nobody can deny the existence of a culture industry media which it proves to be "an institutional structure for subjugating the individual to the control of capital."[29]

Not only what the art piece communicates can be political, but also how it says and how it disseminates what it says. Forms, by which some artworks become political and critical, require autonomous production and distribution. Both the political and the aesthetic dimension of the art piece depend on this autonomy. Inasmuch as art can have a critical role in society, it cannot just be part of the power apparatus (being produced within the institutions of power and distributed through the channels of that power). Then, human misery will become an object of consumption as any other consumer good. It seems that political artists (as cultural producers) are prisoners as employee(s) of the institution(s) of culture industry.[30]

Still, not all means of production and distribution are in danger to be swallowed by the political, economic, or cultural status quo. There are still zines[31] or independent art publications (like "The Independent Media Center of Philadelphia" which used to edit an independent "Aesthetic Journal") which sustain an autonomously critical art production and distribution. Political artists and activists still hope to make them visible without using the mainstream art media.

Producing critical art entails an interrogation of its entire mode of organization: from form and content relationship as tactics of articulating meaning to modes of production and dissemination, ownership of cultural product, its hierarchy of labor as well as the type of relationship between the artist and those who are represented (workers, ethnic minorities, economically challenged people). Critical art acts politically mostly when it is produced as a genuinely collaborative piece.

A genuinely collaborative piece is an intersubjective type of collaboration in which the artist is not the one who directs and dictates the action and the message of those who perform. The others (the public) have to be involved

in a dialog, giving them a voice of their own and not speaking for them or using them to communicate artist's "political" message. Yet, it is not enough to want to transform spectators (passive consumers) in art producers by bringing technological means to the people if the final piece of art is owned and distributed through certain channels of the hegemonic institutions.

## SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND CRITICAL-POLITICAL ART

In what follows, I am trying to survey the answer to two questions addressed by the philosopher Gerald Raunig: "Is there any overlapping between political-critical art and social and political change?" and "How can art promote and animate revolutionary contents?"[32]

For decades, political art was labeled as "unappealing," "didactic," "boring," or "ideological." "Is this really art?" question has been addressed quite often in the last two decades.[33] There is also a tendency to appreciate critical art exclusively on political grounds, disregarding any considerations about artistic identity. However, certain concerns regarding the artistic identity and merit do not de-emphasize the politics of a piece. Art can have a revolutionary potential in terms of insurrection and resistance to hegemony, but this does not mean that artistic practice and political action are one and the same (or that they are not separable on any grounds). Hence, my claim is that political-critical art can be effective *qua* art and sometimes it can have a revolutionary potential *qua* art. As Herbert Marcuse would say "I see the political potential of art in art itself."[34]

This raises the question of what the boundaries are through which something becomes art. This question is unavoidable for the kind of argument I intend to put forth in this book. As I have already mentioned in the introduction, the twentieth century developed the new relativist paradigm "everything is political/everything is art"—with the element added by Beuys, "everyone is an artist."[35] Yet, there should be some limits delimitating art from life and art from non-art, otherwise we end up with sterile formula like "anything is art." To regard anything as art takes the force out of the things that are art. To claim that "everything is art" and "everyone is an artist" without further articulation, is as ineffectual as claiming that "everything is interpretation" or "all art is political." Nevertheless, all art is in a very general sense "political" if we understand "politics" as an imaginative exploration of ideas which are communicated in a medium, but not all art is political in its most robust, confrontational sense. Some art pieces simply don't express the antagonistic politics I'm emphasizing in volume.

Thus, it is "politically pernicious to see all art as political because it takes the force out of those art situations that clearly are political."[36] Going back

to the question of what delimitates art from life, we have at our disposal at least two important philosophical positions: the "institutional" and the "aesthetic" theory of art. The first one is not an appropriate theory for demarcating art from anything else because "the art institutions" (or the "art world" in George Dickie's understanding) are just the bureaucratic confinements of art production, reception, and distribution. In this way, any despotic political regime could decree what is art and what is whatever else just on the basis of its art institutions of power. Institutionalism is not really an alternative to the aesthetic theory of art.

On the other hand, the aesthetic theory of art, in the traditional and modernist narrow understanding of it, confines the status of art just to those productions which exhibit aesthetic features perceivable by the means of the five senses. Beside this strong sensualistic component, the favorite concepts of traditionalist and conservative aesthetics are terms like "quality," "genius," "disinterested pleasure," or "aesthetic autonomy." It is impossible to say what these terms connote for us because their use by those in power (hegemonic art institutions) changed their meaning in a way that influences our current apprehending of them.

However, the fact that the established aesthetic theory of art is not workable does not mean that other understandings of aesthetics don't help in delimitating art from whatever else. Even if, in contemporary art we witness a proliferation of so many objects and situations that could became art pieces (i.e., conceptual art), this does not mean that art and life are inseparable. It is also significant to spell out the idea that not every kind of thing or event can become art. The idea that art is life has been the core of the avant-garde. Many artists call their daily activities "art" on this ground: "For me, all daily tasks, like washing clothes, preparing a meal, shopping, or working in construction are performances, art, acts of survival."[37] Yet, if we want to make sense to what extent critical art can be effective and can have a revolutionary potential, we should firstly clearly highlight the relationship between "art" and "life." This controversial relationship has at least two grand narratives: the formalist credo in art which has its own peculiar life and the neo-avant-garde blending of art with life (in which art production and political action are viewed as one and the same thing). A recent philosophical position comes to offer an *in-between* solution.

Contrary to models of wholly confusing art and life, the philosopher Gerald Raunig proposes the concept of "concatenation of art and revolution."[38] A "concatenation" is a temporary overlap of critical activist art and revolution which does not count as a total blending of the two. There are different ways in which the concept of "revolution" is understood and theorized. For Raunig, revolution is not one dimensional enterprise to take over the state apparatus but it rather comes to mean an interconnected insurrection, resistance, and

constituent power[39] (I suppose that he refers to "power to" affect outcomes or to achieve specific goals and not to "power over," in the sense of domination). Art can have a revolutionary potential in terms of insurrection and resistance, but this does not mean that artistic practice and political action are one and the same. Political action and art practice become linked activities for Raunig, which overlap for a limited period of time, without turning out in indistinguishable entities. This "temporal" and "limited" concatenation of art and revolution in which the two parts still remain open up from both sides effectively eludes some habitual troubles.

*First*, it circumvents the confusion with both the Nazi aesthetical mass organization and the aestheticization of politics[40] and Communist endeavors to integrate and homogenize the masses using art. Raunig offers a detailed account of the way in which totalitarianism attempted to integrate the masses by the means of art: "This kind of integrative conjunction of masses and art does not engender assemblages of singularities, nor organizational concatenations seeking to change production circumstances. Instead it deletes differences, territorializes, segments and striates space, achieving a uniformity of the masses through the means of art."[41] Walter Benjamin and Richard Wagner (among others) have signaled the risks of totalizing art and life.[42] Nevertheless, "transitions, overlaps and concatenations of art and revolution,"[43] as murky, fragile, negative, or fragmentary they may appear for a limited temporal sequence, without considering art and life indistinguishable, would prevent the homogenization of masses by the means of art.

*Second*, the momentarily concatenation of art and revolution in political-critical art, persecuted as it is by the mainstream art world, effectively overcomes the traditional aesthetics' dichotomy between autotelic art and art that is politically concerned. The temporary overlapping between art and revolution, which in a certain way still preserves the autonomy of both of them but it also allows them to work soundly together, opens the road for reconsidering the traditional aesthetic categories and canons.[44] Since we no longer speak about absolute field demarcations and art can overlap with politics and revolution without losing its relative separateness, we cannot be completely wrong if we attempt to retool the rigid and conventional cannons imposed by established aesthetic theories of art. The relation between "art" and "revolution" is not a slippery one and there is no need to be concerned that one would de-emphasize or annihilate the other.

For some contemporary art theorists it does not even matter if activist, critical art is art or not if it fulfills successfully its critical purpose. The neglect of the artistic dimension of activist artworks seems to me as pernicious as the separation of art from politics on purely aesthetic grounds. Raunig's concatenation proposal reconceptualizes the relationship between art and politics. In this understanding, art and politics operate soundly together without being

a total synthesis. Art is not just an instrument of politics and politics is not just art's content and, more importantly, art effectively can promote and animate revolutionary contents *qua* art.

To take a concrete and recent example of the way in which art and social movements overlap effectively (Raunig's "art promoting and animating revolutionary contents"), I will discuss in what follows the significance of critical art in Occupy Wall Street movement (OWS). This social movement is part of the international protest against economic inequality. OWS was the first occupy movement to receive wide coverage (it started on September 17, 2011, in Zuccotti Park, New York City). The well-known slogan of this movement was "We are the 99 percent," referring to the concentration of wealth among the top 1 percent of income earners compared to the other 99 percent.[45] There has been a lot of art centered on the OWS: street posters, logos (the famous 99 percent logo and many others), embroideries and other handmade crafts, graffiti, poetry readings, film, music, collages, carnivalesque performances, guerrilla theatre, and so on.

Besides these artistic actions there has been also a series of protests directed against art's corporatization and commodification. A group known as "Occupy Museums" demonstrated at MOMA against corporate and economic interests dictating which art is successful and desirable. They describe themselves as follows: "Occupy Museums is an action group within OWS movement that seeks to reoccupy our art galleries, museums and cultural institutions with the needs, values, histories and art of the 99 percent." Another group "No-Comment" organized an ad hoc exhibition with art inspired by the moment.

OWS was not just a local protest movement in which art played its important role. Artists globally designed street posters and logos "to collectively construct the aesthetic appeal of the moment."[46] Critical Art within OWS transmitted the message of the movement with wit and with beauty, but it also did more than that through making the creative energy of the 99 percent visible (art occupied art in the sense that not only streets and museums has been occupied but also the so-called professionalized art). Moreover, art's effectiveness in the OWS movement does not necessarily rest in transmitting the message of this protest—even if it did that too—but in making people understand their own place in this Occupying movement and making them see how they relate to each other.

Critical art of the Occupy movement, indeed, overlaps with the protest movement but this does not mean that it does not preserve its own independence and art-hood. Political artists of the OWS movement don't want their art to be invisible as art (even if they meant it as protesting economic inequalities). Then "how could political art retain its identity as art if many times it simultaneously produces a critique of art?" ("Occupy Art" and "Occupy Museums" are just two examples of critical art movements within OWS protest). The answer to this question is not easily identified.

This chapter attempted to answer several interrelated questions; each of which having to do with the issue of "effectiveness" in political art's case. Many tend to disagree both on which kinds of art pieces are politically effective and on what does "politically effective" actually mean. It seems that being politically effective means more than one thing. The question of "effectiveness" in political-critical art's case is addressed from many perspectives. To be politically effective does not only mean "to defeat hegemony" but also to rekindle emotion or to acknowledge and unclose the mechanisms of domination.

Political engagement can take place in different force fields: not only in the mainstream institutions and in the streets but also in the remote zones of our sensibility. Not only transgressive, shocking, and violent critical art can be effective but also campy, sentimental, and handmade ornamental artifacts. Even if one may find the latter "melodramatic" or "soapy" at first glance, it does not follow that criticism and social change find expression only within radical forms of activism. This simply means at least two things: first, that critical engagement manifests in many (and sometimes antagonistic) art forms (from radical art[47] to handmade decoration and "soapy" music); and second, that political-critical art can be effective in unexpected ways. Not only art that combines activism and social organizing can be effective[48] but also some "inoffensive" art productions, which seem completely powerless at a first glance like ornaments, art brut, or folk arts.

Works of political art are not necessarily effective if they shake society loudly and aggressively. Shock art and radical art might do more harm in certain social ills than help to overcome a difficult state of affairs because it occasions a reaction of pain, frustration, and weakness in spectators which does nothing more than to turn into stones spectators in their position. Sometimes, political art is more effective if it rekindles our heart. The impact conducting to political change takes place at personal level. Political-critical art can be effective even if it changes the way of thinking and acting at the individual level only. The society's "mind" cannot be changed unless its individuals change their minds or are provoked to empathize. This "provocation" can be shocking and aggressive but also smooth and compassionate.

Even the innermost lyrical art production can act politically and critically if it is connected with our everyday involvement in disturbing situations which take place in the world. Critical art is politically effective when "breaks into the soul" through the "aesthetic appreciation." As Lukacs would say, it seems as if man is not directly prompted into action—to change something here and now—but that only his readiness.

> To make certain decisions undergoes a change. It is therefore equally wrong to deny that art has any influence upon social life at all, as it is to affirm that art has the power to effectuate decisive changes. After hearing a *concerto grosso*, for

> instance, there is no immediate, concrete effect upon action but only a greater readiness. . . . The social role of art, as the ancient Greek knew, is very important, indeed, but it is basically the role of "preparing the soul."[49]

Then, we can say that art "may stop a war" (indirectly) or "change the world" because it is in art's power to foster empathy and compassion or awareness and deliberation. Political art can do what art in general can do *qua* art. What differentiates political-critical art from apolitical art is that the former intends to be politically effective. Even apolitical art may be politically effective sometimes, but this is not its deliberate purpose. In the case of political-critical art, this is one of its main aims. Yet, in order to stir up action, awareness or dissent, critical-political art has to be appreciated as art in the first place. In sum, political effectiveness of art does not reside in transmitting political messages but in how that messages are transmitted.[50]

## NOTES

1. An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the European Consortium for Political Research, General Conference (panel Art and Revolution), Bordeaux, France, 4–7 September 2013.

2. Benjamin Young' talk is available online at http://vimeo.com/51284714.

3. "Art and Politics: A survey (I and II)," *Frieze*, http://blog.frieze.com/art-and-politics-a-survey-part-1/.

4. Sabine Vogel, "Political Patterns-Changing Ornament," *Nafas Art Magazine*, July 2011.

5. "Art and Politics: A survey (I and II)," *Frieze,* http://blog.frieze.com/art-and-politics-a-survey-part-1/.

6. Nato Thomson, *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991–2011* (New York, Cambridge: MIT Press and Creative Time Summit, 2012), 16.

7. For instance, Amy Mullin argues that for some contemporary theorists, the proper answer to the question "But is it art?" is "What does it matter?" (Amy Mullin, "Feminist Art and The Political Imagination," *Hypatia* 18, no. 4 (Fall, 2003): 189–213, http://www.public.asu.edu/~kleong/activistarttheory.pdf).

8. Hubert van den Berg, "On the Historiographic Distinction Between Historical and Neo-Avant-Garde," in *Avant-Garde / Neo-Avant-Garde*, ed. Dietrich Scheunemann (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi Editions, 2005), 66.

9. I argue elsewhere ("Functional Beauty and Handmade Political Art," *Art and Education*, New York, October, 2012 and "Visual Chronicles from the Balkans and Central Europe: Samplers Remembered," *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics* 9, no. 2 (2015): 1–19) that not all arts that are usually secluded in the area of the "ornamental" or "decorative" are a-political and powerless. Despite institutional silence, there is a long standing, homemade tradition of making political art by the means of ornaments or decorations.

10. Hubert van den Berg, "On the Historiographic Distinction between Historical and Neo-Avant-Garde," 66.

11. Miroslav Tichy is a Moravian artist. As the curator Michael Hoppen writes, "Unwilling to subordinate to the political system he spent some eight years in prison and psychiatric wards for no reason, other than he was 'different' and considered subversive. Upon his release he became an outsider, occupying his time by obsessively taking photographs of the women of his home town, using homemade cameras constructed from tin cans, children's spectacle lenses, rubber bands, scotch tape and other junk found on the streets" (Michael Hoppen's curatorial statement for *Unique Photographs Previously Unseen in the UK* (London: Michael Hoppen Gallery, 2010)) exhibition, https://www.michaelhoppengallery.com/exhibitions/34/overview/.

12. This is part of a larger argument I have developed elsewhere (Maria-Alina Asavei, "A Theoretical Excursus on the Concept of Political Art in Communism and its Aftermath," *Studia Politica* 11, no. 4 (2011): 647–61).

13. According to Howard Becker, "70% of the visitors to a typical contemporary art gallery have a professional interest in art." See Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 106.

14. Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London, 2011), 44.

15. Alain Badiou, "The Communist Hypothesis," *New Left Review* 49 (2008): 41.

16. JaquesRanciere, *Disenssus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010).

17. For instance, political artist Tania Bruguera initiated an art project called "Immigrant Movement International 2010–15" in which she basically lives on the minimum wage in a shared flat with illegal immigrants in Corona, Queens (NY), gives them lessons for free in English, helps them with legal assistance and so on (source: *Tate*, http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern-tanks-tate-modern/exhibition/tania-bruguera-immigrant-movement-international.

18. Paul Mattick talks about Barbara Kruger's work which is both accessible for the general public thanks to its use of imagery and verbal forms borrowed from mass communication and aesthetically sophisticated for the specialists (Paul Mattick, "Aesthetics and Anti-Aesthetics in the Visual Arts," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (Spring, 1993): 256).

19. Martha Rosler, "Take the Money and Run? Can Political and Socio-critical Art 'Survive'?" *E-flux*, 2011 http://www.e-flux.com/journal/take-the-money-and-run-can-political-and-socio-critical-art.

20. "Art brut" is a term coined by Jean Dubuffet in the mid of 1940s, which has come to signify the outsider art (folk, naïve, visionary).

21. Hans Aarsman, "Do We Just Keep Complaining about Injustice or Do We Set An Example?" in *New Commitment in Architecture, Art and Design*, ed. Aaron Betsky (New York: Hans NAI Publishers, 2004), 27–32.

22. In the last ten years, an art movement called "Craftivism" emerged as a reaction to neo-liberal hegemony, women's rights repression and other social troubles. The term "craftivism" was coined in order to unite two separated spheres: crafts and activism. For the adepts of this movement, knitting or sewing in public space is an

activist gesture meant to suggest that we have to produce our own goods and to try to avoid blindly buying consumer goods.

23. *H-arta statement*, http://on-curating.org/documents/oncurating_issue_1813_large.pdf.

24. *The European Graduate School,* http://www.egs.edu/library/walter-benjamin/biography/.

25. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. Michael Jennings (Mass: Belknap Press, 2002), 255.

26. Ibid, 526.

27. Ibid, 534.

28. Marian Eide, "The Politics of Form: A Response to Jeffrey T. Schnapp," *South Central Review* 21, no. 1 (Spring, 2004): 53.

29. Gerald Raunig, "Creative Industries as Mass Deception," in *Critique of Creativity*, *Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the Creative Industries*, eds. Gerald Raunig, Gene Ray & Ulf Wuggenig (London: MayFlay Books, 2011), 198.

30. Ibid, 194.

31. A zine is an original, small-circulation, self-published newsletter.

32. Gerald Raunig, *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism the Long Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007).

33. See, for example, Cynthia Freeland, *But Is It Art? An Introduction to Art Theory* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

34. Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979).

35. Daniel Van Der Gucht, "Pour en finir avec la mythologie de l'artiste politique: de l'engagement a la responsabilite," in *Les FormesContemporainesd'Art Engage,* ed. Eric Van Essche (Bruxelles: Collection Essais, 2007), 59–68.

36. Noel Carroll, "The Strange Case of Noël Carroll: A Conversation with the Controversial Film Philosopher," interview by Ray Privett and James Kreul. *Senses of Cinema* April 13, 2001, http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2001/13/carroll/.

37. Ion Grigorescu, "A Version of Memory (January 2007)," translated into English by Alex Moldovan, *IDEA Arts + Society* 25 (2006): 40.

38. Gerald Raunig, *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism the Long Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007).

39. Ibid.

40. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility," 78.

41. Gerald Raunig, *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism the Long Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007).

42. For instance, Benjamin believed that all efforts to render politics aesthetically culminate in tragedy and wars. Benjamin quoted in *Marxist.org*, http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm.

43. Gerald Raunig, *The Concatenation of Art and Revolution*, http://semiotexte.com/?p=127.

44. In art's case "autonomy" is just a relative autonomy. Except for the case of formalist art where art can itself be treated as an autonomous "life of forms," any

other case art is art as something else (so the autonomy is just a relative one). Even when art is abandoned for "real life" it is still partly autonomous. Even in the cases when the art production as part of culture industry has only a relative autonomy, there is still something to be done about this autonomy, as fragile as it is.

45. *Wall Street Protests Spread*, *CBS News*, http://www.cbsnews.com/2300–201_162–10009481.html.

46. *The significance of Art in Occupy Movement*, http://vimeo.com/39412878.

47. Radical art can be described as an offensive, disobedient, and outrageous art. An example of radical art is art produced by the Russian group *Voina*. They performed many offensive artistic actions like "Humiliation of the cop in his own house" (in which the artists entered a police station in Moscow and hung one of Medvedev's portraits on the prison bars); "A cop in a priest's robe" (in which *Voina's* activist Oleg Vorotnikov entered a supermarket wearing a priest's robe and the hat of a police officer. He left without paying some beverages, to demonstrate the invulnerability of church and police; "Giant galactic space penis" (in which in just 23 seconds, *Voina* painted a 213-feet tall phallus on a historic bridge as a reaction against Russian Federal agencies).

48. An example of effective art which combines activism and social organizing is Laurie Jo Reynolds's "legislative art." Her artistic project managed to reform an Abu Ghraib like prison from Illinois (US). Laurie Jo Reynolds declares that the art project included a huge campaign of public education in which fine arts events, panel discussions, and press conferences have been combined to an effective end.

49. Georg Lukacs quoted in Vera Maslow, "Lukacs' Man-Centered Aesthetics," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 27, no. 4 (1967): 546.

50. Jacques Ranciére, *Le spectateur émancipé* (Paris: Le Fabrique, 2008), 61.

# Conclusion

## *On Theorizing Political Art and the Aesthetic*

This book has explored the possibilities of theorizing an enlarged account of the aesthetic—a sufficiently rich understanding of the aesthetic and of aesthetic theory—that accommodates critical-political art. Few other recent studies also reflect on the relationship between art and politics and aesthetics and political art. For instance, Claudia Mesch offers a detailed account of the ways in which we can appreciate political art from a variety of contexts. Her exploration does not only focus on Western political art but reveals previously unexplored political art practices ranging from Middle East and Latin American to postcolonial African art.[1] Her case study approach is nevertheless illuminating and it brings to the fore front concrete political artistic practices.

Yet, my exploration in this study is rather theoretical (philosophical) and less case study oriented. The artistic pieces discussed are selected to mostly substantiate the main claims made and less to contribute to the collection of empirical data on global political art. That might be one of the reasons why, at certain points, this volume has a slightly polemical tone. The argument stemmed from the need to counterbalance the recurrent critical discourse, which emphasizes "the aesthetic" as one of the critical-political art's influential enemies. In many contemporary critical studies, the aesthetic has become the main rival of socially and politically engaged art. At the same time, in contemporary philosophy of art, in art theory, and in critical studies, there are major disagreements regarding the relationship between art and politics, on the one hand, and political art and the aesthetic, on the other. The main purpose of this book has been to take issue with those views, which mistakenly claim that the aesthetic and critical engagements cannot coexist, or, when they coexist this concatenation is either detrimental to art or to politics. To this

end, this study attempted to critically evaluate two opposite theoretical camps, which claim that there is a gap between the aesthetic and critical art:

The *first* category of detractors of the coexistence of the aesthetic and political-critical art regards contemporary critical art as dominated by ethical, political, and social aspects to the detriment of aesthetic concerns. This theoretic camp is represented by traditional/conservative aestheticians, "modernist" art critics and "old school" art historians. Political-critical art is a confrontational art, dealing with disclosing injustice or abuses of power. Thus, on the one hand, one of its main purposes is to increase the awareness about the mechanisms of domination in society by revealing and criticizing those mechanisms. On the other hand, the aesthetic has been customarily understood as something affording a pleasurable experience (of a special kind), which happens to us when we perceive the surface/"form" of art works or natural kinds. Political art, these critics claim, does not operate primarily via "the aesthetic": it is not an immediately pleasing art type because its purpose is not to afford us an aesthetic experience, but to make us conscious of society's problems.

The *second* category of detractors holds that there is a gap between political-critical art and the aesthetic, but for different reasons than those sketched above. This theoretical position holds that the aesthetic is an "ideological construct" (Terry Eagleton, Paul de Man, and Pierre Bourdieu among many others) or an instrument of "evasion" (Raymond Williams), which usually supports and popularizes the values of the status quo of the cultural elites. By the same token, as Barbara Steiner argues,

> There is a fundamental mistrust in aesthetic objects and aesthetics, in individual expression and in documenting non-artistic reality without interfering in its course. Instead political art is favored that acknowledges the superior status of life's praxis over aesthetics and the superiority of that which is collective over that which is individual, seeing existentialism and spirituality as juxtaposed to the materialism of the system of social and economic organization.[2]

This theoretical camp posits that political art *must* be a "non-aesthetic" art if it attempts to succeed politically or to effect political change and in its most extreme version, this position can be summarized as follows: it does not even matter if political, radical, activist art is art or not, as long as it accomplishes its political purpose.

Therefore, the first theoretical camp finds political art as detrimental to the aesthetic, while the second camp finds the aesthetic detrimental to the political. Against both categories of critics, this book has put forth that political-critical art needs not to be evaluated in accordance with the notion of the aesthetic they employed. These diatribes directed against aesthetics

are sound only if we understand the aesthetic narrowly as a cognitively uninfected perception, as passive contemplation, as "no interest allowed" in art appreciation, as immediate and disinterested pleasure, and so on. However, I have argued that there is no need to set apart political art and aesthetic concerns only because certain interpretations of the aesthetic, which are to some extent still influential and largely widespread, oppose praxis and politics to the aesthetic.

The political effectiveness of art does not reside in transmitting political messages but in *how* those messages are transmitted. Art could be effective politically and it could sometimes have a revolutionary potential *qua* art. Art can be politically effective in terms of insurrection and resistance to hegemony, but this does not mean that artistic practice and political action are one and the same (or that they are not separable on any grounds). Political action and art practice have different ontologies, but they can become linked activities, which overlap for a limited period of time, without turning out in indistinguishable entities.

There are, nevertheless, many other dimensions of a sufficiently rich understanding of the aesthetic, which have not been approached in this study but they might be the focus of further research on political art and aesthetics. A significant political art practice that has not been discussed here is artistic collectivism. There is an increasing interest and a congenital attitude toward art collectives even if this format is not very appreciated in the mainstream art world and art market because both of them campaign for the individual, "unique" artist regarded as a "cultural hero."[3]

## NOTES

1. Claudia Mesch, *Art and Politics: A Small History of Art for Social Change Since 1945* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

2. Barbara Steiner, "No Velvet Glove Criticism: Towards a Political Effectiveness of Art," *Fair Observer,* http://www.fairobserver.com/article/no-velvet-glove-criticism-towards-political-effectiveness-art.

3. I offered a detailed account of collectivist art production in Maria-Alina Asavei, "Collectivism," in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Kelly (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 89–95.

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