Everyday aesthetics and Jacques Rancière: reconfiguring the common field of aesthetics and politics

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ABSTRACT
Aesthetics has been a matter of politics and not only of philosophy from the very beginning. Its subversive power has for a long time been explored mostly in the context of artworks. However, it is only quite recently that the discourse of everyday aesthetics has been reaffirming the potential of aesthetics to affect the perception of the sensible. By indicating the ways that enable to redistribute the sensible, everyday aesthetics engages in going beyond the insurmountable divide between the sensuous and the intelligible, once established by Plato. The article intends to provide a theoretical basis for thinking the potential of everyday aesthetics in a political perspective. By questioning the nature of this redistribution in the Rancière’s thinking and indicating its possible configurations and applications in the present world, we intend to explore more extensively its implications for the discourse of everyday aesthetics. Is everyday aesthetics increasingly adopting a thoroughly nonmetaphysical and rather pragmatist attitude towards the ever-changing reality? Is the distribution of the sensible just another way to think the Platonic divide between the sensuous and the intelligible and their constant conflict in our experience? Is the potential of the politics to redistribute the sensible given in the emerging realm of everyday aesthetics. By exploring the connexion between politics and aesthetics, the article demonstrates the potential of Rancière’s theory for launching new explorations in the field of everyday aesthetics.

Introduction
This article will examine some significant aspects of the overlapping and fusion of aesthetics and politics, paying special attention to Rancière’s later works, which endeavoured to elucidate this relationship. By exploring the meaning of the political and its singular unfoldment in the context of Western democracy, I will first try to show how the Politics, as Rancière names it, might be considered a pre-condition for an aesthetic revolution to take place. Second, I will explore the politics of aesthetics by considering the notion of the sensible and its implications. This will be done by identifying the aesthetic regime as the very becoming of the aesthetic revolution. The notion of “aesthetic regime” could also be successfully employed to clarify what is at stake in the wide but confused realm of aesthetic experience, which relates back to more everyday aesthetic concerns and practices. The exploration begins with the question posed by Rancière himself: „[h]ow can the notion of “aesthetics” as a specific experience lead at once to the idea of a pure world of art and of the self-suppression of art in life, to the tradition of avant-garde radicalism and to the aestheticization of common experience?”1 This way of redistributing the whole concept of aesthetics is an obvious albeit problematic extension of the approach taken by Friedrich Schiller in his famous Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen,2 which involved the double implication of the autonomy of artistic experience and the heteronomy of aesthetic experience proper in life, the latter embracing a specific “promise of politics”.

There is indeed an increasing interest in aesthetics that deliberately distances or even frees itself from aesthetic discourse primarily centred on art. For instance, the interest in looking at the specific mode of experiencing a football match and its supposed aesthetic elements (movements of bodies, rules prescribing certain behaviours that still leave the course of the whole soccer drama undetermined, specific affects produced, etc.) is by no means less important than the interest taken in different forms of art and could provide a deeper knowledge of the transformations taking place in contemporary society. The changes affecting the discourse of aesthetics are manifold (from the realm of everyday aesthetics to the very specific analyses of aesthetic experience) and bear witness to complex political and social discourses that are often consolidated under the diffuse label of post—postmodern, postcritical, poststructuralist or postideological. Furthermore, these tendencies are symptoms of a certain distancing between aesthetic tradition and its central categories (the beautiful etc.). The politics of post-movements has been called

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into question by a variety of authors and texts, including La querelle de l’art contemporain by Marc Jimenez or Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics by Hinderliter, Kaizen et al. Jacques Rancière has been at the forefront of this counter-movement, arguing that aesthetics as a discourse, far from allegedly coming to an end promulgated by these post-movements, should rather be analysed in terms of its inherent ruptures and redistributions.

It is this very confusion about its status that has affected, motivated, and transformed a large part of the aesthetic discourse in recent decades, including its possible implications for politics. Fortunately, aesthetics has not lost its appeal despite severe and constant pressure to rethink both its means and scope. Leaving the widely debated question of art and its political engagements deliberately aside, it is more tempting to explore the relationship between aesthetics and politics in a radically different way. This amounts to analysing the sensorium common to aesthetics and politics, especially from the standpoint of the aesthetics of the everyday. Thus, I come to the central argument of the article: it is through the realm of the everyday, through its most basic perceptions, experiences and events that politics operates as aesthetics. I claim that aesthetics, understood as a specific construction, distribution and perception of the sensible operates as an instance of politics, susceptible to penetrate bodies, languages and institutions. Instead of taking refuge in abstract reasoning about the relationship of the perceiving subject to the perceived object, this approach mobilizes our everyday experience and endeavours to account for its political structure, proving that aesthetics is not so much a matter of individual taste, choices or values, but a matter of social and collective transformations that have a steady and powerful impact on the individual. By insisting on the cultural contingency of aesthetic practices, but also on their political determination, the focus is set on processes and actions that fall only to some degree into the category of the aesthetic. Thus understood, aesthetics does not necessarily refer back to art, but focuses on actions and activities that are part of a more general politics. This politics defines us not only as human beings in the generic sense, but also as processes of subjectivation. Politics proceeds through subjectivations: for example, individuals rarely adopt and follow overarching narratives and ideologies directly and connect them to their personal integrity. Rather, these narratives and ideologies affect us by being transposed into the sensuous. It is through this transposition that politics becomes aesthetic and aesthetics becomes political.

A recent approach by Jill Bennett, for example, envisages this new version of aesthetics as primarily "practical". By practical aesthetics she understands "the study of (art as a) means of apprehending the world via sense-based and affective processes—processes that touch bodies intimately and directly but that also underpin the emotions, sentiments and passions of public life". In this way, her approach avoids tedious discussions about the status of art as well as meta-philosophical discussions concerning the nature of aesthetic values. While recognizing an art-bound character of this aesthetics, she succeeds in charging practical aesthetics with the task of exploring the field of politics, which unfolds as events that serve as reference points for the aesthetics of affects.

Gavin Grindon, in his introduction to Aesthetics and Radical Politics, delineates two basic tendencies that question the interaction between aesthetics and politics. According to him, the blending of aesthetics with politics can be represented in two basic forms: it either "seeks to aestheticize politics or rather, to treat the aesthetic as a directly political terrain, in a fashion which is dismissed out-of-hand by Western Marxist schools of thought, which have tended to dominate radical academic writing on politics and aesthetics". By introducing a series of studies about Jacques Rancière’s notion of aesthetics, Grindon also sets the stage for the Ranciérien concept of politics. It appears that the essential correlation between aesthetics and politics has, for the first time, been clearly affirmed: instead of examining aesthetics and politics as separate fields, I will explore how they overlap and bring forth new forms and objects unknown to contemporary aesthetics studies. From the specific sensorium of the Soviet collective farms (that tried to implement the formal requirements of the Marxist-Leninist ideology) to the globalized capitalist economy (with a plethora of material and immaterial goods characterizing its consumerist aesthetics and overall politics), I come to the understanding that our sense perception is politically structured by definition.

**The political determination of aesthetics**

Nowadays, more than ever, aesthetics is an essential component of politics and even economics; politics is not only increasingly aestheticized, as remarked Walter Benjamin in his classic essay, but it is also aesthetic in the sense that its character has been profoundly transformed by its staging through media. Politics is not conceptualised; it is visualized. From street banners to television advertisements, it must be showed-off and staged, it must be realized in the sensible. Politics is not so much a matter of discussing and doing, as it is a matter of fantasizing, promising, representing and reproducing—on a deeper level it is sensed rather than thought. Far from being kept apart from politics, aisthesis seems to be the very medium of politics: politics is what is sensed and what is felt. Politics is the texture of aesthetic. The inherently utopian, platonic imperative to distinguish and keep apart aesthetics from politics is
doomed to disappear. Contemporary politics is exhibited; it has no essence and cannot transcend the sensuous and phenomenal. This platonic imperative primarily reduces aesthetics to thinking about art or beauty, thereby reducing politics to governance, although this governance has been interpreted, especially by Plato and Aristotle as a matter of art, namely, an art of governance. This view is supported by the claim that aesthetics has to be considered a realm of its own, adjacent but still exterior to that of politics.

Although aesthetics as a concept and a specific field of study is a modern invention, its story reaches back to Plato’s struggle with the sophists. This is where the clash between the intelligible and the sensible—or the reasoning and the aisthesis—is explicitly conceptualized for the first time in the history of Western philosophical aesthetics. From the very beginning, aesthetics was conceived as the uncanny intrusion of the sensible in the form of outrageous and anarchist poetry. Plato stigmatized it as the utmost, though unrecognized, threat to the political order, capable of endangering the essential rationality of the ideal state. Implying the chaos of the becoming (reflected in a concept, although not yet torn apart from the sensible, as emphasized by Heraclitus), aisthesis emerges as a fundamentally ambiguous and even tumultuous realm. This ambiguity, played out by the ever-changing character of the sensible that refuses any self-identity (Heraclitus’ panta rhei), is best exemplified in the figure it takes when related to politics. It serves both as a suspicious ally (the political scene unfolding on the marketplace or agora, implicitly involving a certain anarchic or uncontrollable element) and as a hateful enemy (space and time, privatized by citizens, likely to escape governance) of the political order. The ambiguous border between what can be integrated into the state and what must be excluded as fundamentally hostile to the (good) political order can be defined as the initial challenge of the political.

The attempt to dissociate aesthetics from art is mainly a contemporary phenomenon. From philosophical aesthetics, considered to be the ultimate judge of meaning and status in artwork, we come to aesthetic discourses that serve to accompany, interpret, and clarify artistic practices rather than found or legitimize them. By developing a concept of aesthetics that has been ignored both by the ethical regime as well as the representational regime, Jacques Rancière identifies the realm of aesthetics with the aesthetic regime (of art)—a regime where political potential finally reveals the aesthetic as an autonomous domain of cognition. While Plato submitted art to the task of orienting and legitimizing the politics of the sensible, Aristotle identified art with a certain formal articulation that was supposed to provide the realm of artistic practices with specific rules and principles. Taking a critical stance towards the Anglo-American aesthetics (from John Searle to Arthur C. Danto6) and its desire to free art from its servitude to philosophy and especially to its steadfast metaphysical ambitions, Rancière argues that this pretended emancipation has never taken place. Art, far from rediscovering its own autonomous conditions of creativity, is constantly subjected to the expertise of the critic, the spectator, and the expert.

Yet the political aspect of aesthetics is not to be found primarily in the gaze that the critic or the spectator uses to judge something as worthy or unworthy of being called work of art.7 How could this political aspect be defined? It is not this specific gaze that legitimizes a work of art. It is rather a critical attitude that inoculates dissensus into the fiction of the ‘real’ and re-articulates “connections between signs and images, images and times, and signs and spaces, framing a given sense of reality, a given “commonsense”.”8 This is what Rancière calls une existence suspensive (literally a suspensive existence)—becoming that brings forth a change9 in what we perceive and experience. The example that Rancière uses is that of literature capable of modifying our perception of what society or being-together (following Jean-Luc Nancy) means. What makes literature (and indeed art in general) progressive or future-oriented is the way it introduces heteronomy and challenges our perception of the community. It would be inaccurate to consider critical or subversive art as directly political, turned explicitly against the established power. Rather, critical literature and art in general always function as micro-politics that undermine the prevailing consensus (as Rancière claims, it “means precisely that the sensory is given as univocal”), disintegrating the consensus, bringing along new perceptions, new visibilities... Aesthetic intervention takes the form here of acting on the conditions of perception, instead of acting immediately on the object of perception.

Aesthetics may thus be presented not only as a general theory exploring the aesthetically valuable, but as a (political) practice that comes to question the meaning and function of society. Rancière, by referring to the “democratic paradox”, aims at indicating the inherently problematic nature of democratic politics. Pointing out the ambiguous character of today’s democratic order, he shows how democracy brings together two conflicting definitions—democracy as democratic government, or democracy as democratic life. The essential heterogeneity of democracy is best exemplified by totalitarian politics that often attempt to simulate certain features of democracy or just act as democracy, while failing to provide any real choice, any heterogeneity. For example, it was certainly one of the key features of Soviet politics to convey an impression of its inherently
democratic character, whereas in fact the principle of democracy served to emphasize the subordination of masses to the ideology.

The ambiguity proper to democracy is certainly a feature that has been there from the very beginning. Socrates’ emblematic trial forms a good although tragic instance of this essential confusion—and Plato takes it into account when condemning democracy as a sensuous and therefore imperfect embodiment of the ideal form of politics. But this ambiguity is also an aesthetic feature in the sense that it characterizes the very here and now of the democratic situation; existing in space and time causes an inexorable contamination as well as the decay of the (ethical) principles of governance. It not only represents the imperfect character of democratic governance (liable to break down at any moment, depending on how confused the situation is), but also the essentially impermanent reality of democratic society in general. This vulnerability is therefore an essential part of the democratic aisthesis. Rancière’s political aesthetics can thus be inscribed upon a broader picture of the Kantian legacy, as it aims “to point out the aesthetic dimension of the political experience”.11

The clue to the conception that links aesthetics to politics has been suggested by Rancière in the essay What does democracy mean? The democratic excess—the cause of the ever-threatening decay—is translated there into the following terms: “[t]he contemporary way of stating the “democratic paradox” is thus: democracy as a form of government is threatened by democracy as a form of social and political life and so the former must repress the latter”. Rancière’s point consists in emphasizing that mastering democracy has nothing to do with democracy itself, and that mastering democracy is similar to the Platonic gesture of establishing the ideal that transcends the sensuous, which is considered the imperfect and therefore inferior copy of the perfect model. Democratic excess occurs when the sensuous expression falls short of the ideal and is unable to embody it; instead, the ideal is regularly consumed as something that confers meaning to the sensuous expression but does not coincide with it.

Does democracy stand in a specific relationship with political aesthetics? Against Plato, Rancière vigorously endorses the view that “democracy is neither a form of government nor a form of social life. [It] is the institution of politics as such, of politics as a paradox”.13 The paradox of democratic politics does not consist in the preposterous involvement of every-one and no one that results in a constant struggle for power and, subsequently, in a dynamic (not necessarily progressive) character of democracy. The specificity of democratic rule consists in the fact that “the power of rule in a community” has no ground, no arkhè; it precludes all pre-determined distributions of positions because it precludes all qualifications for ruling. Democracy does not mean that everybody is in charge, but that there is no pre-established set of institutions, groups, individuals. In other terms, it is not grounded in some kind of transcendent idea of democracy, as there is no universal pattern or model that guarantees its perfect functioning. In a way, democracy can be taken as an example of ongoing aesthetic revolution. Paradoxically, this is also a weakness, and Plato in his overwhelmingly suspicious attitude towards the sophists is surely the one who took meticulous notice of it: democracy is a realm of appearance “produced by the sensations of pleasure and pain manipulated by rhetoricians and sophists...”.14 This paradox lies at the very heart of the conception of democracy: the people, prone to easy manipulation, is a perfect example of the ambiguous power of the sensuous that may serve both to lead in the (supposed) right direction, but also to mislead. In so-called democratic societies, this ambiguity is never eliminated, the recent success of extreme-right and populist politics providing a good example of how the claims to transfigure and recode the field of the sensible (construction of fences of all sorts, segregation of people founded on their origin) has been met with increasing approval.

Rancière, in order to account for the radical dis-sensus on the nature of politics, provides a triple articulation of its functioning. The first of them—the logic of police—denotes the pre-established distribution of the sensible. In Plato’s ideal state, the logic of police is the logic that governs the distribution of time and space; for example, Plato imposes a specific distribution of time for every member of society: “[t]he workman must be a professional at the call of his job; his job will not wait till he has leisure to spare for it”.15 In other words, the workman only specializes in what he does professionally and has no time to participate in governing. He is thus unable to actively participate in the (re-)distribution of the sensible, as he is excluded on the basis of missing time. Aristotle offers a slightly different interpretation of the distribution of the sensible by ruling out the right to participate in the common happiness for those who are not citizens. He bluntly affirms that the purpose of the state does not include those who are not counted as its citizens: “a state’s purpose is not merely to provide a living but to make a life that is good. Otherwise it might be made up of slaves or animals other than man, and that is impossible, because slaves and animals do not participate in happiness, nor in a life that involves choice”.16 Thus neither slaves nor animals are allowed to have part in the community qua common aisthesis, they find their affects neglected and their happiness refused. Happiness, instead of being everybody’s inalienable right, is perceived as a privilege that is not part of the
commonly sensible. In today’s democratic society, it is not totally different: even if it seems that the consumer society provides people with sufficient time to enjoy the products they can afford, the excess of leisure time is only apparent and is constantly reduced by new forms of time consuming practices.

The second term—the logic of the politics proper to democracy—is precisely what thwarts the logic of the police and of fixed distribution of the sensible and allows the political to emerge (let us imagine these same slaves and animals liberated and admitted the minimum amount of rights; or in our situation, the “illegal” immigrants allotted the right to freely choose their place of stay). Politics is thus the interruption of the *status quo* and the emergence of freedom and equality through a struggle. It amounts to establish simultaneously the contingency of any social hierarchy, of any distribution of the sensible. The third term—the political—thus refers to the common element of the *demos*, despite the status of the individual in terms of birth, wealth, power or education. The political thus denotes the very possibility of dissensus, of evicting the alleged ideological line between appearance and reality. This is where politics actually begins: as Rancière states in *Ten Theses on Politics*, “[p]olitics is a specific break with the logic of the *arkhê*,” or as stated elsewhere, “[p]olitics is the sphere of activity of a common that can only ever be contentious…”. This statement of the inexorable contentiousness of democracy serves as a major characterization of the political *aisthesis* and leads to another one that makes of democracy the privileged locus of politics, if by politics we are to understand the egalitarian set of conditions. As Rancière specifies, “[d]emocracy is not a political regime. As a rupture in the logic of the *arkhê*, that is, of the anticipation of ruling in its disposition, it is the very regime of politics itself as a form of relationship that defines a specific subject”. In other terms, democracy is an aesthetic regime where the nature of the politics is essentially non-grounded, it possesses no essentialist set of principles for distributing the people or *demos* as the subject of politics. It ensues from this that the regime of politics suggests not only another approach to the political, but also a new type of subjectivation.

What is its non-ground or grounding force if it has no ground at all? It is grounded in the political, in “the power of any one set of people”, in the here and now that is debatable and subject to constant redistributions, following the changing nature of the sensible itself. That is why Plato downgrades democracy to the level of anarchy—it has no grounding other than the sensuous reality that has lost its appeal and connexion with the idea and thwarts the ideal qualification. To put it otherwise, democracy has its non-ground in the sensuous or in the dissensuous excess of the *aisthesis*, in the constantly floating and never-the-same configuration of what presents itself to our senses, in the fleeting configuration of power relations that constantly reconfigure and re-inscribe the whole and its fragments. Interpreting this here and now as *aisthesis*, in terms of the moving and changing reality of bodies that Heraclitus was first to conceptualize in philosophic terms as what is “real” (which means, a change), enables us to see that the political moves in the immanence of the here and now, whereas the police acts as the securing force of the (pseudo-) universal and the transcendent, seeking for some idealized model or figure to contain and to cover them. The unmasking of the ground *qua* non-ground or void is where politics, proper to the democratic regime, converges with aesthetics.

By showing how democracy is the very requisite of (egalitarian) politics to take place, Rancière overtly criticizes the Platonic gesture of foreclosing democracy in favour of a political order (of the police or policy) where decisions are made by the few. This way of imposing democratic order as the only arena in which politics can happen explicitly bears on aesthetics as well. The whole realm of the aesthetic (extending from particular artistic practices to the most commonplace day-to-day aesthetic experiences) may be accounted in this sense as the locus of the exercise of politics. This politics, instead of deploying on a grand scale, unfolds as micro-politics that secretly hollows out the established distribution of the sensible. But how could we imagine this exercise taking place? How could we understand the exercise of politics in the most general terms of aesthetic practices that are closely related to the everyday and the ordinary? And could these strategies of micro-politics also be applicable to practical forms and instances of aesthetics, given that all universalist ground for grounding the matters of taste has to be declared obsolete and therefore inexorably missing?

The aesthetic as the singular realm of the exercise of politics

We are probably living in the era when the *aisthesis* is a privileged, though somewhat unacknowledged focus of politics. The categories of time and space as the determining elements of our sensory experience are steadily subjected to an increasing set of agents and influences. The network of information opens up and provides us with an endless flow of ‘information’ coming from an endless and essentially diverse number of resources. Though the time of ideologies and grand narratives seems to definitely be over, the
distribution of the sensible is getting more complex than ever and prone to be governed by new laws and rules.

Moreover, the limit between the actual and the virtual is being blurred, new forms of sensing and being affected are invented. New medias, in particular, impact the partition of time and space by shaping and reshaping our perceptions, sensations and affects. As we tend to spend more time and energy in the virtual time-space of the internet and social media, we might be said to witness a radical change of what we understand as the being-in-common. So the political and the social impact on the aesthetic—the distribution of what and how we perceive takes into account our involvement in the being-in-common. Social media can be considered a sign of a new era in which almost everybody (under the condition of having access to appropriate technical devices) has a specific functional access to the public space and can to some extent participate in reshaping this space. Virtually everybody has the legitimacy to be included in the network of news, information, social relationships and other types of virtual processing and thus has a virtual part in what is going on. This simplified access to the public space also has its downsides: although we can easily access information and sometimes even influence policy-making through direct action taken on the internet, we severely underestimate the fact that the same internet enables virtually unrestricted control of relations, attitudes and other aspects of the private sphere.

Although democracy is increasingly mingled with the power of the media and of the proliferation of images, it enables for the first time a new strategy for conceptualizing aesthetics without dissolving it in the subjectivity of taste. Rancière sees “democratic practice as the inscription of the part of those who have no part […] Such an inscription is made by subjects who are “newcomers”, who allow new objects to appear as common concerns, and new voices to appear and to be heard”. The inscription of newcomers and their involvement in politics converges in the common sensorium and constantly modifies it. As Rancière emphasizes, “[a] political community is not the realization of a common essence or the essence of the common. It is the sharing of what is not given as being in-common: between the visible and the invisible, the near and the far, the present and the absent”. This is what introduces a shift in the democratic sensorium and this shift is not only political, it is also aesthetic in the sense that it redefines the very constituency of the sensorium.

By introducing the somewhat awkward term of *distribution of the sensible* (in French *partage du sensible* which effectively implies a fundamental contingency of this distribution), Rancière intends not only to rethink the way we are involved in social life and eventually in politics as political subjects, but also to draw attention to the implication that the character and circumstances of this distribution are far from being objectively and unanimously given. The distribution of the sensible is precisely a matter of disensus (one could ask whether this disensus has been partly inspired by the Marxian notion of class struggle as struggle for power although Marx replaces this disensus with the conflictual and contingent antagonism of egotistic needs to be satisfied in the social and not in the political realm). But how should we understand this complex term of distributing? Rancière himself defines it by referring to partaking and calling “distribution of the sensible” a generally implicit law that defines the forms of partaking by first defining the modes of perception in which they are inscribed. Distribution is precisely a matter of structuring and creating the appearance of the sensed in a specifically distributed way. By insisting on the double meaning of distributing and taking part (the French word *partage* enables and even imposes this double reading). Rancière emphasizes our political implication in the realm of the perceived because what appears is a matter of collective experience. Far from being imposed or applied to the politics as Walter Benjamin conceived it, the aesthetic appears to be implicitly contained in the politics, as the latter involves both perceiving and partaking, and *vice versa*, politics is aesthetic as it determines what can be seen and said.

This double meaning of perceiving and partaking, of partitioning and sharing is what intimately links politics to aesthetics in Rancière’s thinking. It follows that aesthetics is not a wise and informed discourse on arts, reflecting on the nature and legitimacy of its procedures and distancing itself from the sensible. Neither is it a discourse aimed at theorizing on aesthetic criteria or promoting aesthetic values. Instead, aesthetics means primarily how we (the collective is to be privileged over the individual) sense or see, hear, touch and so forth. And simultaneously, it means how we become moved and affected by what we sense. It is this dual character of *aisthesis*—sensing and making sense (or being affected in a specific way what we sense ceases to be a matter of contingency and starts to make sense, to be a part)—it enables aesthetics to converge with politics. Understood in this way, aesthetics is not a discipline, but a mode of articulation of the sensible, including senses, thinking, feeling and acting. It offers a knot “by which thoughts, practices and affects are instituted and assigned a territory or a “specific” object”. For example, any specific political situation reflects a specific sensorium and its defining conditions that determine why, how and when we perceive anything or not. The poverty of the Third World or the catastrophic deforestation affecting tropical forests and species living in these forests does not appear to be
part of the perceived when it comes to boosting economic growth or increasing the production of goods in so-called highly developed countries.

By understanding aesthetics as the overall mode of articulation of “the sensible”, Rancière confers a new meaning to what has been previously considered a sophisticated exegesis of different modes of artistic experience. Instead of defining aesthetics in terms of an independent discipline, Rancière relates aesthetics to the concept of regime: aesthetics is a specific regime of making sense of the sensible (it follows the division of regimes that Rancière holds as central when considering art: there is the “aesthetic regime” of modern times, in contrast to the “ethical regime” developed by Plato and the “representative regime” associated with Aristotle). With this move, the Rancièrian notion of aesthetics presents common features not only with Schiller’s project of aesthetic education, but also with Baumgarten’s project aiming to found and promote the knowledge of the sensible as natural aesthetics.

It is worth reminding that Baumgarten was not only the inventor of “aesthetics” in itself, but also the one who came to understand that the whole realm of sensuous experience had been steadily passed over in silence, as though it had not existed and did not deserve any particular attention at all. In a way, the modern world came to discover the realm of the sensible and its immanent diversity and richness step by step, as it came to understand its convergence with the realm of discourse, as it was deployed in different languages. A certain line of continuity binds together Baumgarten’s idea that the sensible cannot be exhausted in rational discourse, Hume’s idea that our values and judgments concerning taste are inevitably rooted in the experience of the sensible, and Kant’s idea that aesthetic experience is, in the end, susceptible to rising above the particular and the subjective. Furthermore, from Baumgarten’s idea of aesthetics qua science of the sensible, we come to apprehend with Rancière the realm of aisthesis as essentially politically articulated. It is important to bear in mind that this aisthesis is strictly related to how we conceive of ourselves as subjects of a certain society or community. Aesthetics therefore embraces the political by referring to politics as a way of (re) distributing the sensible in the contingent space of being-in-common. No action and no perception are meaningful in themselves, they are meaningful only to the degree that they are seen as becoming part of the politics that confers meaning to them. Ben Highmore, for example, has noticed how taste appears as a certain orchestration of the sensible, emphasizing certain values and hiding others.

Rancièrian aesthetics, especially due to its political implications, partly moves away from Kantian aesthetics, although it preserves and further develops the fundamental intuition of Kantian aesthetics, namely that the aesthetic is what pertains to “a priori forms of sensibility”. Indeed, not only is Rancière’s approach linked to artistic practices, but it also enables us to put a finger on “aesthetic effects” that are transversal and potentially extend from artistic practices to a variety of aesthetic experiences that are not necessarily related to art at all. Thus Rancière’s approach privileges art but does not break its continuity with the common sensorium. As Sophie Berrebie states, “in the aesthetic regime, art is constantly caught in a tension between being specifically art and merging with other forms of activity and being”. The classical (aesthetic) regime is defined by a canon of rules and norms that inexorably distinguish between art and non-art, whereas the aesthetic regime is characterized by the absence of ground in the sense that it does not recognize any distribution of the sensible as preliminarily given. In a sense, its dynamic is polemical and dissensual, perpetually shifting the border of art and non-art. By claiming that “the autonomy of aesthetic experience was taken as the principle of a new form of collective life, precisely because it was a place where the usual hierarchies which framed everyday life were withdrawn”, the Rancièrian approach allows the distinction between art and life to be effaced, as the most ordinary and common experience also falls into the category of aesthetic experience. This does not imply that any day-to-day aesthetic experience necessarily enjoys the same status as art. Non-art is posited as the existential condition of art, or as Peter Hallward says, “[i]n the aesthetic regime, in short, art endures as art insofar as it remains fundamentally implicated in non-art, or life”.

The aesthetic regime does not imply that art and life are taken as synonymous, but they grow out of the same soil, that of aesthetic experience of time and space that mingles practical intentions with playful ones and temporarily suspends their distinction. What we regard as aesthetically relevant is a matter of distribution of the sensible that comprises both aesthetic and political aspects: thinking of our lives as both aesthetically rich and politically meaningful amounts to fighting for recognition and autonomy. And this fight can follow two different lines or two different politics of aesthetics: one of them emphasizes the specificity of the artistic experience, the other fuses aesthetic experience into life in the Nietzschean sense. This shift opens up new perspectives for a different consideration of the sensible and its subsequent perception. Both perspectives can be interpreted in the framework of a new experience of time and space, of speech and visibility. This also provides a new understanding of the political sensorium that is neither representational nor ethico-subjective, but aesthetic in the most basic sense of
the word, involving the capacity to discern something rather than overlook it. New objects of perception and new fields of action can thus be introduced: for instance, in the age of the internet, social interaction produces new affects and may lead to new affectivities that did not exist before; new elements of culture are discovered that modify the way we understand human culture in general. Finally, new relationships with nature are discovered that modify the way we relate ourselves to the natural world.

Nevertheless, the possible fusion of art and life and their convergence should not be seen in the context of Romanticism that prescribed a total aestheticization of life and eventually foreshadowed its becoming-art. The coming-together of art and life should rather mean that there is no un-aesthetic life, as there is no pure art (l'art pour l'art) and that aesthetic experience continually pervades life. As Rancière emphasizes, in the aesthetic regime art „is always aestheticized, meaning that it is always posited as a "form of life".\textsuperscript{36} The aesthetic revolution that considers the life of the ordinary equally meaningful, both in itself and for art’s sake, is possible to the extent that it adheres to the emancipatory politics of the senses. It moves in the Stendhalian vein by affirming that the noise of church bells and water pumps belong equally to the realms of art and ordinary life. Leaving aside John Dewey’s approach that affirms the continuity between art and life and makes of the latter the very source of the former, we can explore this question as eminently political by claiming that these two modes of experience are in fact part of the same politics of aesthetics. Whether the sound of a water pump or church bells belongs first of all to artistic practices or to aesthetic experience in general is a political question that either provides the supposed insignificance noises with significant framing (submitting the everyday to certain artistic patterns that are needed to make sense of the ordinary) or sets everyday aesthetic experiences apart from artistic practices by conferring emancipatory politics to non-artistic experiences. Fulfilling the task of “aesthetic education” or interpreting the most insignificant daily experiences as meaningful might lead to a radical redistribution of the sensible and its emancipation vis-à-vis the supremacy of the rigid artistic form, imposed by what Rancière calls the representational or classical regime.

Although Rancière deliberately chooses to include the noises of ordinary life, made discernible and recognizable by the aesthetic revolution, in the aesthetic regime, he is nevertheless suspicious of the tendency to eliminate the entire border between art and life and to declare their final fusion. It is not only because he assumes with Adorno that poiesis and aisthesis can be brought together most eminently in art and its singular practices, without agreeing with the latter that any crossing of the border necessarily ends up promoting the pretended compromise between commodity culture and aestheticized life.\textsuperscript{37} As Rancière indicates in his essay The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes, this fusion could eventually sign the death of art altogether, in the pivotal form of its becoming-life. Nevertheless, the question still remains: could poiesis and aisthesis be successfully related in something that goes beyond art, in the affirmation of a new sensibility that frees itself from utopian promises of art and whose sole outcome would be to make our lives aesthetically more meaningful? For Rancière, “[b]oth industrial production and artistic creation are committed to doing something on top of what they do—to creating not only objects but a sensorium, a new partition of the perceptible”.\textsuperscript{38} There is no doubt that industrial production has been more than successful in transforming our sensorium: the volume of the contemporary urban landscape has increased exponentially over the recent decades and continues to modify the way we perceive our relationship to nature. From now on, another urban politics and aesthetics is needed in order to counter-balance the catastrophic increase of urban deserts and to move towards a more balanced and life-friendly aesthetics. In other terms, the new politics of aesthetics needs another politics of poiesis and this is where a non-artistic poiesis deflects from the artistic poiesis.

The aesthetic regime precludes the distribution of the sensible as the realm of universal nomos. Henceforth, the whirl of the wind or the song of an animal are not discerned as mere meaningless noises that have no place in the established distribution of the sensible. They purport to be aesthetically relevant and politically correct. And when the whirl of the wind is transmuted into music, it might be asked whether this blending is an effect of art or just a contingent but nevertheless meaningful sound brought into music in the framework of a specific aesthetic regime that miraculously raises it above the incessant noise of the everyday, rendering it audible for those who virtually ignored it. Nevertheless, the discernment of these noises is not a matter of pure contingency as one has to be to some degree attuned to them in order to be able to perceive them. That is why Rancière, following Schiller’s call, proclaims „the new education of senses informed by the insignificant noises and events of ordinary life, the type of education becoming of a young republican”,\textsuperscript{39} thus drawing our attention to the fact that the politics of aesthetics is already at work from the very beginning of what we discern, intervening in the form of micropolitics that articulates what we feel, think and do. This new politics of aesthetics, probably being the outcome of what Rancière calls the aesthetic revolution, entails not only a new understanding of artistic...
practices, but also a new sensibility towards the modes of aesthetic experience that pervade our most ordinary lives.

Rancière attempts to think of aesthetic experience less in terms of its content and more in terms of its conditions that articulate its fractures, discontinuities, and reconfigurations. Therefore, it is tempting to reinterpret Jacques Rancière’s approach, claiming that the aesthetic regime is not primarily related to art, but implies that the aesthetic regime of art is first of all a sophisticated version of aesthetic regime of life, aimed at intensifying our everyday aisthesis and creating new modes of aesthetic experience. Furthermore, aesthetics can also be understood as an overall regime of the sensible that not only dissolves the fundamental distinction between the extraordinary realm of art and the ordinary realm of life, but declares its ineffectiveness from the very beginning. Thus a new politics of aesthetics amounts to account for aisthesis that refuses to see the ordinary and the everyday as essentially meaningless.

By returning to Stendhal and its water pump and church bells, one rediscovers the hidden contradiction contained in any theory of aesthetics that aims to distance art and the supposedly insignificant noise of the ordinary aesthetic experience. Rancière resumes with, “[f]ar from revealing the “confusion” of aesthetic theory, Stendhal’s water pump testifies precisely to something that this [aesthetic] theory strives in its way to interpret: the ruin of the old canons that set art objects apart from those of ordinary life, the new form—at once more intimate and more enigmatic—taken by the relation between the conscious productions of art and the involuntary forms of sensory experience in which their effects are manifest”. Preserving for aesthetics its transversality that connects the most diverse forms of art to the modes of the most ordinary aesthetic experience, Rancière suggests that the aesthetic regime is politics with no fundamental distinction, as it is not commanded by hierarchies but led by egalitarian principles that makes no aesthetic experience transcendent in regard to what we experience on a daily basis. This is in agreement with his political theory that considers equality to be the most fundamental element of politics.

The aesthetic regime, enlarged to involve the elements of everyday aesthetic experience, pushes to radicalize the agenda of the aesthetic revolution. In Rancière’s view, aesthetic revolution is primarily associated with a major change in the 19th century that concerned not only aesthetic values but affected “the partition of the spheres of existence” most of all. It is a revolution that brings along new ways to account for aesthetic experience. To play an active role in this revolution means to constantly invent and reinvent politics by displacing the divide between what could be perceived or done. For example, walking in an urban environment can be just a healthy alternative to sitting (in the office, car etc.); at the same time, it is decidedly an act of aesthetic politics whenever we consciously or unconsciously try to avoid contributing to excessive pollution and climate change by preferring an alternative means of moving around, thereby directly influencing the aesthetic aspect of the urban sensorium. By this very act, we reorganise and redistribute the sensible, demonstrating our preference for more environment friendly attitudes.

This politics of aesthetics is a fundamental feature of the aesthetic regime that extends from art to other domains of life, to other forms of daily activity. Aesthetics has something to do with the paradox that seizes both artistic practices and the affective disorder of the senses in general—the disorder caused by the noise of the water pump and its unfathomable meaning. Thinking this paradox is a sustained effort to grasp the reciprocal discontinuity, but also the eventual continuity “between the sublimes of art and the noise of a water pump, between a veiled timbre of chords and the promise of a new humanity”. Aesthetics, touching upon sensory experience and its modes of articulation and functioning, therefore appears as a real promise of a continual redistribution of the experience of the sensible.

The implications of Rancière’s theory of the politics of aesthetics are certainly manifold and need to be explored further. The present article claimed that Rancière’s account, even if primarily directed towards the realm of art, can also easily adapt to the analysis of everyday aesthetics. In an era in which commodity culture along with the leisure and entertainment industries is the major source of aesthetic pleasure, no one mode of aesthetic experience deserves to be raised above others or considered inherently more valuable than any other. The same goes for the senses: no sense is to be ruled out as insignificant or as inferior. Aesthetics, more than ever, has to take into account the entire realm of aesthetic experience, its essential pervasiveness as well as multiplicity. By diversifying the sources of aesthetic experience as well as the affects resulting from it, we come to redefine the entire notion of aesthetic experience—any single perception, from the noise of the water pump to the colour of a screen may fall into the category of meaningful and observable aisthesis. This is where the politics of aesthetics cuts into the very heart of the everyday aesthetics and culture: what looks, sounds or smells meaningful to us is a matter of some essential involvement, be it subjective, social, environmental or some other kind. The foregoing analysis mainly serves to draw a general theoretical outline of some key features of the discourse that
might be called political aesthetics. Nevertheless, it stands only at the beginning of more detailed research to come.

Notes

1. “The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes”, in Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics, p. 116.
2. Lettres sur l’éducation esthétique de l’homme/Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen, Paris: Aubier, 2001.
3. (cf.) Rancière enlists as its central elements pure thought, sensible affects and artistic practices (Introduction to Aesthetics and Its Discontents, p. 3), but later adds social and political distinctions as probably the most pertinent features of this confusion in which aesthetics has been caught.
4. Practical Aesthetics: Events, Affects and Art after 9/11, London/New York: I.B.Tauris, 2012, p. 3.
5. Introduction to Aesthetics and Radical Politics, ed. G. Grindon, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008, p. vii.
6. “La communauté et son dehors”, in Aux bords du politique, pp. 181–2.
7. “Art”, as (cf.) Rancière understands it, is not the unifying concept of different arts, “It is the dispositif that renders them visible”, “Aesthetics as Politics”, in Aesthetics and Its Discontents, p. 23.
8. “The Paradoxes of Political Art”, in Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics, p. 149.
9. “Elle introduit donc nécessairement un dissensus, un trouble dans l’expérience perceptive, dans le rapport du dicible au visible.” (Aux bords du politique, p. 191).
10. “The Paradoxes of Political Art”, in Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics, p. 149.
11. “From Politics to Aesthetics”, in Jacques Rancière: Aesthetics, Politics, Philosophy, Paragraph, p. 13.
12. “Does Democracy Mean Something?”, in Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics, p. 47.
13. “Does Democracy Mean Something?”, in Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics, p. 50.
14. “The Beginning of Politics”, in Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy, p. 10.
15. The Republic, Part II, p. 60 (370 b-c).
16. The Politics, Part III/ix, p. 196.
17. “Ten Theses on Politics”, in Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics, p. 30.
18. “The Beginning of Politics”, in Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy, p. 14.
19. “Ten Theses on Politics”, in Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics, p. 31.
20. As (cf.) Rancière states, “[t]he political rests on the supplementary ‘power of the people’, which at once founds it andwithdraws its foundations” (“Does Democracy Mean Something?”, in Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics, p. 52).
21. (cf.) Rancière’s example (“Does Democracy Mean Something?”, in Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics, p. 56) of the condition of women and the argumentation that supported it is emblematic in the sense that it establishes this divide between the particular (women imprisoned in their domestic world) and the universality of the citizenship. The question of aesthetic sensorium becomes particularly relevant in this context. The established distribution of the sensible did not allow the subjectivation of women or women to be counted as citizen because their pretended sphere of activity was cut off from the public sensorium (“Wrong”, in Disagreement. Politics and Philosophy, p. 41).
22. “Does Democracy Mean Something?”, in Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics, p. 60.
23. “Politics in Its Nihilistic Age”, in Disagreement. Politics and Philosophy, p. 138.
24. “[C]’est l’intérêt qui maintient ensemble les membres de la société civile: leur vrai lien, c’est la vie civile et non la vie politique” (Karl Marx; Friedrich Engels: “La sainte famille ou Critique de la critique critique”, in Philosophie. Paris: Gallimard, 2003, p. 267.
25. “Wrong”, in Dissensus. On Politics and Aesthetics, p. 36.
26. See his much acclaimed “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit”, in Medienästhetische Schriften, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2002.
27. The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible, p. 13.
28. Introduction to Aesthetics and Its Discontents, p. 4.
29. Esthétique, p. 121.
30. “[t]aste is an orchestration of the sensible, a way of ordering and demeaning, of giving value and taking it away” (“Bitter After Taste. Affect, Food and Social Aesthetics” in The Affect Theory Reader, p. 126.
31. “From Politics to Aesthetics?”, in Jacques Rancière: Aesthetics, Politics, Philosophy, Paragraph, p. 13.
32. “Jacques Rancière: Aesthetics is Politics”, in Art&Research: A Journal of Ideas, Methods and Contexts, Vol. 2, No. 1, Summer 2008, p. 2; (cf.) Jacques Rancière himself talks about the „aesthetic regime in which the distinction between those things that belong to art and those that belong to ordinary life if blurred” (Introduction to Aesthetics and Its Discontents, p. 5).
33. “From Politics to Aesthetics?”, in Jacques Rancière: Aesthetics, Politics, Philosophy, Paragraph, p. 21.
34. “The Subversion of Mastery”, in Jacques Rancière: Aesthetics, Politics, Philosophy, Paragraph, p. 36.
35. I have explored this question in more detail in the article “Revolt against Schopenhauer and Wagner? An Insight into Nietzsche’s Perspectivist Aesthetics”, in Studies in Art and Architecture 2014, Vol. 23, No. 1–2.
36. “The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes”, in Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics, p. 118.
37. “The Ethical Turn of Aesthetics and Politics”, in Dissensus: On Aesthetics and Politics, p. 201.
38. “The Aesthetic and Its Outcomes”, in Dissensus: On Aesthetics and Politics, p. 122.
39. Introduction to Aesthetics and Its Discontents, p. 6.
40. Introduction to Aesthetics and Its Discontents, p. 5.
41. “From Politics to Aesthetics?”, in Jacques Rancière: Aesthetics, Politics, Philosophy, Paragraph, p. 14.
42. Introduction to Aesthetics and Its Discontents, p. 14.

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