

JACQUES RANCIÈRE

and Indisciplinarity

The exclusive concentration of artistic talent in particular individuals, and its suppression in the broad mass which is bound up with this, is a consequence of the division of labour. [...] In any case, with a communist organisation of society, there disappears the subordination of the artist to local and national narrowness, which arises entirely from the division of labour, and also the subordination of the artist to some definite art, thanks to which he is exclusively a painter, sculptor, etc., the very name of his activity adequately expressing the narrowness of his professional development and his dependence on division of labour. In a communist society there are no painters but at most people who engage in painting amongst other activities (Marx, 1970, [1845] p. 109).

Whilst in ordinary life every shopkeeper is very well able to distinguish between what somebody professes to be and what he really is, our historians have not yet won even this trivial insight. They take every epoch at its word and believe that everything it says and imagines about itself is true (Marx, 1970, [1845] p. 67).

Following a raft of translations of his works into English over the last two decades, Jacques Rancière has gained much recent attention as the latest ‘*Philosophe du jour*’ of the critical humanities (Bowman and Stamp, 2011, p. xi). He has an exemplary pedigree, having been taught by the French Structural Marxist Louis Althusser, and contributing in the seminars that led to his book *Reading Capital* (1970). His intellectual oeuvre is wide ranging and deliberately unclassifiable, encompassing aesthetic and cultural theory, philosophy, politics, pedagogy, art, class, the police, and the histories and intersections of all of the above. For Rancière, this interdisciplinarity, or ‘indisciplinarity’ as he prefers, is a deliberate methodological manoeuvre designed to evade disciplinary specialism, segregation, or heirarchisation; all of which reflect and reproduce an institutional division of labour within the humanities. Like many French philosophers, his writing style is idiosyncratic - either exasperating or exhilarating depending on your particular taste or academic allegiance. Reductively, one could summarise Rancière’s work as an investigation of the results of refusing one’s designated and proper place in this prevailing social order, and why such a symbolic refusal is necessary and vital. The central concept underpinning this analysis is *Le partage du sensible*, which is most commonly translated as the ‘distribution of the sensible’, though the alternate possible translations of ‘sharing’, ‘division’ and ‘partition’ are useful and relevant. This concept is

explicitly interrogated in the later work *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004), but operates implicitly or explicitly throughout most of Rancière's work. Though difficult to define with any concision, the 'distribution of the sensible' refers to the separation of socio-cultural space and lived existence into strict a priori strata, which condition and limit every individual's capacity to think, to act, to speak, and to be heard. This 'distribution', negotiated socially and lived ideologically, is maintained by what Rancière refers to as the 'Police'. His use of this term is more expansive than that of common usage, referring not simply to one specific 'Repressive State Apparatus' (Althusser, 1971) but any

organisational system of coordinates that establishes a distribution of the sensible or a law that divides the community into groups, social positions, and functions
(Rockhill in Rancière, 2004, p. 3).

The 'distribution of the sensible' therefore is a self-regulating and complex institutional and ideological field where human agency is alternatively repressed or nourished under strictly monitored institutional conditions. For Rancière then, questions concerning the logic of this system are ultimately questions concerning democracy itself, which is to be realised, not simply in the recognition of social stratification, but through the revolutionary rejection of that stratification via a human praxis centred around the logic of equality and the common.

Rancière's doctoral thesis, *La nuit des prolétaires*, published originally in English, in 1981, as *Nights of Labor: The Workers Dream in Nineteenth Century France*, typifies this approach, using the example of the forgotten worker-poets and worker-philosophers of 19th century French industrial capitalism who 'refused to simply take themselves as workers' (Larson, 2013, p. 1) and instead strove to fashion a creative existence beyond the confines of the factory. This act of refusal is not only a challenge to the prevailing social order but also to its temporal logic. That is, the work-sleep-work-sleep pattern, and the socially expected behaviours appropriate to workers in each phase, is completely disrupted. The boundaries between intellectual and manual labour are equally collapsed and the 'distribution of the sensible', usually self-policed by the worker, is substituted for a 'redistribution of the possible' where -

the possible is the workers' dream deemed as impossible by a temporal ordering that would give workers no time and no dreams. It is only by behaving improperly, of disrespecting propriety, that a new distribution of the sensible is possible
(Highmore, 2011, p. 98-9).

By using their spare time for creative acts, these worker-poets transform the socially expected 'work (productive) / free time (docile, passive)' pattern into 'work (productive) / free time (active, dynamic)'. The dynamism of the latter formulation therefore starts to threaten the security of the former. The questions underlying such a redistribution would of course be 'Who dictates that a worker cannot be a poet?'; 'Why would not all workers

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aspire to transcend the drudgery of daily labour?' Perhaps most importantly, 'Why has the art of these workers been forgotten by, or excluded from, certain histories of art?'

Probably because of their regular focus on the potential of the emancipatory potential of artistic praxis, Rancière's works have gained particular popularity in the fields of Fine Art, Art History and Cultural Studies. You will find a copy of one of Rancière's texts in the shop of any contemporary art gallery or biennale worth its salt. The Tate Modern recently hosted Rancière 'in conversation' with author and curator Claire Bishop (13th June 2013) in one of its auditoriums. This is not to suggest (purely at least) that there is a populist element to Rancière's work but certainly there is a fully developed publicity machine surrounding his work, producing accidental socio-cultural effects that jar with the central content of his work. Perhaps there is even something fundamentally un-Rancièreian about Rancière's current quasi-celebrity status (McQuillan, 2010, p. 163-185).

For this paper though, the turn to Rancière's work is made not only for its revolutionary and emancipatory content, its pedagogical relevance, or for its contemporary voguishness, though these are all relevant factors. Keeping with the central theme of this journal, the differences between the Fine Arts and the Graphic Arts, this paper uses Rancière's thought to highlight a particular 'distribution of the sensible' concerning visual arts practice, policed both institutionally (within the university, the artworld, and its apparatus), and societally (in what is referred to oxymoronically as the Creative Industries). More so, in all the associated behavioural types related to the above. Many readers practising within this field will recognise this 'distribution' immediately, even if many would wish it away as a historical concern. Writing recently, in his book *The Education of an Illustrator* (2000, p. 3-5), the illustrator and author Marshall Arisman has sarcastically, but also with a degree of resignation, described a particular hierarchical logic within the disciplinary subdivision of visual arts within the academy:

1. Fine Arts is pure.
2. Illustration is the beginning of selling out.
3. Graphic Design is commercial art.
4. Advertising is selling... period. (Arisman, 2000, p. 3).

This separation is not simply a matter of disciplinary classification, specialisation, and heirarchisation, although it certainly has these institutional effects. More importantly, it is also a fully developed ideological system that has consequences beyond the artworld itself. Ideology, in the words of T. J. Clark (1976), can be defined as

systems of beliefs, images, values and techniques of representation by which particular social classes, in conflict with each other, attempt to 'naturalise' their own special place in history. Every ideology tries to give a quality of inevitability to what is in fact a quite specific and disputable relation to the means of production.

It is the simple contention of this paper to suggest that the distinctions between Fine Art and Graphic are neither natural, nor inevitable, but historically produced out of class struggle and the relations of production. More problematically, I wish to suggest that there is an entire canon of attitudes, beliefs, values, and ideas perpetuated by the artworld, and all those involved in its machinations, which naturalises and validates this segregation, disguising its material reality, and producing subjectivities appropriate to the maintenance of its strata. As Marx (1970 [1845]) has famously argued, the ruling class of any particular period are the stewards of the ruling ideas of that period. Any analysis of cultural attitudes or cultural practice that denies this material class basis can only ever be partial, and is doomed to perpetuate and reproduce dominant-hegemonic attitudes as natural or eternal. The following is an attempt to historicise and reverse such an analysis by demonstrating that the disciplinary division of labour within the arts was 'produced to do a certain job, to validate a particular order of things' (Clark, 1976), and that these false distinctions are disputable, and the social order represented by them contestable.

Arisman suggests that this 'distribution of the sensible' has been in existence since his experience of art school in the 1960s. I would go further. That the disciplinary separation to which Arisman alludes has institutional roots in early modernity, with the formation of the art schools, certainly has some truth, but it is also certainly born out of, and reproduced by, class antagonisms that predated the art school in its institutional form. It is also intimately connected to a set of properly metaphysical concepts, such as art, creativity, genius, expression, beauty, and so forth, which emerged at approximately the same time as the modern system of artistic disciplinary segregation. This list of concepts sits on the privileged side of what Derrida would call a logocentric conceptual system, and they are as closely associated with the fine arts as their binary opposites are unfairly associated with the applied arts. That these concepts and their negative reflexes still stubbornly haunt art and design curricula as undeconstructed baggage is probably harder to admit, for those with a vested interest in the current system, than the recognition that 'two cultures' (to borrow C.P. Snow's famous phrase) currently exist within visual communication, which could be broadly characterised as the Fine Arts and the Applied Arts, and which often find themselves in an antagonistic relationship. It is the investment in the concepts listed above, the uncritical assignation of them as natural products of Fine Art, and the 'policing' of the above by all actors involved, which ultimately maintains the 'distribution of the sensible' under discussion. Before returning to Rancière then, to discuss the contemporary pedagogico-philosophical effects of the 'distribution' above, and to suggest 'indisciplinarity' as a way out of this impasse, I wish to sketch the historical gestation of this system, if only to remind people of what is too readily forgotten in contemporary discourses concerning art, aesthetics, aesthetic education and their derivatives, which far too often remain essentialising and universalising at best; dependent on dominant hegemonic ideology.

THE MODERN

System of the Arts

Paul Oskar Kristeller in his two part essay on the history of modern aesthetics, *The Modern System of the Arts* (1951; 1952), demonstrates that

the term "Art," with a capital A and in its modern sense, and the related term "Fine Arts" (Beaux Arts) originated in all probability in the eighteenth century (Kristeller, 1951; 1952, p. 497).

Terry Eagleton (1990) makes much the same argument in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Pierre Bourdieu (1984), again, in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Larry Shiner, more recently, in *The Invention of Art* (2001). The common thread in all of the above is that the 'modern system of art', in essence Arisman's taxonomy above, was created in tandem with the birth of aesthetics in the eighteenth century. Specifically, Kristeller demonstrates how the 'Beaux Arts' (Beautiful Arts), the disciplines of painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry, were elevated to a transcendent status above other forms of applied arts and crafts at this time. That this 'modern system', or disciplinary separation, could be historically located to the mid eighteenth century, and not eternal or natural seems to be a controversial claim still. In 1951, this claim was faintly scandalous, to the extent that obviously felt the need to justify the seemingly simple observation with a footnote of over twenty references that spans two pages. Prior to this moment, the distinctions between the fine and applied arts were much more ambiguous. For Kristeller,

the social and intellectual prestige in antiquity of what we now consider to be the dominant forms of the visual arts was much lower than one might expect from their actual achievements (Kristeller, 1951, p. 502).

When Cicero spoke of the 'liberal arts', he included grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music in his circumscription (Capella in Kristella, 1951, p. 505). Plato equated poetry with rhetoric and 'the treatment given to it is neither systematic nor friendly' (p. 501). More importantly, the

signifier 'Art' was understood by the Greeks to denote 'all kinds of human activities that we would call crafts or sciences' and, more interestingly for the contemporary art school teacher, something that most definitely could be taught or learned (Kristeller, 1951, p. 498). The obscurantist and romantic myth of art school pedagogy that art cannot be learned, and therefore a paradoxical and 'curious endeavour to teach the unteachable' (p. 498) is a specifically Modern and debilitating malaise. The concept of Beauty, central to the valorization of Fine Art above other artistic forms, did exist, but when Plato refers to ideas of beauty

in the Symposium and the Phaedrus, he is speaking not merely of the physical beauty of human persons, but also of beautiful habits of the soul and of beautiful cognitions, whereas he fails completely to mention works of art in this connection (Kristeller, 1951, p. 499).

In the Middle Ages, a schema for the liberal arts, inherited from antiquity, remained structured into the Trivium (grammar, rhetoric, dialectic) and the Quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy), which jars with our contemporary use of the term. Certainly, the word 'artista' was coined at this time, though this could refer equally to a practitioner of the liberal arts or to what we would now call a craftsman (p. 508). Antiquity lacked even this type of vague classification, and the words that we now take to mean art, the Greek *techné* and the Roman *ars*, referred 'less to a class of objects than a human ability to make and perform' and embraced things as diverse as 'carpentry and poetry, shoemaking and medicine, sculpture and horse breaking' (Shiner, 2001, p. 19). On this evidence, the classical conception of art is actually much closer to what we would now consider craft, or the mechanical arts, than the Fine Arts, and metaphysical notions such as individuality, genius, creativity, beauty were largely absent from the commentaries of such activities. Herbert Read, in the influential book *Education Through Art*, has argued that many of the confusions, limitations, and problems of modern art pedagogy stem ultimately from misreadings of the use of the term 'Art' in Plato (Read, 1961, p. 10-11). And though the Renaissance heralded some early signs of what we might recognise as a modern approach to the arts (for example, the advent of a hagiographic and author-centred approach to the art object heralded by Vasari's *The Lives of the Artists* (2008, [1550])), and a privileged status for painting and sculpture (Shiner, 2001, p. 35-56), all the evidence from scholarship points to a radical rupture, and the creation of a precise classificatory system, in the eighteenth century. This is not to suggest that artistic practices didn't exist before the eighteenth century, but simply that artistic practice was divided, interdisciplinary, and inseparable from other forms of human sensuous activity. Therefore, the modern way of understanding art, which involves 'the subordination of the artist to some definite art, thanks to which he is exclusively a painter, sculptor, etc.' (Marx, 1970, [1845] p. 109) was specifically and historically invented.

Charles Batteux's (1746) *Les beaux arts réduit à un meme principe* (The Fine Arts Reduced to a Single Principle), is

understood to be the first to introduce a limited classification of the superior arts, which included music, painting, sculpture, poetry and dance; all of which transcend mere utility and, in their beautiful imitation of nature, aim to give pleasure to their audiences (Shiner, 2001, p. 83). This opposition between pleasure and utility became the standard method of distinguishing between the 'Beaux Arts' from the lesser arts at this time, remaining prevalent today, and

over the course of the century, the notion of a special kind of refined pleasure or taste would be transformed into the modern idea of the aesthetic (Shiner, 2001, p. 83).

Batteux's text first appeared in England, as an anonymous pirated summary, entitled *The Polite Arts*, and the 'Beaux Arts' signifier was lost (Kristeller, 1952, p. 30). This is not simply a matter of mistranslation however. 'Polite', in the context of English civil society ('elegant arts' was used to a lesser extent), is loaded with connotations of class and societal status, reflecting a growing tendency amongst the middle classes to use conspicuous engagement with the newly emergent cultural institutions 'as a crucial marker for a new kind of social and cultural refinement' (Shiner, 2001, p. 98). Manners, or politeness, served much the same social function at this time. At this time English theories concerning taste (Hume, Hutcheson, Reid) were combined with German Aesthetic theory (Kant, Schiller, Herder), given its proper name by Baumgarten in 1735, to create a fully developed canon which entrenched the separation between the Fine Arts and crafts that we now know as familiar. This systemic separation found its clearest initial articulation in Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (2000, [1790]) that not only distinguished between judgements of the beautiful and the sublime, but also articulated a distinction between art and craft. The former was characterized by its 'purposive purposelessness', to be experienced disinterestedly, and the latter forms of 'remunerative art' were relegated to the realms of the disagreeable due to their connection with labour, as opposed to free play (2000, [1790] p. 183). Because aesthetic judgements are disinterested, that is, ends in themselves, they supposedly contain, for Kant a subjective universality. This claim for the disinterested (outside political agenda, socialisation, prejudice, class, etc.), and therefore universal nature of the aesthetic experience, has famously scandalised theorists of the left throughout the twentieth century. Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) 'Distinction', for example, aggressively argues that the 'aesthetic' is far from universal but actually the aesthetic of the ruling class which interpellates all other classes as its subjects, misrecognising the world view of their class masters as their own. More so, the 'disinterested' experience is a luxury only available to the bourgeois or aristocrat with the material wealth or free time to allow them to be 'disinterested', and certainly not the priority of the wage labourer, or artisan, whose priority is obviously sustenance and self-preservation.

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The journey from taste to the aesthetic reached its denouement in nineteenth century romantic philosophy, which largely reproduced this classificatory system of the arts automatically and uncritically. Symbiotically, a gradual shift in the reception understanding of art developed, which could be characterised as a change in focus from the artwork as beautiful, to the artwork as sublime, to the artwork as autonomous, self-contained, and spontaneous site of creation (Shiner, 2001, p. 143). The latter approaches mystified the act of artistic production to such an extent that they were permanently alienated them from the materiality of artisanal production.

However, it would be an idealist analysis that imagined that such developments were the results of great thinkers alone. Other factors would be the emergence of new forms of art institutions, such as 'the art museum, the secular concert, and literary criticism' (Shiner, 2001, p. 88) all of which used the discourse of aesthetic theory as cultural capital to further their respective commercial interests, thereby accentuating the differences between the artistic disciplines and creating new publics for those disciplines in the process. The emergent bourgeois public sphere, analysed in depth by Habermas (1989), in the new lending libraries, coffee houses, exhibitions, salons, concerts and periodicals, where the aesthetic theories of Baumgarten, Kant, and others would be discussed by the chattering classes, did more than anything to cement this distinction in the public consciousness and the fabric of civil society.

The formation of the art academies at this time across Europe, which grew exponentially during the eighteenth century to almost a hundred in number (Shiner, 2001, p. 101), many of which had links to the aristocracy, institutionalised the

valorisation of certain types of Beaux-Arts practices into formal curricula. Under the stewardship of Joshua Reynolds, for example, the British Royal Academy (founded in 1769) encouraged students to pursue ideal beauty over the simply mechanical.

The moderns are not less convinced than the ancients of this superior power existing in the art; nor less conscious of its effects. Every language has adopted terms expressive of this excellence. The Gusto grande of the Italians; the Beau ideal of the French and the great style, genius, and taste among the English, are but different appellations of the same thing. It is this intellectual dignity, they say, that ennobles the painter's art; that lays the line between him and the mere mechanic (Reynolds, 2008, [1770] p. 46).

This institutional division between the artisanal and the artistic was compounded in the nineteenth century with the establishment of the Government School of Design in Somerset House, London, which became the model that was rapidly rolled out to the provinces. The institutions born out of this model are the forefathers of our modern art schools. However, from their inception, these schools were quite different institutions, pedagogically and ideologically, from the aristocratic Royal Academy, to which they stood immediately as radical other. Quinn (2012) has written extensively about how the ideology of these schools was born from the utilitarianism of a British Parliament dominated by a newly empowered bourgeois class. The focus of these early schools on developing design skills applicable to industry stood in stark contrast to the culture and pedagogy of the Royal Academy. They were also central to the production and reproduction of a

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culture of disciplinary specialisation, necessary for the division of labour in industrial manufacture, but which remains entrenched as a pedagogic art school mode. Beech (2014) has read the formation of these schools as a bourgeois radical act; a declaration of class war against the aristocratic stranglehold on culture. The vocational and pragmatic emphasis of contemporary design degrees, and the romantic esotericism of some contemporary fine art degrees, respectively, could be viewed as distant echoes of this originary moment of ideological class conflict. Both Wood (2008) and Rifkin (1988) have written acerbically about the absolute pedagogical bankruptcy and repetitiveness of these early art school curricula, which sits uncomfortably next to notions of creativity, individuality, expressiveness, or even the myth of the art school as an emancipatory institution.

Eagleton's (1990) explicitly materialist *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* argues that aesthetic theories emerge as the result of, and thus reflect the world view of, an emergent bourgeois class, which in Germany at least, were still largely deferential to the old feudal-absolutist regime. This emergent, but disempowered bourgeois class, provided the philosopher aestheticians for this new social order –

Unrooted in political or economic power, however, this bourgeois enlightenment remained in many respects enmortgaged to feudalism absolutism, marked by that profound respect for authority of which Immanuel Kant, courageous Aufklärer and docile subject to the king of Prussia, may be taken as exemplary (Eagleton, 1990, p. 15).

Though this is certainly harsh on Kant, and a more careful reading can reveal a certain strategic resistance to absolutist power in his work, the preliminary sections of *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1979 [1798]), for example, certainly demonstrate deference to authority. Given its class basis, Eagleton argues that the project of aesthetics could be read as an attempt, by proxy, to extend the hegemony of state control across the entirety of the realm of sensible experience as well. Read in this way, aesthetics is an attempt by absolutist power to take account of a shifting social dynamic and new bourgeois-liberal conceptions such as 'taste', 'individuality', 'feeling', and so forth, which otherwise would threaten the security of its power base (Eagleton, 1990, p. 15). I would suggest that this kind of reading of the aesthetic, and therefore Fine Art as its institutional form, as a perpetuation of the world-view of the ruling class might well be seductive to contemporary applied arts practitioner, that find themselves relegated to the status of second class creative producers since the days of Reynolds.

In summary then, the aesthetic, and its related discourses, concepts, and judgements, is not an eternal, or even classical category but historical invention, whose birth can be more or less precisely located to coincide with the advent of modernity and the expansion of mercantile capitalism. Furthermore, aesthetic theory emerges from the bourgeois classes and reflects the particularities of the bourgeois sensibility above all others. Finally, the disciplinary specialisations and resulting hierarchisations, that we presume eternal, had no equivalent in the classical period, and are invented at approximately the same historical moment and exacerbated by both of the factors above.

THINKING

Beyond Disciplines

In a recent essay, *Thinking Between Disciplines: an aesthetics of knowledge*, (2006, p. 1-12), and interview (2007), Rancière outlines 'indisciplinarity', as a philisophico-political method for rethinking society and, by extension, democracy itself. For Rancière, democracy begins with the presumption of equality, particularly the equality of intelligences, between all citizens. Therefore the task of any democracy is to maximise opportunities for participation in, and the creation of, the socio-psychological and political common world (1991, p. 45-73). This necessitates the rejection of specialist disciplinary positions as these begin from the presumption of inequality; the adoption of such positions involves the drawing of boundaries; 'the distribution of territories, which is always a way of deciding who is qualified to speak about what' (2007, p. 3). Take for example the sociologist's contretemps with the aesthetic, as exemplified by Bourdieu and Eagleton. The declaration of the disinterested aesthetic experience as merely the illusion of bourgeois philosophers is, first and foremost, a declaration of the differing world views of the sociologist and the philosopher, ultimately validating the former over the latter; a separation of 'those who do the science and those who are regarded as its *objects*' (2007, p. 3). Disciplinary boundaries always deny the visibility of all other worlds to demonstrate the validity of their own. This separationist disciplinary logic extends throughout society creating the totality that Rancière famously describes as the 'distribution of the sensible'. The revolutionary politics of an *indisciplinary* approach are therefore to be located not in any doctrinaire political programme, Marxist or otherwise, but in the suggestion of a 'redistribution of the possible' which describes 'a world open to the possibilities and capacities of all' (2007, p. 2).

For Rancière, the radicality of Kant's analysis of the aesthetic in the third critique lies in the way it reveals a disarticulation between knowledge and experience, or the conceptual and empirical, thus revealing the incompatibility of these two orders of knowledge in the process. This demonstrates that there are in fact two orders of knowledge in existence at any particular time, co-existing in a situation that Kant characterises as a double negation, producing two related and necessary, but mutually exclusive, orders of ignorance. In the contretemps above, these

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orders could be characterised as the scientific knowledge of the sociologist against, and in denial of, the knowledge of the philosopher. Inversely, this also represents the denial of the social by the philosopher, whose concept of disinterested aesthetic crumbles in the face of. Eagleton (1990), to give him his dues, acknowledges this troubling disarticulation in Kant’s work, but retreats from the radical conclusions it suggests. He concludes that aesthetics, from Baumgarten onwards, is an illusory attempt to retrieve this unity, in a ‘confusion’ between the conceptual and sensory, and salvage philosophy from the abyss suggested by Kant. However, for Eagleton, this is dismissed as the bourgeois idealist conceit of the philosopher, or aesthetician, lacking the rigour of the historical materialist analysis. Paul de Man (1996, p. 129-163) has made a similar argument about Schiller’s letters (2004, [1795]), who he demonstrates to have wilfully misread Kant for the purposes of creating a philosophical praxis concerned less with wrestling with the problem of the structure of the imagination and more with the pragmatics of filling theatres and the lofty social ambitions he held for the aesthetic education and salvation of society (p. 141-2).

Neither Eagleton, nor Bourdieu, nor Schiller, nor even Kant, truly escape the limitations of their respective disciplinary positions. To remind ourselves, for Rancière, a discipline demarcates territory, to demonstrate the validity of a position and, as such, is a denial of the other which

should be understood as a regulation of a rapport between the two knowledges and two ignorances. It is a way of defining an idea of the thinkable, an idea of what the objects of knowledge

themselves can think and know. It is therefore always a certain regulation of dissensus, of its dehiscence in relation to the ethical order, according to which a certain type of condition implies a certain thought (Rancière, 2006, p. 6).

Rancière explains this further through the example of the palace from the beginning of Kant’s third critique, experienced aesthetically if, contra Rousseau, we ignore our desires to ‘vilify the vanity of the great who waste the sweat of people on such superfluous things’ (2000, [1790] p. 90) and maintain a position of disinterestedness. For the sociologist, whose disciplinary position insists that an individual’s ideas, concepts, and consciousness are produced by their position in the class system such proclamations are

the judgement of the petit-bourgeois intellectual who, free from worries about work or capital, indulges himself by adopting the position of universal thought and disinterested taste (Rancière, 2006, p. 2).

While there is a degree of correctness in this assertion, as Marx famously teaches us in the German Ideology and elsewhere, the limitations of such a reading reside in the binarisation of knowledge, or ways of approaching the world into the correct and incorrect; the true and the false. On the one hand the sociologist, who debunks the illusory idealism of the disinterested judgement; on the other the philosopher who views the sociologists commitment as a barrier to understanding. Two orders of knowledge and two orders of ignorance - operating in a perfectly

stable and systemic regulation of dissensus. A dynamic that perfectly reproduces itself and the expected behaviours of those who are trapped within it. And it is not even necessary for those trapped within this system to be fully invested in it, but simply enough that they

act on an everyday basis as though this was the case: it is enough that their arms, their gaze and their judgement make their know-how [savoir-faire] and the knowledge of their condition accord with each other, and vice versa. There is no illusion here, nor any misrecognition (Rancière, 2006, p. 4).

The worker building the palace need not truly believe that either his involvement in its construction, or his situation or exploitation within the wider relations of production, give him a more concrete understanding of the palace than the decadent aristocrat who resides there. Nor need he believe that the aesthetic experience of said palace, outlined in the rarefied discourse of the aesthetician, is beyond his comprehension. It is simply enough for him to recognise his place in this hierarchical ordering of the world and play to type. Similarly, the Fine Artist need not believe the institutional mythology they have more innate genius, creativity, individuality, or autonomy than the graphic artist. Nor need the Graphic Artist truly be mystified by the extravagancies, affectations, and elitist discourses of the artworld for the hierarchical modern system of the arts to be reproduced. Just like the builder constructing the palace, they simply need to recognise their correct place in the social order, and regulate their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and ambitions accordingly.

Following Kant, Rancière has recently suggested a need for of an ‘aesthetics of knowledge’ to think through this dissensual impasse. His phrase should not be confused with the suggestion that knowledge needs some sensible or visual supplement to make itself concrete, nor some historical understanding of aesthetics or vice versa. This phrase refers explicitly to the radical, troubling and dangerous rupture suggested by Kant’s analysis, where judgements concerning beauty need to be separated from social experience, and in his analysis of the sublime an incompatibility between comprehension and experience. For Rancière,

It is this arrangement [dispositif] that the aesthetic experience deregulates. It is thus that such experience is much more than a way of appreciating works of art. It concerns the definition of a type of experience which neutralises the circular relationship between knowledge [connaissance] as know-how [savoir] and knowledge as the distribution of roles. Aesthetic experience eludes the sensible distribution of roles and competences which structure the hierarchical order (Rancière, 2006, p. 4).

An ‘aesthetics of knowledge’, properly understood, offers some form of agency by opening up a mode of cognition that can disrupt the ‘two orders of ignorance’, challenge the ‘distribution of the sensible’, and the related hierarchical ordering of society. To conclude, albeit too briefly, this paper offers a reading of a contemporary commentary concerning the apparent creative malaise facing the Graphic Arts which, hopefully, suggests just such an approach, and that a different organisation of society is possible.

FIGHT

the Nothingness

Lawrence Zeegen, educator, illustrator, and writer, currently Professor of Illustration at University of the Arts, London, and Dean of the School of Design at London College of Communication, has recently written two contentious articles, in the design journal *Creative Review* (2012) and a comment piece for *It's Nice That* (2014), concerning the lack of criticality in the work of contemporary Graphic Artists. His main target was the annual showcase of 'rising stars from the graphic arts world', *Pick Me Up*, held at Somerset House, London. The former article, entitled *Where is the Content? Where is the Comment?* lambasted the discipline of illustration, which for him had become a discipline of entrenched 'navel gazing and self-authorship', obsessed with issues of its own craft, in retreat from social commentary or social engagement instead focussed on the 'the chit-chat of inner sanctum nothingness' (Zeegen, 2012). His later article lambasts the Graphic Arts world as an arena of

pure simulacra – the uncritical reproduction of outmoded styles without external referent, produced by a new generation of art school hipsters; a generation of would-bes and wannabes with replica beards, plaid shirts and skinny jeans (Zeegen, 2014).

For Zeegen, *Pick Me Up*, isn't to blame, given that it doesn't

claim to represent anything more than a style-over-content, fashion-led, vanilla-bland, anodyne-pop version of yesterday's zeitgeist, remodelled and repackaged for another generation of young pretenders obsessed with the here and now, despite the whiff of the then and there (Zeegen, 2014).

There is an obvious level of exaggeration for rhetorical effect here, but Zeegen is correct in his assertion that *Pick Me Up* isn't to blame for this institutional malaise. A Rancièrian analysis would demonstrate this to be the logical and expected reflex of the systematic and hierarchical ordering of creative knowledge which relegates the designer to mere wage labourer, focussed

on fulfilling the brief, rather than creating spontaneous works concerning with nothing other than disciplinary self-knowledge. This follows Zeegen's rhetorical binarisation perhaps too closely but most readers will recognise this at least a kernel of truth in the caricature. To paraphrase the *First Things First Manifesto 2000*, (Barnbrook, Kalman, et al, 1999) that famous call to arms for a programme of committed Graphic Arts practice contra commercial arts practice, there is a whole slew of publications and articles devoted to this belief. The market rewards it; design professionals and design educators encourage it. Indeed, this has pretty much been the status quo for the last two hundred and fifty years. If designers, illustrators, animators, printmakers, and other crafts practitioners, are 'navel gazers' it is because the system expects them to be exactly this.

Zeegen uses the example of the David Shrigley exhibition (2012), held across the river concurrently, and across the river from *Pick Me Up* as a counterpoint to its supposed artistic bankruptcy. Its giant publicity banner, the height of the Hayward Gallery displays a Shrigley piece with a clenched fist and the slogan 'FIGHT THE NOTHINGNESS', which Zeegen holds as a both a metaphor for the lack of the Graphic Arts, and a proverbial call to arms. Though well intended, the limitations of such an analysis are that they maintain the distinction between graphic arts practice and fine arts practice via the implication that design needs to be more like fine art, or for that matter activism, politics, philosophy, sociology, etc. to be of any worth. One should also point out here that Zeegen, as a professional educator, must acknowledge complicity in the maintenance of the logic of this system in more ways than just these two articles. Like the sociologist, whose discipline was invented as a 'war machine in the age of the aesthetic which is also the age of democratic revolutions' (Rancière, 2006, p. 7), Zeegen unleashes his own war machine exposing the limitations of design discourse vis-à-vis art discourse. The tragedy of this gesture is that, in championing the latter order of knowledge above the former, it reproduces the systematic distribution of the thinkable described above; dismissing a whole sector of creative production in the process.

Putting to one side the ridiculousness of holding David Shrigley up as an example of progressive practice, one needs to make the case for the many practitioners working within the field of the Graphic Arts producing work that, via a methodological 'indisciplinarity', resists any reductive labelling, blurs the boundaries between art and craft, and achieving a genuine criticality in the process. The beginnings of such a roll call would have to include the installation work of Neasdon Control Centre (<http://neasdencontrolcentre.com/>), the site specific work of Daniel Eatock (<http://eatock.com/>), John Morgan's output, which alternates between polished craft and contemporary art (<http://www.morganstudio.co.uk/>), and the politicised work of fellow Yorkshiremen, The Designer's Republic (<http://www.thedesignersrepublic.com/>), who have backgrounds in philosophy and produce as much moving image work as 2D material recently. The genuinely uncategorisable Swedish design collective Snask (www.snask.com) produce their own beer, run a record label and music festival, make films, host track and field events, alongside

producing editorial, web, and brand identity work. Any or all of the above could easily have been included alongside the numerous artists that Nicholas Bourriaud (1998) cites in his famous manifesto for progressive contemporary art, *Relational Aesthetics*. His identification of a tendency amongst contemporary art towards the relational and collaborative, which could be argued to ameliorate the alienating effects of capitalist societal relations, is as much a feature of the 'design' work above as it is of the latest Turner Prize shortlist. In fact, one could probably argue that the relational and the collaborative are characteristics that have been much more prevalent in the fields of design practice than of art practice over the last two centuries.

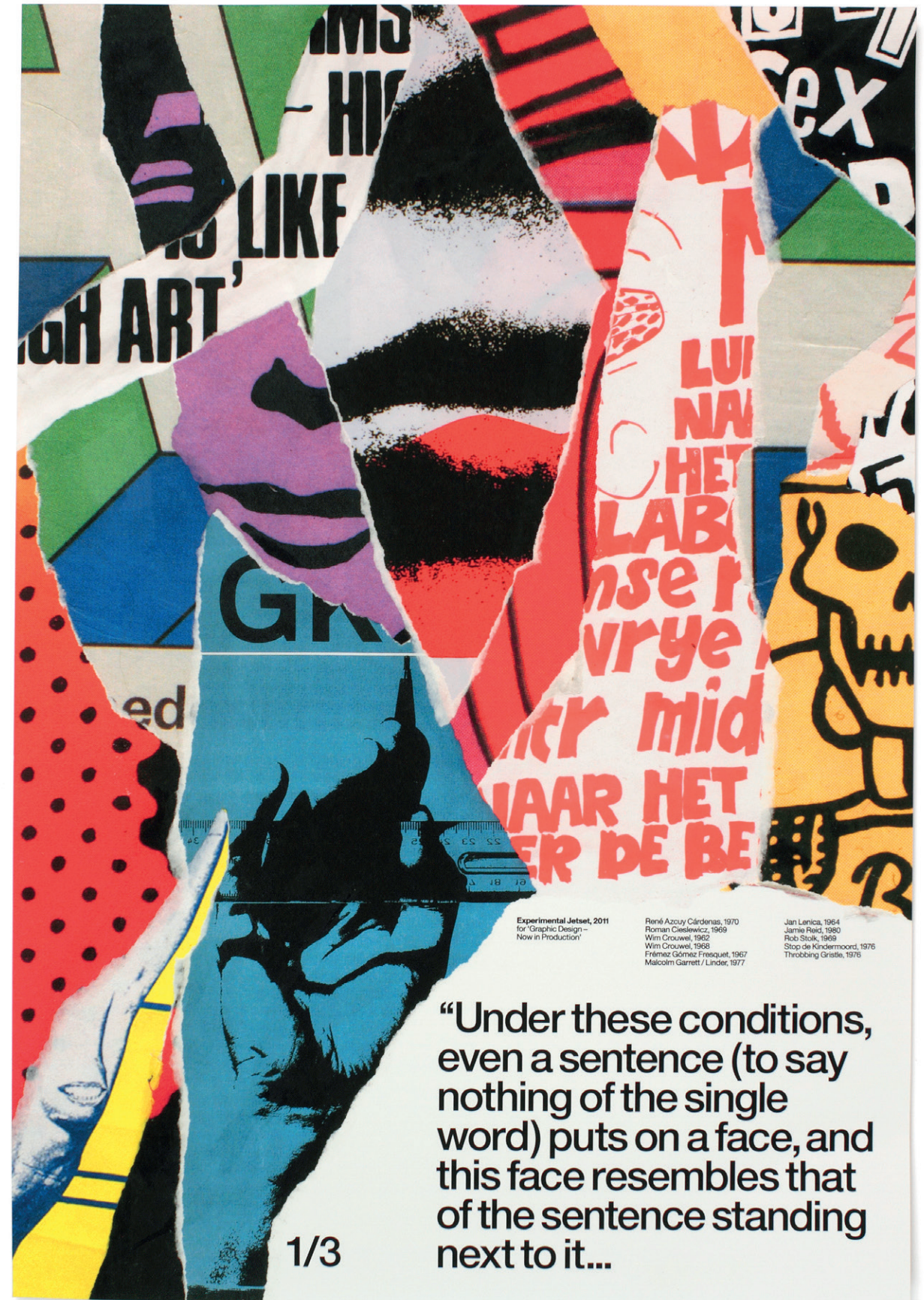


Figure 1. Statement and counter statement. Poster (1 of 3).
Experimental Jetset, 2004. Image courtesy of Experimental Jetset.



Figure 2. Statement and counter statement. Poster (2 of 3).
Experimental Jetset, 2004. Image courtesy of Experimental Jetset.



Figure 3. Statement and counter statement. Poster (3 of 3).
Experimental Jetset, 2004. Image courtesy of Experimental Jetset.

The equally indisciplinary Dutch design collective Experimental Jetset (<http://www.experimentaljetset.nl/>) issued a manifesto in 2001 entitled *Disrepresentation Now!* (2010 [2001]), that opens with a quote from Van Doesberg's (1923) *Antitendenzenkunst* manifesto that:

There is no structural difference between a painting that depicts Trotsky heading a red army, and a painting that depicts Napoleon heading an imperial army. It is irrelevant whether a piece of art promotes either proletarian or patriotic values (Van Doesburg in Experimental Jetset, 2010 [2001]).

As Experimental Jetset argue, this should not be misconstrued as an apolitical statement but instead a assertion that the act of representation, in art or politics, is always the claim for one particular world view above another, and therefore is counter-revolutionary whatever its originary politics. In this sense, like the similarity between history painter glorifying imperialism, and the Bolshevik artist celebrating the October revolution, there is a strange equivalence between the resolutely commercial artist or designer advertising trivial commodities for a pay cheque, and the subversive 'culture jammer' advocating the overthrow of such a system through interventionist graphic agitation. Both are representative activities, staking a claim for the correctness of their world-view (Beirut, 2007, p. 56-7), and both employ similar persuasive strategies. In contradistinction to a limiting bifurcation between the committed and the incorporated, such as one finds in *First Things First Manifesto 2000*, Experimental Jetset advocate and 'anti-tendentious' approach, which rejects the artificial distinctions placed between social, cultural, and commercial forms of graphic art and the logic of representative culture.

The immorality of advertising and the morality of anti-advertising are two sides of the same coin. What we need is a form of graphic design that is neither immoral nor moral, but amoral; that is productive, not reproductive; that is constructive, not parasitic. (Experimental Jetset, 2010 [2001]).

Instead, their work frequently advocates a form of presentational design abstractionism, which celebrates a radical materiality of design (type, spacing, space etc.) over any representation of the world. One could comfortably apply the analyses of the materiality and self-criticality of American Abstract Expressionism, made by the likes of Clement Greenberg (1992, [1965] p. 754-760) and Michael Fried (1992, [1964] p. 769-775), to a reading of their work, which in itself suggests the falsity of drawing boundaries between disciplines. More importantly, Experimental Jetset's call for disrepresentative practice suggests, like much of the best progressive art, a utopian image of society radically reconfigured, perhaps even unified, which is the ultimate ambition of 'indisciplinarity' as methodology in Rancière's work.

The contemporary graphic designer or illustrator, just like the labourer who constructed Kant's palace, or the shopkeeper in the Marx quote above, knows well enough their situation within

the relations of production. What they don't need is an alternative tendency, in the combative programmes issued by Zeegen, Adbusters and others. Paraphrasing Benjamin, a philosopher beloved by Experimental Jetset, in *Author as Producer* (1998, [1966] p. 85-103), it is not enough for designers, illustrators, and so forth to simply make political art if, in some way, this work doesn't destabilise or intervene in the very socio-psychological structure of a system that denies them the very possibility or right to make such statements in the first place. What they need more urgently is an 'aesthetics of knowledge' that demonstrates the distinctions between the presumed creative capacities of the designer and artist to be historically constructed artifice. This recognition involves a head on reckoning with dominant-hegemonic ideology that is ultimately political; more political in fact than any superficial attempt to politicise graphic design. From here, one could begin to imagine interdisciplinary, or *indisciplinarity*, creative industries based on the presumption of the shared socio-cultural importance of all creative activity; where there are neither art nor design as discreet activities, nor artists nor graphic designers, but people whom, amongst other things begin to create a radical new model of social organisation in common.

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