

**A CRITIQUE OF KNOWLEDGE-BASED ARTS EDUCATION:  
ARS GRATIA ARTIS THROUGH RANCIÈRE'S AESTHETICS**

**THANH PHÙNG**

passionatethanh@gmail.com | Michigan State University, USA

**LYNN FENDLER**

fendler@msu.edu | Michigan State University, USA

**ABSTRACT**

We are interested in contrasts between 'art for art's sake' and instrumental justifications for art in education. Surprisingly, it seems that current mainstream discourses of arts education tend to inflect the term 'art for art's sake' with instrumental qualities. This paper examines the scene of Discipline-Based Arts Education (DBAE) in contemporary United States and critiques the instrumental setup of 'art for art's sake' endorsed by DBAE. It also suggests an alternative framework to think about 'art for art's sake' in the education of art from Rancière's political and aesthetic theory.

**KEY WORDS**

Rancière; Knowledge; Aesthetics; Equality; Arts Education.



**SISYPHUS**

JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 1,

2015, PP. 172-191

# A Critique of Knowledge-based Arts Education: *Ars Gratia Artis* Through Rancière's Aesthetics

Thanh Phùng | Lynn Fendler

## INTRODUCTION

In 2013, OECD released a publication titled *Art for Art's Sake? The Impact of Arts Education*. The report explores the question of whether arts education helps to cultivate desirable attributes for the workforce in knowledge-based economies. It inquires into research databases in education and psychology in Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish. The kinds of arts education examined include arts classes (classes in music, visual arts, theatre, and dance) and arts-integrated classes (where the arts are taught as a support for an academic subject) in school as well as arts study undertaken outside of school (e.g., private music lessons; out-of-school classes in theatre, visual arts, and dance). The outcomes of arts education are categorized in three areas, academic skills in non-art subjects, thinking and creativity, and social and behavioral skills. Interestingly, the authors remind us that the primary justification of arts education should be in the intrinsic value of the arts and the important habits of mind that they promote.

In conclusion, we argue that, even though we find some evidence of impact of arts education on different kinds of skills, the main justification for arts



education is clearly the acquisition of artistic habits of mind—the current priority objective of arts education in the curricula of OECD countries. By artistic habits of mind, we mean not only the mastery of craft and technique, but also skills such as close observation, envisioning, exploration, persistence, expression, collaboration, and reflection—the skills in thinking and creativity and the social and behavioral skills that are developed in the arts. (Winner, Goldstein & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013, pp. 19-20)

The OECD slogan ‘art for art’s sake’ points to a divide between art and non-art disciplines and the assumption that art disciplines allow students to engage with life in a different way. For instance, because arts do not force right or wrong answers, they free students to explore, experiment, and find their personal meanings in a way that non-arts do not afford. The OECD ‘art for art’s sake’ argument asserts that art should serve life.

In the history of Western art, the slogan first surfaced in French literary circles in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and later became central to the British Aesthetic movement. ‘L’art pour l’art’ is often credited to Théophile Gautier (1811-1872), French art and literary critic, who defined it as follows: «Art for art’s sake means for its adepts the pursuit of pure beauty—without any other preoccupation” («Art for art’s sake», 1917, p. 98). This definition is Kantian. Kant’s aesthetics holds that enjoyment of beauty is distinct from other sorts of pleasure and distinct from taste. If someone responds to Botticelli’s *Venus* with an erotic desire, they are actually not appreciating the work of art for its beauty. To appreciate the beauty of an object, the viewer’s response has to be disinterested. For Kant, making sense of an object can be done in three ways. In the first of these, the faculty of signification subordinates the faculty of sensation. This is the order of knowledge. It defines a certain view of the object. The spectator would ask what story the painting tells. In the second way of making sense, in contrast, the faculty of sensation rules over the faculty of knowledge. This is the law of desire. The third way of looking appreciates the object neither as an object of knowledge nor as an object of desire. The disinterestedness results from the harmony between the faculty of knowledge and the faculty of sensation. Kant also distinguishes ‘the agreeable’, the category of pleasures judged pleasures for me but not necessarily for others, from ‘the beautiful’, the category of pleasures judged pleasures for everyone. Only judgments about what Kant calls the beautiful are aesthetic judgments.

Proponents of ‘art for art’s sake’ sympathized with Kant’s aesthetics in a particular way. They assumed the aesthetic experience is stimulated by the form and design of the artwork and demanded the spectator have sufficient disinterest to distinguish between feelings provoked by an artwork’s subject matter, and, in their view, its more important qualities as a work of beauty in itself. ‘Art for art’s sake’ is commonly viewed as an attempt to divorce art from life and elevate it to an autonomous sphere of its own. Its legacy has been at the heart of 20<sup>th</sup> century ideas about the autonomy of art. If education is about life, and art is separate from life, how is ‘art for art’s sake’ possible in education?

From our observation, ‘art for art’s sake’ is the slogan of discipline-based arts education (DBAE), the currently dominant paradigm of arts education in knowledge-based economies. However, in light of Kant’s aesthetics, the OECD ‘art for art’s sake’ justifications are instrumental. As we were grappling with how to think about art, education, and their relationship so as to de-instrumentalise the value of art, we came across Jacques Rancière’s philosophy and found it illuminating our intellectual problem. This essay is supposed to bear the fruit of this fortunate meeting. It sets out to examine the scene of DBAE in contemporary United States and redefine art and education in line with Rancière’s conceptual innovations. It critiques the instrumental ‘art for art’s sake’ endorsed by DBAE and suggests a way of thinking about ‘art for art’s sake’ in the education of art from Rancière’s political and aesthetic theory. Our analysis suggests that DBAE, since it is cast in terms of knowledge, perpetuates inequality. Equality, the logic of dissensus, is proposed as an alternative to knowledge. It connects art and education to the ‘redistribution of the sensible’ that works to introduce new subjects and objects into the field of perception. Consequently, art/education can be seen as an autonomous form of life, or a specific mode of experience, namely the aesthetic. This autonomy is paradoxical. In Rancière’s vision of aesthetics, the aesthetic experience «grounds the autonomy of art, to the extent that it connects it to the hope of ‘changing life’» (Rancière, 2010, p. 116).

## DISCIPLINE-BASED ARTS EDUCATION (DBAE)

In this section, we offer a critical reading of Discipline-Based Arts Education (DBAE), first with an overview of the ways DBAE constructs art in terms of knowledge, and then with a critical interpretation of the assumptions of



consensus and inequality that derive from such knowledge-based approaches to art. Both of these critiques are shaped by our reading of Rancière's philosophy of aesthetics.

#### AN OVERVIEW OF THE DISCIPLINE-BASED ARTS CURRICULUM

In DBAE, art disciplines are classified based on art forms or art related activities. The arts outlined in the OECD report include music, visual arts, theatre, dance and multi-arts. In the United States, arts education standards use similar categories (music, visual arts, theatre, dance, and media arts). Literature, a distinct art form that works with words, is not usually named among the arts in arts education. Literature belongs to 'language arts', which is traditionally regarded a different realm in the structure of school curriculum, perhaps for the traditional significance of words as a means of expression. Culinary art is almost absent from the school curriculum, which is a curious case.<sup>1</sup> The partition of art into art forms corresponds to the theory of the autonomy of modern art as a process in which each art develops and progresses by becoming aware of its medium specificity. Clement Greenberg (1909-1994), a famous developer of the theory, argued that progress in the history of painting is identical with the conquest of 'flatness'. The partitioning of art into art forms provides arts with a knowledge base, and construes the arts as a discipline in terms of knowledge.

Another common way to divide the art field results in its four major disciplines:<sup>2</sup> art making, art criticism, art history, and aesthetics (the philosophy of art). Descriptions of the territories of arts education often combine the two classifications. Indeed, modern education has been partitioned in disciplines (school subjects): there are art disciplines and non-art disciplines. Each discipline is viewed as a structure or a domain of knowledge. Given a map of disciplines that define school subjects, two curricular approaches to art are

1 This paper does not aim to explore the case. Insights into it might be gleaned from Fendler, L. (2012). The educational problems of aesthetic taste. *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, 58, pp. 66-80. Special issue on Materiality and Education [Die Materialität der Erziehung: Kulturelle und soziale Aspekte pädagogischer Objekte]. Karin Priem, Gudrun M. König & Rita Casale, (Eds.).

2 The first advocates of DBAE used these four 'disciplines' to formulate their definition of DBAE. Later, when 'arts integration' becomes a buzzword, the art forms are featured. The use of the four disciplines makes 'art making' less prominent. The use of the art forms tends to emphasize active competences over propositional knowledge.

named: the arts curriculum and the arts integrated curriculum. The former, currently understood as an ‘art-for-art’s-sake’ approach, is dedicated to the study of the arts whereas the latter describes the use of the arts as vehicle for learning non-art contents. The national conceptual framework for arts learning of the United States published in 2014 by NCCAS (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, a task force organized by National Art Education Association, NAEA) expresses an ambition to implement comprehensive arts education so as to develop students’ ‘artistic literacy’ in all the art disciplines. The document does not indicate explicit preference for the arts curriculum or the arts-integrated curriculum. Nevertheless, the arts-integrated curriculum is fundamental to arts-based education reforms. For example, the A+ Schools Program,<sup>3</sup> the largest arts-based school reform effort in recent history, aims to weave the arts into every aspect of a child’s learning. The present arts integration movement emphasizes the study of art contents as an equivalent goal. ArtsEdge, the official website of the Kennedy Art Center, an important resource for arts integration in schools in the United States, distinguishes the arts integrated curriculum from the arts enhanced curriculum, where only the non-art contents are considered the goal. ArtsEdge defines arts integration as follows:

Arts integration is an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate understanding through an art form. Students engage in a creative process which connects an art form and another subject area that meets evolving objectives in both. (AE, 2015a)

As evidenced in this example, the arts-integrated approach is derived from the conception of art as a distribution of art disciplines and the current arts based education reform calls for intensifying disciplinary knowledge of the arts in every aspect of education. Together, the arts curriculum and the arts integrated curriculum have formed a broader paradigm of arts education named ‘discipline based arts education’ (DBAE). In the paradigm, art consists in disciplines and the purposes and resources of arts education are described in terms of knowledge. References to art disciplines and the acquisition of

<sup>3</sup> Over ten years and expanding to forty-two schools in North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Missouri, the reform works to increase arts instruction and arts integration in schools. Its proponents claim that it has been highly successful.

knowledge might have been incorporated in various paradigms of arts education, and the frame seems to have been quite an obvious choice for professionals in the arts since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The DBAE we refer to, however, extends to a general body of students. It claims arts for all. At present, the paradigm is influential in many countries in the world; within the scope of this essay, we focus on the context of the United States, where, historically, it has come to public attention since 1980s. DBAE joined the standards-based reform movement initiated by the U.S. Congress in 1994. It became associated with the discourse of global knowledge economy. The term DBAE, an acronym of ‘discipline-based arts education’ or ‘discipline-based art education’, gained prominence during the 1990s. It encompassed all the field of arts education. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, ‘arts integration’ has become a buzzword, and DBAE appears less in the discourse of arts education. This essay adopts DBAE to refer to the dominant discourse of arts education from the 1990s to the present because we view the new arts-integrated curriculum as disciplined-based and aim to address both the arts curriculum and the arts-integrated curriculum.

If we look at the discourse from Rancière’s point of view, we see that the discourse of DBAE is establishing a ‘distribution of the sensible’. It circulates and naturalizes what is sensible about arts education. It seeks to replace the creativity/self-expression order of arts education, which is said to have thrived from early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The creativity/self-expression order attributes the value of art to the originality of the child’s personal expression. On the surface of the sayable, the central tenet of the order is a theoretical caution against knowledge. This does not mean that the paradigm is against the development of knowledge. Instead, it means that creativity and the child’s personal growth have more merit than what can be encompassed by knowledge. Knowledge always starts with rules and might hamper creativity. Dobbs (2004) offered the following description of the creativity/self-expression order:

Creativity and self-expression theory cherished the untutored and naive emanations of child art, which many art specialists believed would be contaminated by even talking about student work. Art’s capacity to provide unique contacts with and learning about the works of art of mature artists was subordinated to art’s capacity to reinforce the goals of child development. Few efforts were made to utilize the vast heritage of world art for such learning tasks as understanding its role in human history; nor were questions of aes-

thetic content or import raised with children lest art be «intellectualized.» A bias against reading or talking about art (basically against anything that seemed «academic» or made art resemble other subjects) caused defenders of the paradigm to retreat to soft stances regarding the mystique of art and its essentially non-academic character. (p. 705)

The creativity/self-expression order of arts education also draws the line between arts and non-arts and defines proper arts education. Its rule of propriety is different. The present DBAE paradigm does not reject the language of creative self-expression; it appropriates it into a framework that prioritizes knowledge over self-expression. To be educated in the arts implies the ability to do arts or to speak about the arts in a ‘knowledgeable’ way. DBAE displays the slogan ‘art for art’s sake’ and puts the work of art, rather than the student, at the center of the art lesson. The work of art is placed at the center to develop competences. In national, state and district-level standards for each art form for prekindergarten through grade 12, the objectives and indicators prescribed for curricular programs are described in terms of competences and specific tasks that students should be able to perform successfully. To ensure quality arts education, it is mandated that teachers have certified knowledge of the relevant art forms and arts instruction. Presumably, the teacher is in a position by virtue of expertise to assist the student. Competence can be understood in terms of knowledge. From a pragmatic point of view, knowledge is an instrument of action. It is associated with the ability to do something well to the extent it equals ‘skill’, ‘expertise’, ‘literacy’, or ‘competence.’ Knowledge means the learned ability to carry out a task with pre-determined results within a given amount of time and energy.

The shift from the creativity/self-expression paradigm to DBAE could be understood as a project to reconfigure the space for arts education. According to Dobbs (2004), the creativity/self-expression paradigm took root in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century based on the effort of educators who advocated art for its value as relief from the rigors of the academic curriculum, its potential for nurturing children’s expressive life, and the opportunities offered in art for ‘making’ and creative work. Other areas in the curriculum did not host these goals, so they went to art. However, schools did not necessarily value play and self-enrichment, and art occupied a modest partition in most school programs. The arts have been slipping from the curriculum to give space for the STEM, the academic disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. STEM



is a prioritized choice to improve competitiveness in a knowledge economy. Whether starting from the marginalized position of the arts in the curriculum or not, proponents of arts education argue for the fundamental value of arts education and strategically associate the arts with the global knowledge economy. As much as it is a new invention, DBAE is a movement back to the ‘foundations’ so that art can be firmly rooted in education. In the new home, art adopts a different meaning.

Although DBAE is formulated based on the divide between arts and non-arts, it is influenced by the language of science, especially that of psychology. Education has established a steady relationship with behavioral, cognitive and developmental psychology (see, e.g., Popkewitz, 2002). Psychology has offered education formulas for effective instruction and rigorous, objective evaluation of knowledge. Within DBAE, artistic performances, appearing as sensory presentations, are attributed as competences through preordained procedures.

The formation of DBAE in the United States has been made possible through the practices of various speakers including policy makers, philanthropic organizations, scholars, teachers, etc. Their speeches present variations of knowledge based arts education. Among the most prominent speakers about DBAE, Elliot Eisner (1933-2014) secures a position. We feature Eisner to showcase a particular speaker whose speech makes sense in the distribution of the sensible. Eisner promoted the term ‘discipline based art education’ as a reference to a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach that features systematic and sequential learning experiences in four distinctive domains of art (art making, art criticism, art history and aesthetics). Despite being skeptical towards standards-based arts education and indifferent to the economic benefits of arts education, Eisner passionately endorsed a cognitive vision of arts education that is compatible with DBAE. In this vision, the arts are different forms of representation that require different forms of intelligence to engage with. Different art forms demand the use of different techniques and an understanding of the materials and ideas to be used. Important is the competence that the artist develops in an art form. Eisner regarded competence as intelligence in the domain. Eisner’s cognitive view of arts education makes the point that artistic work is not only about emotion and the hands but also about insight and the mind. When articulating the distinctive features and values of the arts, Eisner, like many other proponents of arts education, appealed to the embodied knowledge or somatic knowledge that the arts allow. The arts are associated



with empirical experience whereas hard subjects such as mathematics and science with technical rationality. Eisner also highlighted that the heterogeneity and unpredictability in the outcomes of arts education does not fit in predetermined objectives. The term ‘flexible purposing’ was borrowed from Dewey to refer to a characteristic of artistic work and a desirable feature of education that resembles or supports art. ‘Flexible purposing’ appears to us as a strategy of adjusting intentions more than the aesthetic appreciation of the unintended. Another contribution of Eisner’s is to recommend using criteria as a means to provoke responses to students’ works of art. Eisner called attention to three criteria: the technical quality, inventiveness, expressive power/aesthetic impact. In summary, although Eisner’s version of DBAE is softer than policy makers’, Eisner’s argument in support of arts education is primarily couched in terms of knowledge and representation. It inscribes an instrumental meaning for ‘art for art’s sake’ as well.<sup>4</sup>

The curriculum emerging in a particular classroom might be very different from the curriculum as dictated by policy makers, or the curriculum of the dominant discourse. From the beginning of the essay to this point, we have only discussed the discourse of DBAE as it is made available to us. Our presentation of DBAE is to show how it theorizes art and education as well as to problematize the theorization. Here, it should be restated that our critical reading of DBAE relies on Rancière’s ‘distribution of the sensible’. The discourse of DBAE is producing a new distribution of the sensible in the field of arts education. Rather than disturbing an existing normal order, it is molding a new social ethos of the arts. The problem is that in this new common world, only inequality is possible. Art and education become instruments of inequality, and the possibilities for genuine politics are suffocated.

#### THE PRODUCTION OF INEQUALITY

Rancière’s writings on politics and aesthetics examine the historical modes of intelligibility and visibility we live in. Rancière’s critique of discourse elucidates how our thinking constructs hierarchies and how equality as a theoretical setup can transform the way we see and engage with the world. While Foucault is primarily concerned with knowledge as a status of statements in a

<sup>4</sup> We acknowledge that Eisner’s presentations may be using instrumentalist arguments for strategic rhetorical purposes.

historical episteme, Rancière attends to both the visible/perceptible and the sayable/intelligible in ‘a distribution of the sensible’, also a ‘police order’. To critique in a Rancièrian manner is to question how DBAE’s theoretical apparatus is founded upon inequality/equality and the extent to which it makes room for the redistribution of the sensible. We approach DBAE as a regime of identifying art and education. This section examines how the discourse of DBAE, as a representative regime of identifying art, assumes hierarchies and reproduces inequality. It also discusses the nature of education and the relationship between education and art in DBAE. These gestures point to the intelligibility of an instrumental meaning of ‘art for art’s sake’.

To provide a conceptual background for our critique, we insert here a summary of Rancière’s theorization of the regimes of art, which not only sheds light on the problem of inequality in the way DBAE identifies art but also shows us an alternative regime of identifying art, ‘the aesthetic regime of art’. In Rancière’s language, a regime of art defines the configuration of various conditions that make it possible for words, shapes, movements, and rhythms to be felt and thought as art in an epoch. Rancière distinguishes three regimes of art: the ethical, the representative, and the aesthetic. In the ethical regime of art, which should actually be called the ethical regime of images, works of art have no autonomy. Viewed as images, they are questioned for their ontological veracity, the truthfulness with which they accurately represent an ideal model, and their effect on the ethos of individuals and the community. For Rancière, the conceptual apparatus of the ethical regime of images is most precisely articulated in Plato’s *Republic*.

Aristotle’s *Poetics* is Rancière’s standard reference for the representative regime of art (the arts). In the representative regime, works of art belong to the sphere of imitation. Imitation—*mimesis*—does not mean the copy of reality. It is the representation of actions or ways of imposing a form on matter. The representative regime of art is governed by «the concordance between a form of intellectual determination and a form of sensory appropriation» (Rancière, 2010, p. 210). Art is the work of form that imposes its law on matter. The rules of art are supposed to align with the laws of sensibility. The pleasure experienced is seen as a verification of the adequation of the rules. *Mimesis* is the agreement between a productive nature—*poiesis*—and a receptive nature—*aisthesis*. The guarantee of this three-way agreement is human nature. This human nature is split: the fine arts distinguish people of refined sensibility from the coarseness of the masses.

The aesthetic regime of art, staged in the modern period over the last two centuries, dismantles the intrinsic norms of the representative order. With the aesthetic regime, the knot between *poiesis* and *aisthesis* is undone. The aesthetic regime of art differs from ethical and representative regimes in that it offers no possibility of repetition or transferability, and no possibility for separating art from life.

Rancière emphasizes the historical nature of the material conditions and the thought patterns that characterize each regime. At the same time, since at the heart of each regime is a theory of art, the three regimes present three ways of identifying art that can coexist in the same historical period. There is no historical point of rupture on the basis of which it became impossible to do art in the old fashion and necessary to do it in a new mode. To make a distinction between regimes is «not to say that in 1788 art was part of the representative regime and, in 1815, part of the aesthetic regime» (Rancière, 2010, p. 210). The distinction defines not epochs but modes of perception and of intelligibility.

Returning to the discourse of DBAE, we see how it prioritizes the activity of the work of art by forcing it to display competences. The work of art is valued because it is actively created by the artist. The perception of the work of art traces back its production. Let's look at Eisner's guide for assessing art based on the three criteria (technical quality, inventiveness, aesthetic quality) in more detail:

By technical quality I mean the extent to which the material with which the students work has been handled with control and understanding. It also includes the extent to which the forms that are used display an intelligent use of technique. Put another way, do the techniques employed support what the work is intended to express; is there a consonance between the two?

By inventiveness I refer to the productive novelty the work displays: Does the work say something new or say something quite familiar in a new way? Put another way, does the work reflect a creative use of idea or process that relates constructively to its expressive intent? Is the work imaginative?

Finally, we are concerned with a work's expressive power, its aesthetic impact. The ability to create work that is satisfying aesthetically is and has been a prime artistic value. The achievement of such qualities is largely related to



the ways in which forms have been composed and technique handled. In assessing the quality of student work these three features can serve as criteria for assessment. Criteria are features that one can look for in a work; they are not fixed descriptions that obey some formulaic recipe. Technique, inventiveness, and expressive power can be realized in an infinite number of ways. Their identification here can serve as criteria to guide our search, not as pre-specified features that obey a fixed set of rules. (Eisner, 2004, p.183)

How the teacher perceives a work of art determines the student's competence. It matters to figure out what the work of art tries to say. Speech or intelligibility is privileged over visibility. The concordance required between the artistic techniques (form) and the message of the work of art (subject) assumes a stable relationship between the visible and the sayable. The teacher's aesthetic experience is linked to the active work of form. Eisner did present a fixed set of rules, and was positive about the infinite number of shapes artistic performances can embody in conforming to the rules. The student might know how chance rather than competence has participated in the artistic process. Nevertheless, as s/he thinks of it in terms of competence, at stake, there is a set of rules to attribute sensory presentations to competences.

Although our current art disciplines are different from those in ancient Greece and the medieval time in Europe, the discourse of DBAE presents a way of identifying art similar to the representative regime of the arts. At the heart of a representative order of art is a system of rules to govern artistic practices. We can say that a representative order of art is knowledge-based. These rules determine the sphere of art. In DBAE, art is seen in contrast with non-art, not with life. As a result, 'art for art's sake' means that the domain of art is also a significant domain of life. An important feature of DBAE is the intensified role of knowledge. Knowledge is valorized over the experience of pleasure in creating, appreciating and understanding art. While situating the need to develop artistic competences in the context of economic globalization, DBAE links the arts with creativity, but creativity in DBAE is a form of knowledge. Rather than a capacity to transform the world, it is a capacity to adapt to a given world. We also see within DBAE the acknowledgement of how art can change the world. Making reference to stunning achievements of art, Eisner (2004) talked about works of art that changed the world. It makes sense that knowledge is needed to change the world. However, if knowledge is used to frame the world, the world is a world of inequality and bounda-

ries. Knowledge assigns competences and positions to bodies and orders them into a hierarchy, following the law of meritocracy. If education is to provide and certify competences, this qualification has the purpose or/and the effect of socialization. It inserts people into a hierarchy. Knowledge of the arts is helpful for disadvantaged groups to advance socially, but the logic of social mobility presupposes inequality. What matters is that «equality as well as inequality is never anything but the result of themselves», as Rancière put it, in Bingham and Biesta (2010, p. 11).

For Rancière, the only way to escape inequality is to assume equality, to be as if everything were equal. Equality relies on dissensus, the ‘commensurability of incommensurables’ (Rancière, 2009, p. 11). On the ground of dissensus, bodies that are assigned to ‘proper’ places and functions can appear or act as if they were free of order. Politics is the redistribution of the sensible on the assumption of equality, not the reordering of power relations between groups, as it is usually understood. From a Rancièrian perspective, the discourse of DABE is policing and depoliticizing the artistic experience. While developing common frameworks and rules to align diverse arrays of entities, it enforces a vision of a common world and strengthens the frame that defines boundaries and allocates competences and positions in this world.

#### AESTHETIC REGIME OF ART: EQUALITY & ART’S SPECIFICITY

As art is connected to education through the notion of knowledge/competence, it is encapsulated in the logic of the representative order. This section portrays the aesthetic regime of art as an alternative to identify art. This is to illuminate the possibilities that are inhibited by the discourse of DBAE, the free invention of forms, the free invention of meanings, and the aesthetic free play, as well as to figure in an understanding of ‘art’s for art’s sake’ that strongly rejects the very idea of a pure art without committing itself to instrumentality. By opening up a gap between *poesis* and *aesthesis*, Rancière’s aesthetic regime of art connects art to life, and this connection does not signify the loss of the autonomy of art. The identification of art no longer occurs via a distinction of ways of doing and making, and art is now distinguished based on a mode of experience that is exceptional to the normal distribution of the sensible. The representative order, relying on a set of rules, is an order



of knowledge whereas the aesthetic regime, starting from the assumption of equality between passivity and activity, enables the aesthetic experience.

Let's examine what happens when we untie the knot between *poesis* and *aesthesis*. The work of art is freed from the active will of the artist and offers itself to our gaze as free appearance. Free appearance embodies the qualities of non-art. A substantial link between the immanent poeticity of the world and the work of art is formed. Images of the world have their expressivity, even when they are silent, temporarily suspended from concepts. It is possible for them to matter to us as themselves, not on the basis of representing any competence. The primacy of action in the representative order is opposed by the new primacy of expressiveness. The privilege of speech over visibility is shaken. Another consequence is that style becomes indifferent to subject. The arbitrariness of language is revealed, and the regime welcomes the principle of literariness: «the freeing of language and representation such that that everyone is now entitled to intervene in any form of discourse, use or be addressed by any language and be the subject of representation» (Corcoran, 2010, p. 17). Since representability is unlimited, it does not make sense to constrain the range of acceptable subjects. The stage of the equality of all subjects and the indifference of style in relation to subject depose the hierarchy of genres.

The aesthetic regime of art abolishes all the hierarchies characteristic of the representative order. This is not a dream. The aesthetic regime of art has come to play a critical role in the last two centuries. During the period, the diversity of objects introduced to the field of art as works of art has made it sensible to us that works of art are not defined by a predetermined set of intrinsic norms. Rancière's two favorite scenes of the aesthetic regime of art are Winckelmann's reinvention of *Belvedere Torso* in *The History of Ancient Art* published in 1764 and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* published in 1856. Winckelmann turned a mutilated statue from ancient Greece into a perfect work of art. Instead of compensating for the accidental lack of head, arm, and legs, Winckelmann transformed it into a virtue: there is no action but pure thought. Pure thought is represented not by a head but by «a stomach that seems unfit for any digestive functions, by muscles that do not tighten for action, but whose outlines flow over each other like the waves of the sea» (Rancière, 2013, pp. 2-3). Flaubert's novel treated all things with the same care, making style become the only true subject of literature. How objects acquired their speech and how subjects acquired their visibility in surpris-



ing ways indicate the freedom of thought that the aesthetic regime of art has effected. Rancière, however, attributes the autonomy of art not to the work of art but to an experience that is made possible by the absence of pre-ordered structures and the expressivity of the world—the free play encounter with free appearance—the aesthetic experience.

As a spectator, Rancière has done a beautiful translation of the aesthetic experience described as disinterestedness by Kant and free play by Schiller by relating it to the notion of equality. For Kant, aesthetic experience implies a certain redistribution of the habitual conditions of sensible experience. It is captured in a double negation: the object of aesthetic apprehension is neither an object of knowledge nor an object of desire. This suggests that when doing the active work of form, an artist might do it by appreciating the matter aesthetically. In the aesthetic regime of art, an artist does not impose form on a given matter according to a function of knowledge. The artist's work of form does not determine the spectator's experience of pleasure. In fact, there is no qualitative difference between the artist and the spectator with regard to aesthetic experience. In a Bourdieusian interpretation of Kant, the aesthetic experience is an illusion from the mind of a petit-bourgeois intellectual, one that is locked to a social position and hence does not know how the oppressive structure of the society works to produce such an illusion.

For Rancière, the aesthetic experience is not a function of inequality but a function of equality, of an *as if* mode of being. We approach the work of art as if it were not a work of art and as if we were not fixed to a position that limited our perception. The *as if* mode is real, and it makes us the unaccountable in a given count. It demonstrates a dissensus, the commensurability of incommensurable worlds (inequality vs. equality). The aesthetic experience enabled by equality is equality by itself. The neutralization of the faculty of reason and the faculty of sensation signifies a distribution of the sensible that escapes hierarchy. As it starts from the abolition of the opposition between form and matter, between activity and passivity, aesthetic free play also erases the distinction between a full humanity and a sub-humanity. This is why «it bears within it the promise of a 'new art of living' of individuals and the community, the promise of a new humanity» (Rancière, 2010, p.176). Defined by the aesthetic experience, the arts become art, a singular process. Anything can become art, and this does not mean the common 'anything goes' that presupposes significance and its negation. Aestheticized art does not always exist. It is precarious, happening in unpredictable, unrepeatable moments.



To delineate the paradoxical nature of the autonomy of art, Rancière builds on Schiller's articulation: «aesthetic experience will bear the edifice of the art of the beautiful and of the art of living» (Rancière, 2010, p.116). The paradoxical autonomy of art could be summarized in three points. Firstly, the autonomy is not that of the work of art but of a mode of experience. The autonomy of art as the autonomy of art forms brings art back to a representative order as it is founded upon an assumed concordance between *poiesis* and *aisthesis*. However, since 'art's for art's sake' understood as art divorced from life untied the link between form and subject, it liberated the artist from the responsibility of representing social, political and moral contents and allowed the artist to focus on form. Thus, it has been participating in collapsing the hierarchy of subjects and introduced new objects to the field of art. The problem is that the way it thinks about art installs dependence on the part of the spectator and posits a split between activity and passivity. In his writings, Rancière brings to view that despite the equality staged in the field of art, discourses of art keep adhering to the logic of inequality that makes the aesthetic experience theoretically impossible. The autonomy of art is not determined by the artist's agenda. Even in the case the artist wants art to become life, when art is perceived aesthetically, the aesthetic experience is a distinct mode of life.

Secondly, in the aesthetic experience, the spectator stands in front of 'free appearance', which bears no trace of will or aim. The work of art participates in the sensorium of autonomy inasmuch as it is not a work of art.

Thirdly, the aesthetic experience consists in the suspension of a certain autonomy, the autonomy of reason. The spectator who enjoys the free play of the aesthetic in front of the free appearance experiences a kind of autonomy that is strictly related to a withdrawal of power. The suspension of reason is possible by means of a supplement that neutralizes the faculty of knowledge and the faculty of desire. We can also imagine an excess in the relationship between the visible and the sayable. The obstinate silent thing visible to us cannot be fully captured into words. Two incommensurable worlds stand in relation to each other and radiate an enigma unavailable to our knowledge, our aims and desires. We are promised the possession of a new world by the free appearance that we cannot possess in any way.

In summary, art is autonomous only by means of tying art to non-art. The aesthetic experience communicates the realm of art with that of life experience. Art has the potential to generate an experience that is alternative to the

ordinary, an exceptional experience that is freed from habitual hierarchies of perception. In Rancière's view, art's potential as an independent aesthetic configuration to interrupt the distribution of the sensible renders it political.

## CHANGING THE TERMS OF ART EDUCATION, PERFORMING THE ART & ENJOYING THE MOMENTS

Given how school subjects have been organized as bodies of knowledge, systems of concepts, generalizations, and procedures students must learn, and how qualification and socialization have been articulated as the main purposes of education, DBAE firmly fits in the established distribution of the thinkable about arts education in our time.

We can modify the distribution, if we wish to. We can always start a change of discourse. There will be a chance for our voice to be heard and equality to become sensible. We speak about art as a matter of experimentation and appreciation rather than knowledge application and representation. This does not mean a return to the creativity/self-expression paradigm of arts education, where the work of art is tied to the authentic self of the child, the child is regarded as a deficit being, and knowledge is considered a threat. Rather, in an aesthetic regime of art, knowledge manifests materially, invites aesthetic free play, and can be reinvented.

We also speak about education as a project of equality. Education then becomes a process of subjectivation rather than qualification or socialization. Subjectivation is the opposite of socialization, a way in which the individual is not a part of a consensual community. For Rancière, subjectivation is possible on the assumption of equality. It may occur in different ways. Education can be the moments of aesthetic free play in which the spectator ignores the possession and the destination of the work of art and his/her own social position. Or it can be a process of political subjectivation, a process of becoming a collective subject through acting out of equality. Assuming the power of anyone/anything, the student/artist creates 'a new scenery of the visible' or/and 'a new dramaturgy of the intelligible' that reframes the world of the common objects and language. The student demonstrates the capacities denied by the police order, as we can see in the case of Winckelmann's *Belvedere Torso* and of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. This does not mean that one's competence to change the world is located safely within



oneself. Whether the student's performance makes a difference to the world depends on how it is received by others. From a Rancièrian viewpoint, the capacity for politics is not a matter of mastery. What matters is that the student acts as if s/he had the capacity to change the world, and, thanks to luck, can actually participate in refiguring the world. For another version of subjectivation, Simons and Masschelein (2010) proposed 'pedagogic subjectivation' as the verification of equal intelligence that does not necessarily involve a public demonstration of the capacities denied by a police order. Specifically, education is not a process of elevating incompetence to competence, which would construct instrumental relationships between art and life. Rather, education is a process of verifying one's 'potentiality', where the student can enjoy the experience of being able to do art. Speaking about education as subjectivation allows us to see how art, education, and politics can intersect and penetrate each other when they are conceived on the assumption of equality.

Finally, the discourse of art education may be aware of itself as an artistic practice. Scholars might think of their work as a project to inspire people by using a set of strategies anticipated to bring about the desirable effects on the part of a target audience predefined by a trait. However, this theorization falls back to the logic of the representative order. We can add an acknowledgment that no matter what we do, the effects of our labor are not within our control. We do our labor for how we experience it. There is delight in rearticulating, connecting between the current discourse of DBAE and Rancière's poetry. This essay, as much as it is a critique of DBAE, is a humble expression of how we appreciate Rancière's work.

## REFERENCES

- AE (ArtsEdge) (2015). *What is arts integration?* Retrieved from: <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators/how-to/arts-integration/what-is-arts-integration>
- Art for art's sake: its fallacy and viciousness. (1917). *The Art World*, 2(2), 98-102.
- BINGHAM, C. & BIESTA, G. J. J. with J. Rancière (2010). *Jacques Rancière: Education, truth, emancipation*. London/New York: Continuum.
- CORCORAN, S. (2010). Editor's introduction. In J. Rancière, S. Corcoran (Trans.), *Dissensus: on politics and aesthetics* (pp. 1-24). New York: Continuum.



- DOBBS, S. (2004). 31 Discipline-based art education. In E. Eisner & M. Day (Eds.), *Handbook of research and policy in art education* (pp. 701-724). New Jersey: National Art Education Association & Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- EISNER, E. (2004). *The arts and the creation of mind*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- NCCAS (NATIONAL COALITION FOR CORE ARTS STANDARDS) (2014). *National core arts standards: A conceptual framework for arts learning*. Retrieved from: <http://www.nationalartsstandards.org/content/conceptual-framework>
- POPKWITZ, T. S. (2002). How the alchemy makes inquiry, evidence, and exclusion. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(3), 262-267.
- RANCIÈRE, J. (2009). The aesthetic dimension: aesthetics, politics, knowledge. *Critical Inquiry*, 36(1), 1-19.
- RANCIÈRE, J. (2010). *Dissensus: on politics and aesthetics* (S. Corcoran, Trans.). New York: Continuum.
- RANCIÈRE, J. (2013). *Aisthesis: scenes from the aesthetic regime of art* (Z. Paul, Trans.). New York and London: Verso.
- SIMONS, M., & MASSCHELEIN, J. (2011). Governmental, political and pedagogic subjectivation: Foucault with Rancière. In M. Simons & J. Masschelein (Eds.), *Rancière, public education and the taming of democracy* (pp. 76-92). Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.
- WINNER, E., GOLDSTEIN, T., & VINCENT-LANCRIN, S. (2013). *Art for art's sake?: The impact of arts education*. Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing.

\*

Received: June 6, 2015

Final version received: November 16, 2015

Published online: December 2, 2015

