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«On Jacques Rancière»:

Gabriel Rockhill – Lecture abstract and Bio

L'art entre le réel

Critique of the Contradiction in Terms of Political Art

Gabriel Rockhill

Abstract

Many contemporary thinkers—from Herbert Marcuse to Arthur Danto and Jacques Rancière—have underscored various ways in which contemporary art is trapped within a supposed contradiction between art and reality, and in particular political reality. In the attempt to link the institution of art to its outside by merging aesthetics with real life via what Rancière calls “*l’art du quelconque* (the art of the commonplace),” art becomes trapped between two extremes: either it becomes so ordinary that it loses its status as art, or it remains so artistic that it can never really become commonplace. Too real or too aesthetic, the art that takes aim at the heart of the real can never truly meld with reality without ceasing to be art as such.

This paper argues that this contradiction is based on an unfounded theoretical abstraction according to which there are two more or less autonomous spheres: art and (political) reality. The opposition between these two domains by no means goes without saying, and the delimitation of their borders—if there are any—is a subject of much debate. Indeed, if these two spheres are not separated by an insurmountable barrier that is more or less *a priori*, it becomes possible to reopen, in a new light, the question of the relations between what is called, somewhat schematically, “art” and “(political) reality.”

Gabriel Rockhill is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Villanova University (Philadelphia), Directeur de programme at the Collège International de Philosophie in Paris and Chercheur associé at the Centre de Recherches sur les Arts et le Langage (CNRS/EHESS). He is the author of *Logique de l’histoire: Pour une analytique des pratiques philosophiques* (Editions Hermann, 2010) and *Radical History & the Politics of Art* (Columbia University Press, 2013). He co-authored *Politics of Culture and the Spirit of Critique: Dialogues* (Columbia University Press, 2011), and he co-edited and contributed to *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics* (Duke University Press, 2009) and *Technologies de contrôle dans la mondialisation: Enjeux politiques, éthiques et esthétiques* (Editions Kimé, 2009). He edited and translated Jacques Rancière’s *The Politics of Aesthetics* (Continuum Books, 2004) as well as Cornelius Castoriadis’s *Postscript on Insignificance* (Continuum Books, 2011). He is also the co-founder of the Machete Group, a collective of artists and intellectuals based in Philadelphia (<http://machetegroup.wordpress.com/>).