

Politics of Description (Weimar, 4-5 Jun 09)

Maria Muhle

Politics of Description.

Lecture and workshop with Jacques Rancière

4. und 5. Juni 2009

Politics and aesthetics cannot be considered as separate domains that need to be connected a posteriori, but as essentially interrelated from the start. According to Jacques Rancière, politics can't be reduced to the mechanisms and relations of power, and in the same way aesthetics is more than just the forms of literature, theatre or film. In fact, the basic activity of politics is linked to a „partition of the sensible“: to a genuinely aesthetic decision about what is perceivable as part of a community and what is not. Politics happens as a conflict – a conflict between a logic of inequality that links the position occupied by a singularity in the common space to its abilities to speak and act, and a logic of equality understood as a logic of indifference. Equality is thus not the aim of politics, but its axiomatic condition, and it first of all means the possibility to confront two voices, that is, two partitions of the common. This conflict gives way to a re-partition of the sensible, to a redistribution of the roles, activities and positions, that individuals occupy in the common space, and therefore to the partaking of those who have no part. The distinction between those who participate in the political and those who do not is a distinction defined aesthetically, between what is perceived as voice and what is perceived as noise. We can take the French Realist novel as an example: according to Rancière, it contributed to define the social in the 19th century by describing not only the lower classes and undermining the traditional reservations of artistic depiction, but also and decisively by privileging description over narration, by making mute things “speak for themselves”. This technique of describing and connecting is equally at work in the emergence of human sciences and a mode of exerting power that according to Foucault could be called governmental: the attempt to explain and contextualise subjects in terms of their existence in their social, biological or economical surroundings.

Likewise, a politics of aesthetics or of the aesthetical can be

inscribed in various artistic positions, we would like to address during the workshop. Its key hypothesis, borrowed from Rancière, is as follows: The expression “politics of aesthetics” implies that the political impact of artistic form does not rely on its political content (its directly critical potential), neither on its sociological context of emergence. If there is a politics of literature, film or fine arts, it has to be as literature, film or fine arts. In this context, the workshop will investigate whether the formal procedure of description can be a key notion to approach such politics of aesthetics.

We welcome contributions to the workshop discussing descriptive techniques in literature, film and the arts, confronting their potential to influence formations of politics and the political by actualizing a certain form of the common. These can include general discussions of aesthetic concepts of commonness, as well as a discussion of art’s ability to define and align itself with forms of government. They can also be investigations of the question of the political effectivity of description in a way that undermines distinctions of genre, narrative forms and forms of politics.

Politics of Description is hosted by the »Professur für Geschichte und Theorie Künstlicher Welten«, Fakultät Medien, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar.

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The lecture and workshop will be held in English. Please register for the workshop via email.

Programm:

LECTURE

Thursday / June 4th 2009 // Bauhausstrasse 11 / Room 015

19.30

Jacques Rancière (Paris): »Image, Narration. The Tensions of Fiction«

WORKSHOP WITH JACQUES RANCIÈRE

Friday / June 5th 2009 // Berkaer Straße 11 / Seminar room

9.30

Introduction: Maria Muhle / Simon Roloff

10.00–13.00

Francesca Raimondi (Frankfurt a. M.): »Politics of Appearance.

Aesthetics and Politics in Arendt and Rancière«

Matthias Wittmann (Weimar): »Meine verzognen Kinder.

Re-Distributions of the Sensible after Friedrich Schlegel«

Simon Roloff (Weimar): »Idle Description –

Robert Walser's Poetics of the Unemployed«

Chair: Maria Muhle (Weimar)

14.00–16.00

Sulgi Lie (Berlin): »From ›hors-champ‹ to ›hors-lieu‹.

The Unrepresentable in Rossellini, Antonioni and Visconti«

Daniel Eschkötter (Weimar): »Organizing Dissent:

Realism, Defeatism, The Wire«

Chair: Antonia von Schöning (Weimar)

Reference:

CONF: Politics of Description (Weimar, 4-5 Jun 09). In: Arthist.net, May 10, 2009 (accessed Jul 16, 2025),
<<https://arthist.net/archive/31600>>.