MEMORY AND ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE

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Alberto Zanutto
Mikael Scherdin
Timon Beyes
Terry Brown & Kathy Mack
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Aesthesis

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the construction and
re-construction of memories
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a themed section edited by
**Pierre Guillet de Monthoux
& Antonio Strati**

Ponte dei Sospiri: Bridging Art and Aesthetics in Organizational Memories

Introduction by Pierre Guillet de Monthoux and Antonio Strati

Do you know when you see it, or do you see it only when you know it? Is it a matter of intention or is it something in the eye of the beholder? Is it a phenomenon or is it a perspective? How, then, do you express it, or how do you represent it? These are just some of the questions requiring an answer when 'aesthetics' enters the realm of social science. The themed *papers* section of this issue of *Aesthesis* is aesthetics and the construction and re-construction of memories of organizational life – such considerations seemed omnipresent to the researchers who gathered in the little village of Gattières,[1] southern France, for the Third EIASM Workshop on 'Art, Aesthetics and Organization' in July 2007. On this occasion, as in the past, the common 'call for papers' was intended to emphasise the dialectics that give strength to the ongoing configuration of an aesthetic discourse on organization. Art and aesthetics, in fact, are not understood in the same way by both of us.

// Pierre Guillet de Monthoux (2004) has a clear predilection for the arts as an arena and laboratory for aesthetic experiments. The arts have an important role as showcases of aesthetic practices threatened and marginalized by bureaucracy and corporate managerialism. Pierre is thus particularly keen to understand and enhance the aesthetics of the organization through artistic intervention.

// Antonio Strati (1999) emphasises aesthetics as a central but forgotten dimension of 'organizational life'. He focuses on *sensible* knowledge and aesthetic judgment in everyday organizational practices, and is particularly keen to highlight that the negotiation of organizational aesthetics gives form to the organization and also shapes power relations in organizational cultures.

These two diverse emphases regarding art and aesthetics in the study of organizations have also configured two different approaches – among others – in organizational aesthetics research: namely, the artistic approach (Guillet de Monthoux et.al., 2007) and the aesthetic approach (Strati, 2008). The artists, art critics, and organizational scholars who responded to our common call for papers for these three workshops – the first held in Siena in 2000, the second in Gattières in 2003, and the third again in Gattières, in 2007 – were in various ways catering to each convener's special interests. Their participation, however, did not give rise to a clear separation between the two research styles. On the contrary, participants and organizers shared the conviction that both performing art and aesthetic comprehension must be part of our understanding of the social processes of organizing action. This conviction was shared both by participating organizational and managerial scholars and such prominent guests from art world and industrial design such as Alberto Alessi, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Maria Finders and Daniel Birnbaum. Symbolic of this interaction is the Human Relations special issue on 'Organizing Aesthetics', featuring the script of a performance (Steyeart and Hjorth, 2002) inspired by the first workshop held in Siena. This was a novelty in an organization studies publication. But even though it appeared in such a prestigious journal, it did not engender much of a hybridization of art and aesthetics in organizational research and writing. The two approaches did not merge together. Rather, they continued to propose, each on the basis of its distinctive characteristics, a common ground for transgressive and novel forms of conducting and representing field research and the theoretical study of organization. In a word, what they had in common was simply a genuine and profound desire for … aesthetics!

This issue of *Aesthesis* reminds us of this desire for aesthetics in our knowledge of organizations. When Alberto Zanutto writes that the task of research is to 'valorize aesthetics', he articulates an almost programmatic aspiration -- aesthetics as an escape from a one-dimensional idea of reality. Zanutto's long experience as a researcher on a variety of projects seems to have shown how aesthetics can be 'smuggled' into traditional organizational inquiries. What memories can one represent, firstly to the researcher him/herself, secondly to colleagues involved in the same research, and thirdly to organizational students and scholars, and to the

organizational actors themselves? Zanutto's article can be read as an ongoing fragmented aesthetic memoir. It also stands as a quest for a deeper understanding of aesthetics in organizational field research, which polemicizes functionalism's basic assumptions in order to open the way for aesthetic experience itself. How can traditional, rather 'square' research, be turned into a multidimensional inquiry -- thus providing an aesthetic research team with techniques for an aesthetic research process that will constructively confuse the binary boredom of an aesthetic reading of organization dynamics! Like most freedom fighters, however, Zanutto somewhat over-simplifies matters. It is difficult to argue that reality is life whilst rationalism is death; for both are part of our desire for freedom. However, his contribution is a viable first step towards transforming the representation of the outcomes of social science research into forms of aesthetic organizational memory.

Mikael Scherdin's argument stands in sharp contrast to Zanutto's strong belief that aesthetic organizational research and the researcher's personal aesthetic comprehension of organizational phenomena should be grounded in negotiation with colleagues. Scherdin's contribution evokes a tension between an almost romantic belief in subjectivity for subjectivity's sake on the one hand, and on the other a view of aesthetics as a social phenomenon that constantly puts the idea of a given subject in constant danger. We ourselves recognize this tension in our own editorial divergences: Pierre Guillet de Monthoux´s interests in art are viewed with some scepticism by Antonio Strati on account that art might well obstruct our analysis of aesthetics out there in the field. However, this issue's references to art critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud´s understanding of contemporary art as performing a 'relational aesthetics' (Bourriaud, 1998), and Guillet de Monthoux's predilection for Joseph Bueys´ definition of art as 'social sculpture', indicate that we are immersed in the intricacies of a controversy. Scherdin´s rather radical position begs the question of whether organizational aesthetics can be adequately represented by adopting such an individualistic style in field research. Comparisons with Zanutto's article may thus help us grasp the delicate nuances of organizational research in practice, in ways that induce diverse states of aesthetic feeling in the researcher. Here we get a feel for how to 'legitimate' certain forms of aesthetic understanding through a process of negotiation in the context of a plurality of individual aesthetic understandings. This contrasts with the aesthetic 'self-legitimation' assumed by Scherdin's 'autoethnographic' re/construction of the aesthetics of his individual organizational memories. Moreover, both articles echo broader methodological controversies in social studies, and one can see emerging a process by which the study of the aesthetic is negotiating its own legitimacy in the context of mainstream methodologies. In a sense, this brings us back to the central issue in aesthetic organizational research, that of the epistemological controversy (Taylor and Hansen, 2005) – but with a touch of novelty introduced by the specific characteristics of these two research experiences.

These methodological reflections can be understood in a new light through Timon Beyes' detailed account of Jacques Rancière's aesthetic philosophy. When organizing the 2007 Gattières workshop, we recommended this French philosopher to the participants. His booklet *Le Partage du sensible* (2000), as well other works such as *Malaise dans l'esthétique* (2004), raises issues that are not strictly bound to the art world but encompass the way in which our world offers itself to be shared and divided up in our daily perception of it. This philosophical aesthetics has recently gained fame in art schools and amongst young artists. French theory, however, has a very special way of elucidating how aesthetics is

a fundamental approach to social philosophizing, and it signalled for us exactly what the title of this introduction indicates: bridging art to aesthetics (and back).

Beyes' article provides a 'crash course' in this aesthetic philosophy. Rancière sees the formation of new arenas, the emergence of new collectives, and the voicing of new desires, and this new activity is fundamentally aesthetic. It is up to aesthetic intuition to give form to, to organize if you prefer, otherwise silenced and suppressed phenomena. Rancière's aesthetic perspective opens up what might be called a *political* analysis, and it is, as Beyes makes clear, 'critical' in the sense of relying on the self-organizing force of aesthetic intuition. The researcher is not a judge nor an expert once s/he has opted for an aesthetic approach. S/he develops a sensitivity to aesthetic forces that are profoundly liberating because they creatively generate their own trajectories, rather than simply voicing dialectic criticism or staging violent revolts.

While illustrating Rancière's aesthetics, Beyes alludes to possible implications for the study of organizing processes. Beyes also claims that Rancière's organizational aesthetics has emerged as a philosophical alternative to the implicit authoritarianism of aesthetically engaged sociologies, like that of Pierre Bourdieu. Hence his article raises an issue similar to that encountered in the tension between Zanutto's and Scherdin's articles: the tension between an aesthetics implicitly imposing something that 'ought to be' and an aesthetics that only reveals the organizational control of the sensible in order to defy and escape it – as in Strati's aesthetics (1999) or Gagliardi's empathic-logical approach (2006). The question of who is most prone to open up organizational life – a sociological researcher or an

aesthetic philosopher – still remains. Terry Brown and Kathy Mack provide a concrete example that might appeal to Rancière. They show that aesthetic research forces us to assume a new stance as social scientists. As they reflect on common organizational memories, Brown and Mack are compelled to give form to everyday artifacts in order to invoke the aesthetic dimension of collective memory. Zanutto insists that aesthetic research consists of encounters within a team of researchers, while Scherdin develops arguments to defend the sphere of subjective action for individual interpretations of an experience. For both of them the outcome of the aesthetic research process is unclear, although one surmises that it would be some kind of organizational awareness of aesthetic processes in Zanutto's case and some sort of art-like product (cut off from its context) in Scherdin's. Brown and Mack, however, illustrate how they used multimedia techniques to make a product that was then fed back into the field in order to bring forth an aesthetic dimension common to both researchers and researched: research thus consists in crafting a piece of art necessary to bring forth forgotten aesthetic memories in organization.

Niina Koivunen analyses this process by exploring the making of an artistic artefact: a recording of contemporary classical music. Her contribution implicitly supports Brown and Mack's account. They simply had to make a product to bring forth an aesthetic process; for Koivunen it was the other way round. There was a process -- the listening to contemporary music by aficionados with set values and with a set context of classical connoisseurs -- into which products (the recordings made by the skilled producers observed by Koivunen) were constantly fed. Rather than a process triggered by a product, the product was created by the process, and in ways that,

according to Koivunen, seemed almost automatic and system-conditioned. Koivunen accordingly helps us understand the difference between what we usually call an artwork and what we consider a tool to bring forth the aesthetics of 'non-art' organizational life.

Klaus Harju's article tackles the ontological status of this dimension itself. It propounds the extreme idea that the aesthetic of organization is nostalgia for a never-existing past. This does not involve a beautiful utopia to come; nor an ideal of some sort of perfection to be reached. It is a 'saudade' for the always bygone retrospects, which is not the same as simple nostalgia for an origin. If this is what aesthetics is about, then we are again confronted by the fact that art and research are separated only by a very fine line. For how can we seriously claim that there is a difference between fact and fiction if Harju's point is taken seriously? Mind you, this kind of fiction is not an ideal, a universal dream, or a claim to transcendent reality. It is a poetical fiction tainted by singularity, which can only be reshaped in a Nietzschean process of eternal return.

In editing this themed section of *Aesthesis*, however, we have not been able to maintain that artistic and aesthetic approaches are distinct and counterposed phenomena in organizational research. On the contrary, we have found ourselves affirming – with Rancière – that a crucial issue in both the aesthetic and artistic approaches to the study of organizational life is the changeover to a post-aesthetic discourse on organization. This involves a sensitivity, an awareness, and a taste that shapes organizational aesthetic research on the re/construction of organizational memories, as the capacity for aesthetic pathos in the understanding of organizational life. The novelist Philippe Delerm (2005: 114) – to continue with the French slant of this introduction – has relevantly and masterfully evoked:

.... tous les témoignages de lecteurs concordaient: on lui était reconnaissant d'avoir su inscrire dans le temps et l'espace des sensations détachées du temps, dans lesquelles chacun se reconnaissait pour avoir éprouvé non les mêmes, mais leur équivalent dans un lieu différent, avec une intensité perdue.

..... all the readers' testimonies agreed: they acknowledged her mastery in inscribing in time and space sensations detached from the time when each reader recognised that they had felt not those sensations themselves, but their equivalents in another place, bereft of intensity.

NOTE

1// We surely do not need to introduce Siena, but we want to say a few words about Gattières: The 4000 inhabitants of this little village, situated some 20 minutes drive from Nice-Cote-d'Azur airport, enjoy not only art & aesthetics conferences: in the village there are three good value-for-money restaurants and as many nice bars for your pastis. You can, as conference goers, check in at the nice small Hotel Beau Site and then visit Le Jardin run by the European Center for Art and Management. This is an ultra-select art space open only one day each year for us mortals. Last year Benjamin Saurer put on a show for the conference -- starring a big Zebra painting and a pony in Zebra suit (see over). The rest of the year this art-space is devoted to the aesthetic education of those extraterrestrials frequently flying over the neighborhood in their tiny saucers. But there is also an annual opera festival performing late July:
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Deleuze et....

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Reframing the possible:
Rancièrian aesthetics and the study of organization

Timon Beyes

For me, the fundamental question is to explore the possibility of maintaining spaces of play. To discover how to produce forms for the presentation of objects forms for the organization of spaces, that thwart expectations. The main enemy of artistic creativity as well as of political creativity is consensus - that is, inscription within given roles, possibilities, and competences.

Jacques Rancière, *Art of the Possible* (2007b: 263)

This paper draws upon the work of the philosopher Jacques Rancière in order to outline a reconfiguration of the relation between aesthetics, art and organization (theory). For this, I will consider a specific notion of aesthetics as the distribution of the sensible that enables modes of articulation, that is, ways of perceiving, thinking and saying (Rancière, 2004a). Hence, aesthetics here neither refers to a theory of taste (and its sensual pleasure), nor solely to art theory or the study of specific forms of art. For reasons that will be discussed in this paper, Rancière nevertheless attributes to art a significant power of rearranging and expanding what can be perceived and what is thinkable (Rancière, 2007b). I will suggest that a Rancièrian thinking of aesthetics in general, as well as its implications for exploring artistic endeavours in particular, are interesting terrain for the study of organization and the field of organizational aesthetics, most notably by provoking the organizational scholar to think about rupture and dissent, hence emergence and newness from an aesthetico-political perspective.

However, this move entails a reframing of key concepts like aesthetics and politics. In order to highlight Rancière's distinct and idiosyncratic voice on these issues, it thus seems necessary to prepare the terrain by sketching central tenets of his work. Perhaps most importantly for Rancière, aesthetics and politics are intertwined, either because a given division of the sensible "claims to recognize only real parties to the exclusion of all empty spaces and supplements" (Rancière, 2004b: 226) or because politics proper resurfaces through a re-configuration of what is visible and expressible. Moreover, across the philosopher's writings the presumption of equality and equal intelligence informs his ensuing notions of politics and education as well as aesthetics.

In light of such axiomatic issues, the following pages cannot but adumbrate prolegomena for connecting Rancièrian concepts to the study of organization and aesthetics. This article is thus intended as a first step towards further and more elaborated conceptual work as well as empirical study. It is structured as such: First, I will follow Shusterman (2006) who has

recently stressed the twisted and messy genealogy of the notion(s) of aesthetics and, relatedly, the potential to take it into new and rewarding directions. Then, second, I will enter Rancièrian territory by offering a brief itinerary and contextualization of his thought, as well as an introduction to core ideas of his oeuvre. On these grounds, I will, third, focus on the philosopher's reflections on the aesthetic, followed by, fourth, an inquiry into the possibilities of artistic practices to transform a given distribution of the sensible. Fifth and finally, I will consolidate my findings, pointing out what I consider to be important consequences for the discourse of organizational aesthetics, offering possible points of departure for further inquiry.

Most notably, what one could call Rancière's reframing of the political through aesthetics provokes the organizational scholar to engage with undoings and reconfigurations of given distributions of the sensible, with struggles to name what can be seen and with (re) inventions of spaces. Moreover, and conversely, enlisting this perspective implies a reframing of the aesthetic through a notion of politics that is tied to the event of equality. As I will try to show, both instrumental and critical aesthetico-managerial discourses sit uneasily next to a form of thinking that destabilizes 'royal science' with its attempts to put (and keep) everything in its proper place. The neglect of the art world itself in important strands of organizational aesthetics seems to be a case in point. Rancière, for one, has made a significant case for the potentialities of artistic endeavours and their configurations of possibilities. Finally, or so I will argue, relating a Rancièrian aesthetics to the study of organization problematizes the politics of scholarship. As to the latter, in order to reserve this paper's limited space for outlining

an idiosyncratic notion of aesthetics, I have opted to forgo any detailed discussion of organization theory's current delineations and orderings of the aesthetic – its very own distribution of what is visible and sayable (for overviews of the field see Taylor and Hansen, 2005; Warren and Rehn, 2007; Strati, 1992, 2007).

PROBLEMATIZING THE USE OF AESTHETICS

For Rancière (2002) there is an essence to politics: disagreement. Following this idea, Jones and ten Bos (2007) have commented upon the 'use' (and 'misuse') of philosophical concepts -- like the aesthetic -- in organization studies, stressing that the use of philosophy in the first place means interrupting and problematizing the conceptually taken-for-granted. It seems apt that Shusterman (2006), tackling 'The Aesthetic' in the journal *Theory, Culture & Society*'s special issue on 'Problematizing Global Knowledge', mainly seems to question any attempt to confine the notion of aesthetics. Although conventionally referring to the philosophy of art and beauty, 'the concept of the aesthetic remains deeply ambiguous, complex and essentially contested' (ibid.: 237). Shusterman begins his tour de force of a term's twisted genealogy with Plato and Aristotle. Whereas the former defined the arts as mimesis, regarding them as an imperfect copy of ideal forms (and thus denying the autonomy of the sphere of art), the latter conferred more importance upon art and mimesis, mainly through the notion of catharsis, as what one could call a 'safe' arousal of passions within the artistic context. Moreover, Aristotle introduced principles like plot, character and diction for the formalistic evaluation of works of tragedy.

Usually, however, the discourse of aesthetics is taken to be a product of western modernity (Rancière, 2004a). Shusterman distinguishes between three distinct notions of the aesthetic. The first is related to Baumgarten and views aesthetics 'as a general science of sensory perception that was involved in discerning and producing beauty' (Shusterman, 2006: 239), thus including everyday practices within the scope of aesthetics. The second is traced back to Kant's theory of taste with an emphasis on the beauty and the sublime in nature. The third is connected to Hegel who conceived of aesthetics as a scientific discipline that dealt with fine art's high truths. Within academia, the focus on the fine arts as the realm of the aesthetical has been dominant ever since.

However, other concepts thwart this three-fold classification. For example, the disputed idea of *disinterestedness* designates an aesthetic perception that 'examines and appreciates its object not in terms of some ulterior motive or function ....but instead for the intrinsic value or pleasure of the appreciative experience itself' (ibid: 240). Moreover, Shusterman mentions the idea of the freedom and autonomy of art that connects, in manifold forms, the argument on disinterestedness with Schiller's educative function of art with its unconstrained play, to the writings of Benjamin, Adorno and Arendt – and, it could be added, to thinkers such as Deleuze, Lyotard and Rancière. For sure, there is more – for example the notion of aesthetics as a *philosophy of life* that can be traced back to ancient philosophical writings. Also, more recent sociological thinking has contributed significantly to the discourse of aesthetics, for example, by trying to unmask its ideological function, insisting that notions like disinterestedness and functionless contemplation serve power interests and confirm hierarchical distinctions (see especially, and to Rancière's dismay, Bourdieu, 1987)[1] or by inquiring into the workings of art as one of modern society's autonomous spheres (Luhmann, 1999); or by arguing that processes of identity formation would lie at the heart of artistic practices and production (White, 1993).

As this eclectic exercise of name-dropping indicates, the genealogy of the aesthetic is anything but straightforward. Indeed, the aesthetic 'is obviously a vague, polysemic, contested and shifting signifier. But vague terms still signify ....Besides, its historically nested rich complexities of meaning harbor the promise of generating new rewarding directions of use' (Shusterman 2006: 243). That 'the aesthetic' denotes a multitude of sometimes overlapping, sometimes contradictory, understandings has not escaped the field of organization studies. In recent years, a growing body of work has emerged that circles around the aesthetic as 'shorthand for knowledge derived from the senses, as a specific research methodology, as a specific literature/theoretic debate, as simply 'Art', as the theory of beauty, *and so on*' (Warren and Rehn, 2007: 159; italics added).[2] As Warren and Rehn (2007) have pointed out, this diversity should not be regarded as a problem. Philosophical concepts, they argue, do not stand still and resemble a manifold of energies. Hence, limiting them to specific instrumental purposes of organization theory might be misguided. With regard to the aesthetic's twisted genealogy and its implications, then, one should caution against attempts to 'fix' the concept, thus denying a philosophical term its potential to problematize and question notions like organization and its relation to politics. For organization theory, too, the study of aesthetics carries the promise of new and rewarding directions of use to come.

A POLITICS OF EQUALITY

This line of reasoning sits comfortably next to the writings of Rancière who seems to be on uneven terms with those who explore the realm of aesthetics by trying to neatly put its assumed elements in pre-assigned places, denying a thinking of *mixture* (Rancière, 2007a). In order to more fully appreciate his distinct perspective on aesthetic issues, it seems necessary to broadly chart the mainstays of his itinerary of thought that, as the philosopher has acknowledged (2004b: 219 et seqq.), form a thread that ties together what otherwise comes across as a diverse collection of studies. Rancière says that he would 'basically' be interested in 'investigating the modern forms of political subjectivization' (Rancière, 2003b: par. 15). As the phrasing already indicates, his oeuvre has interesting similarities with (and differences to) the works of other French so-called radical thinkers, especially Foucault,[3] but also Deleuze, Nancy and Badiou (Deranty, 2003; Déotte, 2004; Rockhill, 2004).

However, Rancière's thought comes equipped with a twist, a fundamental intuition that seems to coherently run through his writings, namely the positioning of 'equality' as a founding axiom. 'The equality of anyone with anyone else' thus becomes a straightforward presupposition. 'If you are to carry out the command of your master, you first have to understand it. And for this, you have to be his equal' (Rancière, 2003b: par. 14). For inequality to be recognized, an ability to recognise has to be presupposed. Hence, a fundamental recognition of (democratic) equality has to be assumed. It follows that whatever determines social orderings is arbitrary: any form of social organization is contingent (Rancière, 2002). Equality, then, is neither understood as an essence or a 'pure' historical origin, nor as a teleological goal of human progress (in this abstract sense, equality is an 'empty' term that is situationally 'filled' and proven). It is not set up as a 'structural principle' but as a principally undetermined 'de-structuring principle' that relates each respective contingency of domination to its prior, fundamental contingency (Rancière, 2003b: par. 14).

Equality enables politics. But departing from the founding axiom of equality, Rancière sharply breaks with conventional meanings of politics. To begin with, any social field can be characterized by relations of inequality, by hierarchy, control and domination (Deranty, 2003). The force

regulating the social field, Rancière (2002), following Foucault (2002), calls 'the police'. Surpassing notions of overt repression or control, the police designates certain ways of cutting up the world, a systematic production of the given, an organization of bodies and things that define modes of being, doing and making, the sayable and the unsayable, and the places where these occupations are performed – a definition, thus, of how to take part (Rancière, 2002: 40 et seq.).[4] The political, on the other hand, comes about on the basis of the opposite principle, that of radical equality. Again, 'equality' does not signify a structural operator of historical development – it is a 'vanishing condition' (Rancière, 2003b: par. 14) that can only situationally come to the fore with the naming of what Rancière calls a 'wrong', a miscount. Politics, then, is linked to dissent, to a polemical count of those that were un-counted before. A split emerges between given identities (that of the police order) and a new political subjectivity (Rancière, 2002). 'Equality has to be involved in operations of subjectivization, in constructions of scenes of enunciation and manifestation in which uncounted objects are handled and signed objects are handled by uncounted subjects, and put as objects of common dispute' (Rancière, 2003b: par. 15). Hence, politics cannot be defined by referring to the idea of a pre-existing subject, and neither does it have its own, pre-given proper place.[5] Rather, a 'pre-distributed' field of identities is transformed through a political disruption, which produces a new political subjectivity.

Politics thus becomes a matter of particular situations, of events that pragmatically verify equality, of 'polemical scenes'. It has an essence: 'the production, within a determined, sensible world, of a given that is heterogeneous to it' (Rancière, 2004b: 226). Disagreement is the fuel of politics.

It situationally comes to the fore through a taking-part of those who have no part.[6] It is worth noting that one encounters here a particularly disruptive notion of democracy. The latter signifies dissociation, a rupture within a given order: 'If politics means anything it means something that is *added* to all these governments of paternity, age, wealth, force and science ...' (Rancière, 2006a: 45, italics added). It follows that politics is not about, for example, laying out a scheme for integrating the excluded, but about the construction of a stage where matters of exclusion emerge as matters of conflict (Rancière and Höller, 2007: 459). Politics thus denotes a surplus relation, an extra, a supplement to any actual (ac)count of the population, to the regular orderings and apportionments. Hence, politics differs from assembling people into a community – it comes about when there is an exception to the usual operations of assembling (Rancière, 2001: par. 15 et seq). Democracy, then, can strictly speaking not be assigned to a form of state: 'We do not live in democracies' (Rancière, 2006a: 73). Rather, it emerges whenever there is a process of struggle, of enlarging the public sphere. 'Democracy is first this paradoxical condition of politics, the point where every legitimization is confronted with its ultimate lack of legitimacy, confronted with the egalitarian contingency that underpins the inegalitarian contingency itself' (Rancière, 2006a: 94).[7]

The seemingly simple axiom (of equality) and the resulting meditations on (the *practice* of) equality, and on the question of who has the right to think, pervade Rancière's writings and his 'maverick intellectual itinerary' (Ross, 1991: 59). They mark the philosopher's break with Althusserian Marxism: in what seems to have been a decisive moment, namely the Parisian uprising of 1968, the 'theoretical police' of Althusserianism went up in flames on the barricades (Rancière, 1985: 131). This was because 'the people' took collective matters into their own hands, while Althusser had serious misgivings about the whole affair – from his point of view, this was just not the proper moment (Ross, 1991). In this stance, Rancière sensed an exemplary move against equality inherent to (also) 'progressive' thought. He would later dedicate a magnificent study to western thought's proposition of keeping 'the poor'[8] in its place, a fundamental gesture uniting diverse thinkers such as Plato, Marx, Sartre and Bourdieu, namely the exclusion of 'the poor' from the realms of thought and art – and thus the co-implication of philosophy and sociology into repressive social hierarchies (Rancière, 2004b).

To these strategies of confirming the divisions of knowledge and inequality, a counter-move is suggested: 'I write to shatter the boundaries that separate specialists – of philosophy, art, social sciences, etc. I write for those who are also trying to tear down the walls between specialties and competences.' (Rancière, 2007b: 257) Rancière has been called a 'confident critic: he simply assumes that anyone can think' (Méchoulan, 2004: 5). The presumption of equality and equal intelligence seems to unfold in his writings that range from archival work bringing to light forgotten workers' struggles (Rancière, 1989) to a much-discussed essay on education called *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (Rancière, 1991); and from conceptual and polemical elaborations on the question(s) of politics (Rancière, 2001, 2002, 2006a) to a treatise on the truths and *The Names of History* (Rancière, 1994). Furthermore, he has published an impressive list of studies on aesthetics and art, that comprise inquiries into novelistic endeavours and the politics of literature (Rancière, 2003a, 2004c, 2004d), forays into the world of film (Rancière, 2006d), critical art (Rancière, 2006b) and theatre (Rancière, 2007c) as well as general reflections on the aesthetic (Rancière, 2004a, 2006c, 2007a). To the latter I now turn.

AESTHETICS AS POLITICAL PROBLEMATIC AND THE REGIME OF ART

If '[p]olitics is first and foremost an intervention upon the visible and the sayable' (Rancière, 2001, par. 21), then it is entangled with the question of aesthetics. Politics comes to the fore through dissensual scenes, when a given police logic clashes with a different partition of the sensible. Politics and aesthetics fold into one another when what is brought forth and made visible has been hitherto invisible, when what is made audible was hitherto inaudible (Rancière, 2004b). 'These poetic displacements and condensations are not just secondary illustrations of an underlying ideological struggle, but the very terrain of this struggle.' (Žižek, 2004: 77) It takes a challenging of the established orderings of ways of doing and making for politics to 'happen'. And it is through new registers of what is perceivable that novel forms of political subjectivity come to the fore. 'Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time' (Rancière, 2004a: 13). There is a theatrical and literally spatial dimension to Rancière's politics since the latter implies constructing a stage, producing a scene, provoking another space and bodies and voices that were unheard of and unseen before (Deranty, 2003).[9]

'Aesthetics' thus extends from the realm of art towards general modes of visibility. In this broad sense, the Rancièrian notion of aesthetics does not denote the name of a discipline. It does not entail a theory or philosophy of the beautiful and the sublime or of the human senses. It signifies 'a mode of articulation between ways of doing and making, their corresponding forms of visibility and possible ways of thinking about their relationships'

(Rancière, 2004a: 10). However, Rancière also deploys the concept of aesthetics in another, more restrained albeit related sense. If the first notion, as outlined above, designates a political problematic, the second refers to a specific regime of the identification of art, of contemplating art (and its politics) (Rancière, 2000). One can thus distinguish between 'the aesthetics of politics', that is, aesthetics in the broader sense, and 'the politics of aesthetics', that is, aesthetics in the narrower sense. The latter conception is linked to the emergence and consequences of what the philosopher names 'the aesthetic regime of the art' (Rancière, 2004a). This discursive regime emerged some 200 years ago – precisely when artistic practices began to mess up the given variants of the so-called fine arts, when imitation and mimesis ceased to be appreciated as art's common goals and as points of departure for classifying genres, rules of fabrication and criteria of appreciation. In short, it emerged when it became progressively harder to distinguish art from non-art. The aesthetic regime denotes a gaze and a thinking that identifies 'art' in the singular in place of the plural of the fine arts, and the discourse called aesthetics emerged in order to think this singular (Rancière, 2007a).

To outline this fundamental rupture, Rancière broadly distinguishes the aesthetic regime of art from two other discursive 'knots'. Like Shusterman alluding to Plato's non-consideration of aesthetics, Rancière calls the first an 'ethical regime of images' that, strictly speaking, does not refer to an autonomous art at all since works of art are not granted any autonomy (Rancière, 2004a: 20 et seq.). The second, a 'representative or poetic regime of the arts' 'identifies the arts ....within a classification of ways of doing and making, and it consequently defines proper ways of doing and making as well as means

of assessing imitation' (Rancière, 2004a: 22). Following Aristotle, these ways of doing and making, of imposing a form on matter, are discussed according to ideas of representation and mimesis. Hence, a set of norms, an ordering of the relations between the visible and the sayable is constituted.[10] The 'representative' regime is thus able to combine the notion of an autonomous art with the identification of a hierarchy of genres.

This canon that allows for a neat separation between artistic objects and those of everyday life is ruined by the aesthetic regime of art. 'The aesthetic regime asserts the absolute singularity of art and, at the same time, destroys any pragmatic criterion for isolating its singularity.' It recognizes the autonomy of art while establishing the identity of artistic forms 'with forms that life uses to shape itself' (Rancière, 2004a: 23). In a somewhat paradoxical move, 'art' got into the position of a common sphere of experience precisely when the rules and regulations that allowed a clear distinction between art and non-art were abolished. It follows that the separation of the aesthetic sphere does not coincide with the notion of an artwork's autonomy, since the aesthetic regime has done away with agreed-upon, determined criteria in order to differentiate between what belongs to art and what does not. Of course, the 'end of mimesis' does not imply the disappearance of representational art. It denotes the end of a certain discursive ordering of the fine arts. For Rancière, the discourse of aesthetics and its twisted genealogy from Kant to Adorno, via Schiller, Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, has as its object the attempt to think this disordering and thus establishes a new and paradoxical regime of identifying artistic endeavours (Rancière, 2007a: 17 et seq.). Whereas the representative regime conferred dignity on the fine arts through the praise and position of those in power, of the 'man of taste', to the order that tied human nature to the nature of society and that determined the place of everyone; the aesthetic regime breaks up this distribution of the sensible (Rancière, 2007a: 22). Aesthetics in the narrower sense first and foremost indicates the regime that names this rupture.

Hereinafter, art acquires its own politics (understood in Rancière's terms). Since artistic products are more often than not 'classified' due to their adherence to a specific regime of the sensible (that no longer identifies art according to proper ways of producing it), art becomes singular, no longer subjected to specific rules (of doing and making it). Thus, and independent of attempts to consciously politicize art, the separation of the aesthetic sphere itself brings forward political effects. 'A political declaration or manifestation, like an artistic form, is an arrangement of words, a montage of gestures, an occupation of spaces. In both cases what is produced is a modification of the fabric of the sensible, a transformation of the visible given, intensities, names that one can give to things, the landscape of the possible.' (Rancière, 2007b: 264)

CONTEMPORARY ART'S DISJOINTED JUNCTIONS
If politics is conceived in terms of situational ruptures that disturb a given distribution of the sensible, if the aesthetics of politics denotes a thinking of reconfigurations of what is visible and sayable, and if the politics of aesthetics comes about through the equality of forms of art and forms of life as identified by the aesthetic regime of art, then it does not come as a surprise that Rancière has shown a remarkable interest in artistic endeavours and their possible consequences. For what other field could open up a 'breathing room' for a reconfiguration of roles and competences? In Rancière's words, 'artistic practices are 'ways of doing and making' that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility' (2004a: 13). It follows that artistic inventions have

political effects whenever a given distribution of the sensible is blurred and the possibility of other practices of life and forms of organizing emerges, whenever such endeavours invent 'sensible forms and material structures for a life to come' (Rancière, 2004a: 29).[11]

Art, then, is being granted a power comparable to that of politics, namely, reframing and expanding what can be perceived and reconfiguring what is thinkable (Ross, 2007). For example, 'the political dimension of the arts can be seen first of all in the way that their forms materially propose the paradigms of the community. Books, theatre, orchestra, choirs, dance, paintings or murals are modes for framing a community' (Rancière, 2000: 17). With regard to contemporary art, Rancière speaks of a 'disjointed junction' that would characterize its practices due to the fuzzy border between the indistinguishability of forms of life and forms of art on the one hand, and the separation of the system of art on the other. Contemporary art's form of efficacy would lie precisely in this blurring of borders and thus in the reconfiguration of ties between spaces and times.[12] Hence it might disturb the logic of consensus and counteract the annulment of politics (Rancière and Höller, 2007: 464). Of interest, then, are the capacities that are set in motion through artistic endeavours.

Maybe needless to say, not every kind of art, nor art in itself, is liberating or emancipatory – it depends. In 'Disagreement', Rancière (2002) stated that politics itself does not take the form of a perpetual, easy-to-trace chain of rupturing; it scarcely happens at all. In a related text, he confirmed that the emergence of politics is 'in no way necessary, but that it occurs as a *provisional accident* in the history of forms of domination' (Rancière, 2001: par. 17; italics added). It is, I assume, no different for the capacities set in motion by artistic interventions. For example, art that presupposes a viewers' *imbecility* constitutes a rather sad spectacle when contrasted with the presupposition of equality. 'An art is emancipated and emancipating when it renounces the authority of the imposed message, the target audience, and the univocal mode of explicating the world, when, in other words, it stops *wanting* to emancipate us' (Rancière, 2007b: 258). In an assessment of contemporary critical art (Rancière, 2006b) as well as in other comments, the philosopher casts a critical eye on explicitly political, so-called 'critical' art, which revels in unmasking the workings of Capital beneath common objects and behaviours. Here, too, he senses a rather simple gesture of fundamental opposition that would be accompanied by its co-implication into the decried capitalist logic: a simple redoubling of the signs of neo-liberal times that deny the possibility of resistance and otherness. Instead, as he succinctly put it in a recent interview,

> "..one must find ways to create other places, or other uses for places. But one must extricate this project from the dramatic alternatives expressed in questions like: How do we escape the market, subvert it, etc.? .... Critics of the market are content to rest their own authority on the endless demonstration that everyone else is naïve or a profiteer; in short, they capitalize on the declaration of our powerlessness. ... And it ends up sounding not dissimilar to reactionary discourse. These critics of the market call for subversion only to declare it impossible and to abandon all hope for emancipation." (Rancière, 2007b: 263)

Furthermore, not all is well either with current art practices advocating a 'relational aesthetics' (Bourriaud, 2002), some of which have caused quite a stir in the art world in recent years (e.g. Doherty, 2004). The term 'relational aesthetics' refers to a loosely assembled group of artistic strategies that immerse artistic practice into everyday human relations, looking for other ways of organizing human togetherness and new forms of sociability. For the curator and theoretician Nicolas Bourriaud (2002), such endeavours produce a breeding ground for social experiments by creating new situations and encounters.[13] Rancière, ever in favour of polemical scenes, has linked such attempts to a 'soft-ethics of consensus' and an 'art of the neighbourhood' that would perform an adaptation of yesteryear's political art to today's conditions (2007a: 149). Correspondingly, the concept of relational aesthetics has been criticized for its implied homogeneity, for missing out on conflict and dissent as important processes in the struggle to produce other spaces (Bishop, 2004).

The contemporaneous existence of a host of different artistic attitudes points towards a fundamental, constitutive undecidability about the politics of aesthetics in the aesthetic regime of art. Moreover, if the singularity of art is related to the indistinguishability of its 'autonomous' forms with those of everyday life, and with a possible politics, then '[t]hese possible politics are only ever realized in full at the price of abolishing the singularity of art, the singularity of politics, or the two together' (Rancière, 2007b: 92). This paradox also pertains to the classic and perhaps rather worn-out dream of an art that would be able to enshrine its autonomy, of *l'art pour l'art*, resisting both its commodification and the aestheticization of products, merchandise and power. Rancière is thus equally dismissive of what, conversely, amounts to a 'hard-ethics' of an art that is dedicated to celebrate the mourning of the catastrophe of modern society (Rancière, 2007a: 149). In its own way, such 'hard-ethical' reasoning implies 'policing' the field, denouncing

the aesthetic confusion and undecidability. But this confusion is precisely the 'knot' through which disjointed junctions and, hence, new modes of thinking, practices and affects emerge, and are given a space. In other words, artistic in(ter)ventions should not be robbed of their talent of being ambiguous, disputable and preliminary cuts into the distributions of the sensible and thus the orderings of the social (Rancière, 2007a: 14 and 151).

It remains to be seen and explored whether art today, as Rancière (2006b) muses, might assume a higher degree of political force by the absence or scarcity of politics proper. The philosopher diagnoses a shrinking of public space and an annulment of political imaginativeness in a time of (neo-liberal) consensus that might endow 'a substitutive political function' to contemporary artistic practices, 'to the mini-demonstrations of artists, to their collections of objects and traces, to their mechanisms of interaction, to their provocations in situ or elsewhere. Knowing if these 'substitutions' can recompose political spaces, or if they must be content to parody them, is certainly one of the questions of today.' (2006b: 92)

PROLEGOMENA TO A RANCIÈRIAN ORGANIZATIONAL AESTHETICS

What could be the punch-lines of Rancièrian aesthetics with regard to organization studies? In conclusion, I will try to adumbrate possible connections between the philosopher's reflections on (the politics of) aesthetics and the study of organization. To repeat, not only artistic but any set of practices can be called 'aesthetics' if it intervenes in the general configuration of what is perceivable, thinkable and sayable, as well as in the latter's conjunctions with modes of being. Hence, such practices carry their own politics. For 'the aesthetic dimension of the reconfiguration of the relationships between doing, seeing and saying that circumscribe the being-in-common is inherent to every political or social movement' (Rancière, 2000: 17). Generally, researching the aesthetics of organizing could include the search for undoings of a given distribution of the sensible, reorderings of the very manner in which (public) space lends itself to (and is produced by) processes of organizing. However, the latter here denotes the organization of bodies, perceptions, thoughts and things over time and space – the 'police' – and the disruptive qualities of politics that, for example, might play themselves out in artistic interventions. I assume, then, that an organizational scholar's perspective need not be restricted to a bounded notion of *the* organization as a distinct entity and to producing results (mostly) for managerial man, but that it can (or should) be open towards the phenomena and consequences of *organization*, that is, towards general forces of organizing that affect us and the conditions of our lives (Cooper, 1998). Rancièrian thinking, or so I would argue, can be perceived as a convincing demonstration of the importance of aesthetics for describing such forces of organizing.

Moreover, one should not gloss over Rancière's insistence on the de-structuring principle of equality. Democratic disagreement does not refer to situations in which the conflicting parties are already known, exchanging well-rehearsed arguments. Instead, the noise of politics announces disjointed junctions, the appearance of new political subjectivities. For one, aesthetics thus loses its conceptual innocence, if it ever had one – this kind of aesthetico-organizational research would not concern itself with frivolities (Warren and Rehn, 2006: 81). But more importantly, such thinking interferes with the perhaps all-too-useful distinction between an instrumental use of aesthetics in organization theory (that would turn aesthetics into mere material for managerial domination) and its counterpart, the critical unmasking of the instrumentalization of aesthetics as yet another means for managerial

control. Hancock considers the former strategy to be founded upon a 'romanticized account of the aesthetic as a particular mode of knowing and being in the world' (2005: 31); whereas the critical approach engages with aesthetics as a homogenizing force within managerial colonization (Hancock, 2002; Cairns, 2002; Warren and Rehn, 2006) and the '*corporate production* of the labour of aesthetics' (Witz et al., 2003: 35). An aesthetics informed by Rancière's writings disrupts the safe bet of employing aesthetics either affirmatively or 'purely' critically. For sure, it resists incorporation into a managerial logic that fundamentally departs from a logic of inequality, only to prove it again and again.

However, as indicated in Rancière's treatment of critical art, it also problematizes the gesture of acknowledging nothing but managerial colonization, of singing the 'oppression blues' (Guillet de Monthoux, 2006). Instead, this notion of aesthetics urges us to locate those time-spaces in which an 'excess of words' (Rancière, 1994: 33) or an excess of signs and forms suspends the relation between the order of space and speech and the order of bodies (Chambers, 2005) – the orderings of organizing. Rancière's work is a call to count on the possibility of polemical scenes and of the noise of politics that accompanies the reconfiguration of a given distribution of the sensible.

Of course, already the identification of such an aesthetico-political event is conflict-ridden. Dissensual scenes are of the moment and provisional. 'Political difference is always on the shore of its own disappearance…, the space of a people's public demonstration is always at risk of being confused with the merchant's *agora*, etc.' (Rancière, 2001: par. 25). In what seems to amount to a call for situational analysis, there is thus a need, I think, and an opportunity to

'sociologize Rancière' (quite possibly a provocative choice of words in light of the philosopher's comments on the 'royal science' of sociology). More precisely, the philosopher's notion of aesthetics lends itself quite pragmatically to empirical work. Not only has Rancière often used events of the day as material to consider and sharpen his arguments (see e.g. Rancière, 2005), his major themes can be traced back to spending time in workers' archives and adding his voice to their forgotten struggles (Rancière, 1989). There is a sort of empirical operativeness, a plasticity inherent to his writings that seems readily applicable for concrete situations (Deranty, 2003). As noted above, moreover, Rancière is a fond user of spatial vocabulary – see only his referring to politics as a transformation of a so-called public, policed 'space of 'moving-along' into a space for the appearance of a subject: i.e. the people, the workers, the citizens: it consists in refiguring the space, of what there is and what to do there, what is to be seen or named therein' (Rancière, 2001: par. 22).

A count of the uncounted is possible whenever a space is produced from which new voices can be spoken and heard. For example, everyday urban struggles 'to name neglected spatialities and invent new ones' (Amin and Thrift, 2002: 4) seem to deliver interesting possibilities to observe and recount possible partakings of those that have no part. The kind of organizational aesthetics I am arguing for would thus imply an empirical engagement with the 'poetic' moments, when the excluded bring forth their own claims – when *they speak for themselves* – or when artistic endeavours disturb existing orders of what is visible and sayable (Žižek, 2004).

Furthermore, since the philosophical tradition of thinking aesthetics is dominated by reflecting upon the fine arts, declaring that art itself would have hardly anything to do with organizational aesthetics is somewhat surprising. In some readings of organizational aesthetics, concerns with art, the art system and artistic enterprise are slipping from view by limiting the 'aesthetic approach' to a specific mode of understanding organizations (e.g. Strati 2000, 2007; Gagliardi 2006). Unencumbered by this distinction, a number of studies have been conducted that testify to art's potential for redistributing the sensible and, hence, of its organizational effects (see Guillet de Monthoux, 2004; Rehn and Sköld, 2005; Steyaert, 2006; Vickery, 2006; Beyes 2006; Beyes and Steyaert, 2006; Warren, 2006; Sliwa and Cairns, 2007).

Over the years Rancière has made a significant case for the potentialities of an art that, in the aesthetic regime, is no longer identified through specific rules and regulations of doing and making. Perhaps contemporary art is more sensitive to the possibility of social change than science, precisely because it can be characterized by the effacement of boundaries up to the point of its disappearance as a distinct practice, as Funcke (2007) speculates. In light of Rancière's writings, then, I would strongly argue for taking the art world seriously in organizational research and for regarding it as a breeding ground for potential modes and structures for a life to come.[14] I thus suggest opening the study of the aesthetics of organization towards a '*topography of the configuration of possibilities*, a perception of the multiple alterations and displacements that make up forms of political subjectivization and artistic invention' (Rancière, 2007b; italics added).

Finally, these prolegomena of relating Rancièrian aesthetics to the study of organization cannot avoid the question of the politics of scholarship. It seems obvious that, in light of notions such as conflict, dissent and rupture, an organizational aesthetics informed by Rancière's thought would entail a (re)politicization of research, a questioning of consensus and a cultivating of conflict (de Cock, 2006). After all, '[c]onsensus is the reduction of politics to the police' (Rancière, 2001, par. 32).[15] Seen this way, organization theory might be assessed as contributing its fair share to the annulment of politics in favour of (business school) interests (Perrow, 2000). Moreover, the politics of writing 'organization' extends to the role and self-image an organizational scholar assumes for him- or herself. Particularly in *The Philosopher and his Poor*, Rancière (2004b) has convincingly forwarded what could be called a deconstruction of philosophy's (and, for Rancière, sociology's) self-proclaimed position of mastery. Hereinafter, a critical study of organization would refrain from merely 'speaking for' the presumably dominated, thus possibly silencing or excluding actual struggles of emancipation. Instead, the task becomes adding one's voice to such struggles, to listen rather than interpret and to attempt to 'help .... resound, to make .... circulate' (Deranty, 2003: par. 1). Of course, disputing the critical researcher's emplacement and stance is far from new. However, Rancière's insistence on resisting easy classification and grand conceptual musings, the moving pertinence of his attempts to add his voice to worker-poets, forgotten revolutionaries of education, and to the dreams of anonymous thinkers (Ross, 1991), could reframe the discussion by posing a simple, albeit unsettling question: What if equality were the point of departure? //

NOTES

1// For reasons that are well worth pondering and that will be touched upon later, Bourdieu's strategy of unmasking Kantian 'pure' taste as simply Bourgeois taste, thus implying that the philosopher would not know the underlying motives of what he says, has been strongly criticized by Rancière: 'The science effect produced by the sociologist .... results in the expulsion of everything not reducible to an effect of distinction. .... The 'vulgarity' of the sociologist .... is only the disenchanted banality of the learned opinion of his time, which, with an amused eye, regards the witnesses of that age when philosophers believed in the future of equality and proletarians in the inspirations of poets' (Rancière, 2004b: 190 et seqq). For more on this, see the scathing chapter on 'The Sociologist King' in *The Philosopher and his Poor* (Rancière, 2004b). However, Rancière addresses selected influential works of the sociologist, particularly *Distinctions* 1987). For a 'different Bourdieu' on questions of possible effects of art see Bourdieu and Haake (1995).

2// Gagliardi (2006) relates the growing interest in aesthetics to the recent inquiries into the role of emotions, to approaches that view society as a network of practices in time and space with objects as active presences, to the diagnosis of a general aestheticization of the economy and social life, to the blossoming research on the human body and to epistemological developments such as new fieldwork techniques that explicitly rely on the researcher's sensibilities. One could add here an interest in the so-called 'creative industries' and the recent attention directed at spatial thinking.

3// Rancière (2000) has *expressis verbis* acknowledged his debt to Foucault, especially the latter's genealogical thought and his notion of 'episteme'. However, 'I am much more sensitive to crossings-over, repetitions, or anachronisms in historical experience. ... ..[W]here Foucault thinks in terms of limits, closure and exclusion, I think in terms of internal division and transgression' (2000: 13).

4// In his hunt through the archives and literatures of the 18th century, Foucault (2002) unearthed a positive notion of the police which works upon whole populations (as the emerging field in which to intervene through political and administrative power) and whose purpose is thus defined as seeing to living. Fittingly, in Germany at that time the science of administration was called *Polizeiwissenschaft* (*science of the police*). In contemporary society, then, the police is 'exerted through all sorts of channels in the social body as well as through the managerial organisms of the state and the market' (Rancière, 2007b: 264) – including, I assume, Management Science as today's *Polizeiwissenschaft*.

5// That is why the philosopher states that he would not be a political philosopher (Rancière, 2003b: par. 10). From his perspective, politics is opposed to philosophy since the latter traditionally entails coming up with justifications and explanations for the given social and political orders. 'By defining its object in relation to the social hierarchy, political philosophy ends up defining a non-political object.' (Deranty, 2003: par. 3).

6// It follows that the conceptual restriction of politics to the exercise of, and the struggle for, power means abolishing politics (Rancière, 2001: par. 1). Moreover, in 'Disagreement' (2002) Rancière directly confronts a Habermasian 'proceduralist' notion of democracy. Where the latter presupposes political subjects, a given public sphere and situations of disagreement, i.e. partners within communicative exchange and their validity claims, for Rancière democratic struggles consist of the production of political subjects, so to speak, of the enlargement of the public sphere through new entitlements to take part and be seen. From this point of view, a Habermasian politics resembles a consensual management of transparently visible diverging interests. Instead, Rancière's style of meditating on instances of disagreement poses not a(nother) theory of political communication but an idea that denies the very possibility of a communicative rationality (Chambers, 2005: par. 2).

7// However, this does not boil down to a utopian hope of the egalitarian society-to-come. Rather, 'egalitarian society is only ever the set of egalitarian relations that are traced here and now through singular and precarious acts' (Rancière, 2006a: 97).

8// The abstract notion of the 'poor' does not refer to a socio-economic and pre-existing class, but to those who have no part and are not taken into account. It designates more than a social category, namely those who from the point of view of the philosopher and sociologist kings do not think and write as well as the 'other' to the liberal-democratic police order (Rancière, 2001: par. 12). The poor, then, comes into being with the interruption of politics, it 'emerges when it makes its very claim to be counted' (Chambers, 2005: par. 13).

9// However, this interrelatedness has nothing to do with the often-heard claim of an aestheticization of power's forms and manifestations, like theatrical party conventions or the so-called experience economy's infatuation with performativity (see Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Thrift, 2002). Moreover, the close proximity of aesthetics and politics might irritate readers that cling to a Benjaminian concern about the aestheticization of politics.

10// Rancière does not want to insinuate that every artwork would have adhered to the criterion of resemblance until the emergence of the aesthetic regime of art. The criterion designates 'a fold in the distribution of ways of doing and making ....., a fold that renders the arts visible. It is not an artistic process but a regime of visibility regarding the arts.' (Rancière, 2004a: 22).

11// If such statements come across as overly romantic with regard to art's possible effects, then Rancière's notion of an 'aesthetic revolution' that has lead to the aesthetic regime of art, cogently counteracts such scepticism. As the philosopher has pointed out in fascinating studies on literature and the novel (Rancière, 2003a, 2004c), the importance of the social body that came to fascinate social thinkers, 'the honour conferred on the commonplace,' had been part of the 'science of literature' before becoming part and parcel of the social sciences (Rancière, 2004a: 33). The modern novel played an important role in pioneering models of relating the presentations of facts with ways of rendering them intelligible. These 'patterns' of arranging signs and images, of connecting what is seen and what is said, later found their way into the analyses of the social sciences. The emergence of the human and social sciences is thus related to and draws upon what Rancière calls the 'phantasmagoric dimension of the true' (ibid.: 34) that was brought forth by the arts and 'flattened' into positivist sociological concepts. 'Marx's commodity stems from the Balzacian shop.' (Rancière, 2004d: 20).

12// According to the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk (2007), we are witnessing an inflation of the displayable (*des Ausstellbaren*) in the world of art, provoked by a 'two-fold revolution': First, the radical self-liberation of artistic expression, and second, the seemingly unstoppable proliferation of what counts as art. For Sloterdijk, contemporary art that knows better leaves museum and gallery spaces and steps back from being 'artfair-art' (*Kunstmessen-Kunst*). Instead, it joins the people, putting to disposition both its artistic form (*Werkform*) and its value-form (*Wertform*), hence looking for other, often ephemeral spaces.

13// Relational art thus implies that an artwork becomes a 'social interstice', 'an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space' (Bourriaud, 2002: 14). Intent on inventing new forms of sociability, the sphere of human relations – 'meetings, encounters, events, various types of collaboration between people, games, festivals, and places of conviviality' (ibid.: 28) - is turned into the 'material' from which artistic forms emerge. Such experiments do not follow a utopian agenda but share an interest in provisional, fleeting situations: 'This chance can be summed up in just a few words: *learning to inhabit the world in a better way*' (ibid.: 15).

14// For an attempt to relate Rancièrian aesthetics to artistic endeavours – specifically, the activities in East Berlin's former people's palace (*Palast der Republik*) – and to the study of organization see Beyes (2008).

15// agreements (Rancière, 2002). The essence of consensus is the closing-down of politics, i.e. 'the annulment of dissensus as the separation of the sensible from itself, the annulment of surplus subjects, the reduction of the people to the sum of the parts of the social body, and of the political community to the relationship of interests and aspirations of these different parts' (Rancière, 2001: par. 32).

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