

Marx and the Aesthetic (Amsterdam, 10–13 May 12)

Universiteit van Amsterdam, May 10–13, 2012

Deadline: Jan 31, 2012

Johan Hartle

CALL FOR PAPERS

Marx and the Aesthetic

(University of Amsterdam, May 10-13th, 2012)

The aim of this conference is twofold: on the one hand, to analyse the role of the aesthetic in the writings of Marx and, on the other, to examine works of art and literature which are based on, or have been directly inspired by, Marx's writings. At the core of this conference, then, is an attempt to think the immanent relation between the aesthetic and emancipatory conceptions of politics.

Previous attempts to make sense of Marx and Engels in terms of aesthetics have either been Marxist in a very broad sense – writing as productive force, aesthetic autonomy as critique of the commodity form, the critique of aesthetic ideologies etc. - or Marxological in a naïve sense i.e., merely assembling in one volume the stray comments on art and literature that pepper Marx's and Engels' writings. The problem with the first attempt is that it simply assumes that there is a prominent lacuna with respect to the aesthetic in Marx himself and that, therefore, Marxian grammar and vocabulary were in need of radical transformation. The failure of the second approach (although these attempts call for reconsideration in their own right, since they are now all about 40 years old) was that it restricted the understanding of "aesthetics" to statements dealing explicitly with art and literature.

Recent debates concerning the aesthetic (to be distinguished from aesthetics as a discipline), however, have allowed for a different understanding of the field. The aesthetic crosses disciplinary boundaries and cannot be restricted to specific subjects. The aesthetic is a form of thought in which a whole host of complex and interrelated issues are at stake: the orders of mind and matter, the disruptive dynamics of sense perception, expression and of metaphor, the logics of innovation and of "the event," the indeterminate character of semiotic systems and so on. Aesthetics cannot, therefore, be restricted to art alone and does not even necessarily coincide with it. In other words, the aesthetic is in a constant state of "migration." Authors like Nancy, Lacoue-Labarthe and Rancière, among others, have pointed out the way in which all radical attempts to theorize the political are profoundly dependent on figures of the aesthetic. The "aesthetico-political" has become a name for all aesthetic dynamics that cross (and confound) the hegemonic orders of reason and the established channels of perception.

Against this backdrop, the entire history of radical political thought must be reconsidered. Sociophilosophical and strategically political claims, which were never originally considered as aesthet-

ic, e.g. Sohn-Rethel's notion that "Communism is the overcoming of the separation between intellectual and manual labor," now appear in a new light. The texts of Marx himself have not yet been sufficiently interpreted and reconstructed in these terms. And yet in these writings innumerable figures of the aesthetic are, so to speak, at work. From notions of an "aesthetics of production" to the "poetry of the future", from the radical modernism of bourgeois development to the very idea of "free association," from references to Shakespeare and Dante in the original texts as well as in important translations, to the idea that bourgeois politics is nothing but a theatrical stage, the aesthetic has an undeniably prominent place in Marx's thought.

Conversely, Marx's work has also become extremely rich "raw material" for artistic production. From theatre works on Capital to the Chinese attempt to stage this text as an opera, from Sergej Eisenstein's and Alexander Kluge's attempts to make a film of Capital to Rainer Ganahl's reading seminars, from the work of Zachary Formwalt, Pedro Reyes, and Milena Bonilla to that of Phil Collins: these artists are producing Marx as an "aesthetic event."

In short, in Marx the aesthetic and the political are immanently related: this conference aims to explore how.

Possible topics include, but are by no means limited to the following:

- Aesthetic Production in the Early Writings
- Marx and Engels as Historians of Literature
- Modernism in the Manifesto
- Aesthetico-Political Associationism
- Aesthetic Form and Commodity Form?
- Marx's Method and the "Aesthetic Regime of Art"
- Revolutionary Shakespeare
- Monsters and Ghosts
- Eisenstein, Kluge and the Cinematography of Capital
- Staging Capital (Opera, Theatre)
- Brecht's Communist Manifesto
- Images of Marx in Painting and Sculpture
- The Beauty of Communism

Confirmed Speakers:

- Keynote: Boris Groys (NYU)
- Keynote: Terrell Carver (University of Bristol)
- Keynote: Jochen Hörisch (Universität Mannheim)
- Keynote: Kristin Ross (NYU)
- Ruth Sonderegger (Akademe der Bildenden Künste, Wien)
- Sven Lütticken (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam)
- Kati Röttger (Universiteit van Amsterdam)
- Josef Früchtl (Universiteit van Amsterdam)
- Helmar Schramm (Freie Universität, Berlin)
- Clint Burnham (Simon Fraser University, Vancouver)
- Gary Teeple (Simon Fraser University, Vancouver)

Confirmed Artists:

Rainer Ganahl
Phil Collins
Zachary Formwalt
Milena Bonilla
Pedro Reyes

Organising Committee:

Nathaniel Boyd (Jan Van Eyck Academie)
Samir Gandesha (Simon Fraser University)
Johan Hartle (Universiteit van Amsterdam)
Daniel Hartley (Justus-Liebig Universität, Giessen)

Partners:

Universiteit van Amsterdam, Afdeling Wijsbegeerte
Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Institute of the Humanities
Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
Goethe Institut/Amsterdam
Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis
Duitsland Instituut, Amsterdam

The conference fees will be
25 Euros for students/unwaged participants and
55 Euros for waged participants

Please send your abstract (max. 500 words) including information about institutional affiliation and field of scholarship) before January 31st to
mail@marxandtheaesthetic.org

Reference:

CFP: Marx and the Aesthetic (Amsterdam, 10-13 May 12). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 27, 2011 (accessed Jun 10, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/2327>>.