THE AESTHETIC HETEROTOPIA

Jacques Rancière

Why speak of an aesthetic heterotopia? Because I think it is necessary to rethink the notion of aesthetics today and to spell out some implications of the notion that have not yet been given their full importance. Aesthetics is not the philosophy or the science of art or of the beautiful. "Aesthetics" is a re-configuration of sensible experience. At this stage I'll define sensible experience in very simple terms as a relation between sense and sense, between a power that provides a sensible datum and a power that makes sense of it. I hope to show that this simple relation entails a much more complex set of relations. For the moment I will just say that the aesthetic heterotopia is a specific form of relation between sense and sense. This will be a starting point to determine the specificity of the "aesthetic." I shall try to show that this specificity can be determined in opposition to, or as a shift from, another form of configuration of experience that I will define as the "ethical configuration."

In order to explain this shift, I will start from an example, a specific case of the making sense of a sense datum. I draw it from one of the philosophical works which contributed to constructing the idea of aesthetics as a form of experience, namely, Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*. In the first section of the *Lectures*, which is devoted to the concept of the beautiful in art, Hegel makes a strange digression in order to discuss two paintings by Murillo that he saw at the Royal Gallery in Munich. The paintings represent beggar boys sitting on the street. In one of them, a boy quietly munches his bread while his mother picks lice out of his head; in the other one, two boys, covered with rags, are cheerfully eating grapes and melon. What shines forth in their attitude, Hegel says, is the "complete absence of care and concern. . . . This freedom from care for external things and this inner freedom made visible outwardly is what the concept of the Ideal requires."[1] Apparently there is a gap here between sense and sense, between the images Hegel is looking at and the sense that he makes of them. The reader wonders why this carefree eating of bread or melon by ragged boys should be thought of as a manifestation of "inner freedom." Hegel answers the question, but the answer is disconcerting: "We see that they have no wider interests and aims, yet not at all because of stupidity; rather do they squat on the ground content and serene, almost like the gods of Olympus; they do nothing, they say nothing; but they are people all of one piece without any surliness or discontent; and since they possess this foundation of all excellence, we have the idea that anything may come of these youths."[2]

The gap between these images and what Hegel makes of them is what I am calling a gap between the aesthetic and the ethical. The reader of these lines might wonder how this "aesthetic" deification of the Seville beggar boys can be squared with the principles of the *Philosophy of Right*, the same principles Hegel taught some years before at the same University of Berlin. How can we explain this emphasis on the "inner freedom" of the indolent boys, when Hegel had convincingly demonstrated that the so-called freedom of the noble savage, satisfied with the gifts of Nature supplying for his scarce needs, was a totally misleading idea of freedom to which must be opposed the power of liberation entailed in labor and in its activity of differentiation? He had clearly opposed the formative aspect of labor, the discipline allowing men to acquire both the habit of an occupation and a general skill, to the laziness and stupidity of the barbarian, the merely reactive conduct of the Cynical philosopher and the aversion to work and the loss of shame and honor produced by extreme poverty. The carefree squatting of the beggar boys appears then to defy the good organization of the society into three classes: the substantial class, the industrial class, and the universal class. How are we to understand in this respect the enthusiastic praise of the divine state of boys who do nothing, have no aim and care for nothing? How are we to reconcile this idea of freedom as radical absence of will with a philosophy of Right that bases the whole edifice

of personality, society, and the state on the determinations of will? In other words, how can we reconcile the aesthetic ideal embodied by the young beggars with the order of *Sittlichkeit*, or the ethical order?

It might be said that the determination of the Ideal in art and the determination of the concept of Right do not belong to the same sphere and the same level in the self-realization of the Absolute. The ideal aspect of the beggar boys is a matter of representation; and it is well-known since Aristotle that men can delight in the representation of something that they would find unpleasant and ugly in reality. Moreover, it has become commonplace to call "aesthetic" this capacity to abstract the form of a representation from its content. It has also become commonplace to equate this aesthetic abstraction with the aristocratic attitude of people who feel they are above distinctions of content. In this sense, the pleasure taken by Hegel in looking at the ragged boys might easily be equated with the sense of "aesthetic distinction" that Pierre Bourdieu analyzes in his book *Distinction: A Critique of Social Judgment* and that he documented with photographs of electric plants, cabbages, or the gnarled hands of an old woman, which, he tells us, please petty-bourgeois aesthetes for the precise reason that they do not appeal to common people for whom a beautiful photograph is the representation of a beautiful thing or person. But the point is not that the image of ragged boys can please people who dislike poverty. Hegel does not abstract the form from the content. He does not tell us that the observation of children of impoverished people can form the basis for good painting as well as the representation of mythological subjects. He tells us that the ragged boys share the same blissfulness as the gods of Olympus. And he tells us what the "excellence" that they share with those gods consists in: the excellence of doing nothing. It thus appears that the aesthetic difference cannot be equated with the distance between empirical reality and artistic appearance. Rather, is it a distance with respect to the reality/appearance opposition itself, a way of restaging the very status of appearance or the very relation of the visible and the invisible. Now, it appears that this restaging of the visible is connected with the excellence of a "doing nothing. This means that it is connected with a redistribution of the ways of doing or a restaging of the very opposition between activity and passivity.

The aesthetic has to do with a "doing nothing." At a first level, this "doing nothing" may be understood as the mark of the opposition between two regimes of the identification of art. The excellence of the "doing nothing" is clearly opposed to the hierarchy that structured the representative regime of art. In that regime, painting, like all arts, was appreciated according to a certain idea of poetry. Poetry had been defined by Aristotle as the construction of a causal chain of actions, opposed to history, conceived of as a mere succession of facts. The excellence of poetry and of the other fine arts was dependent upon their capacity to tell a story and represent actions. But action did not simply mean the fact of doing something. It meant a split between "ways of doing": from that point of view, there are people who act, people who are able to pursue great ends and to risk those ends in confronting other great designs and the strokes of Fortune; and there are people who simply live, who are caught in the succession of the everyday: passive people. The excellence of poetry, painting, or any other fine art was dependent on their capacity to represent "active men," men capable of great designs or great actions. The "excellence" of the little beggars appears thus to shatter the whole poetic hierarchy. But it does so to the extent that it also reveals the ethical ground of representative poetics. The question of artistic mimesis has always been linked with matters of activity and passivity, which means that the question of reality, appearance, and truth has always been intertwined with the distribution of social occupations. This intertwinement had been conceptualized in Plato's *Republic*: appearance and passivity go hand in hand for him. As inactive spectators delight in seeing on stage the trouble that ignorance and passion cause in the souls and the behavior of fictional characters, they internalize the illness of ignorance and passion. They do it all the more so as they belong to the lower class of the city, the class of needs and desires, a class that is doomed to passivity. "Passivity" does not mean that they spend their time resting. Quite the contrary: it means that what they do all the time—working with their hands to earn their livings by providing for other peo-

ple's needs—is enclosed in the circle of needs and desires, or the circle of *epithumia*. The shadows of the theatre are attuned to a certain look, the look of those people who do not see but who focus on the turmoil of the appearances. They are attuned to certain ears, the ears of people who only perceive the noise of discourse and react as noisy persons, by clapping their hands. So the use of their hands, their eyes, and their ears is suited to both the baseness of their condition and the falsehood of the spectacles they are listening to and looking at—whether it be the tragedy of kings in the theater or the speeches of orators in the assembly of the people.

This is what a relation between sense and sense means: a relation between what people do, what they see, what they hear, and what they know. It is what I call a distribution of the sensible: a relation between ways of doing, ways of seeing, of speaking, thinking and so on. Plato proposes a specific distribution of the sensible: an ethical one. What "ethical" means has to be understood from the etymological sense of the word *ēthos*: the *ēthos* is first of all the abode, the place and the sensible setting where people live; then it is the way of life, the ways of being, seeing, thinking, and doing that are determined by this setting . The ethical distribution that Plato constructs that people who work with their hands are able only to clap their hands when it comes to matters of discourse, appearance, and truth. The conformity of their aesthetic capacity with their way of being is the conformity of passivity with passivity, or the conformity of poison with illness. It is the consensus of the bad community, the ignorant or democratic community, to which Plato opposes another consensus, the consensus of the hierarchical community where the shoemaker uses his hands to make shoes and nothing else, where he has no time to go to such places as the assembly and the theatre—where, in short, the class of ignorance and passivity is submitted to the class of knowledge and activity. Plato constructs an alternative ordering of space and time. But the point is that the principle of both communities is the same: it is the ethical principle that couples a principle of identity with a principle of differentiation, which means a principle of hierarchy: what people can perceive and the sense they can make of it is the strict expression of what they do; what they do is determined by what they are; what they are is determined by their place, which is determined in turn by what they are. They have the place that suits their ethos and the ethos that suits their place. This is what an ethical distribution of the sensible entails.

So the "ethical "order is not only a well-ordered hierarchical organization of the positions, occupations and competences in the community. It is a whole organization of the visible, the thinkable, and the possible, determining what can be felt, seen, thought, and done by this or that class of beings, depending on its place and occupation. This means that the "aesthetic rupture" with the problematic of mimesis cannot be a mere distancing from the content of the representation. It must entail a rupture with the distribution of the sensible that defines "forms" and "contents" and the ways of making sense of them, a rupture with a whole ordering of categories linking possibilities of sensation and perception with matters of places and occupations and with levels of epistemological competence and social dignity. It is in this respect that we must make sense of the similarity—or the aesthetic equality—that Hegel "sees" between the gods of Olympus and the kids of the street. This story of idle gods may remind us of one of the most famous passages of the *Republic*, about the lie of the poets: the poets lie; they represent gods that are fake gods since they make them judges who can be seduced by gifts or lovers, unable to curb the violence of their desires. In short, they represent passive gods, gods obeying the law of *epithumia*, the law of need and desire. They are therefore models of passivity, and they nurture similar forms of passivity in those who listen to the poets and look at the theatre. But the aesthetic vision of the becoming-gods of the street urchins sets up an entirely new stage. Hegel sees them in a new space of visibility that Plato could not imagine: a space called the "museum," where paintings and sculptures are separated from their former destinations: they are no longer illustrations of the truths of religion or the majesty of princes or even picturesque representations of popular life destined for the pleasure of aristocrats. In this new space, where street scenes are hung next to religious scenes, mythological scenes, portraits of noble men or deeds of princes, he

sees the little urchins sharing the freedom of the antique gods, a freedom which is itself an aesthetic novelty, one that has been granted them in the time of Winckelmann and Schiller: the absence of action, care, and concern. The "inactivity" of the kids on the street and the gods of Olympus is a way of being which is withdrawn from the ethical opposition between activity and passivity. This means that it must also be withdrawn from the ethical distribution separating the class of needs, desire, and ignorance from the class of knowledge.

This withdrawal is at the heart of the very definition of the aesthetic judgment in Kant's "Analytic of the Beautiful." It takes the form of a twofold negation. The object of the aesthetic judgment is neither an object of knowledge nor an object of desire. The "excellence" of the aesthetic form has to be judged apart from epistemic or ethical criteria. It is no coincidence that Kant illustrates this theoretical statement with the example of the form which is, more than any other, fraught with issues of geometric perfection, social hierarchy, and ethical judgment, the form of a palace. If we are asked whether it is beautiful, we can certainly answer that "things of that sort are merely made to be gaped at" and inveigh against "the vanity of the great who spend the sweat of the people on such superfluous things."[3] But, Kant says, this is not the point at issue. When we see the palace aesthetically, we ignore those matters of appearance and reality, necessity and superfluity, or sweat and vanity. We withdraw it from the hierarchical distribution linked with matters of needs and desires. This is what the "disinterestedness" of aesthetic judgment means. In a way, the indifference of the boys or gods who say nothing and care for nothing inherits the "disinterestedness" which is the propriety of the aesthetic judgment. The judgment and its object form a circle, the aesthetic circle which stands apart from the ethical construction of the community, if not in contradiction to this community. In this circle, the appearance of forms and images is no more proposed to desire nor is it opposed to knowledge. The free play of the high and the low faculties in the aesthetic appreciation of a form entails the neutralization of three sets of hierarchical oppositions: the opposition of knowledge and ignorance; the opposition of knowledge and desire; the opposition of refined desires and vulgar needs.

How are we to think about this disconnection between the appreciation of a visual form and the hierarchies of knowledge, needs, and desire? There is a well-known answer which states that this "disconnection" itself is a proof of either the deliberate mystification of or an ignorance about the reality of those hierarchies. This is the diagnosis of "aestheticism" that has found its more systematic formulation in the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. According to him, each class has the taste that is determined by its ethos. The disinterested judgment on the formal beauty of the palace is the form of appreciation reserved for those who are neither the owners of the palace nor the workers who build it. It is the judgment of the petit-bourgeois intellectual who, free from worries about work or capital, indulges himself in adopting the position of universal thought and disinterested taste. Social classes which are less subjugated to the demands of immediate necessity can create a distance between need and desire. This exception still proves the rule that judgments of taste are in fact social judgments expressing a socially determined ethos. Those who take on different positions in the hierarchy of needs and desires—the hierarchy of *epithumia*—are equally enclosed in the realm of *epithumia*, meaning the realm of ignorance.

This analysis is often held to be a form of radical social criticism. In reality it is a mere reaffirmation of the ethical principle: there is a distribution of positions that determines what people can feel and think, depending on their position. This distribution of needs and desires is a distribution of knowledge and ignorance as well. The scientific denunciation of the "aesthetic" illusion is the modern form of the platonic denunciation of the shadows of the theatre where actors pretend to be what they are not in reality. The lie of this illusion denied the good social order in which people have to do only one thing, the thing to which they are destined and for which they have native "aptitudes." This Platonic diagnosis is prescriptive: it says how people have to feel and think depending on their place in the community. Bourdieu's own "radical" diagnosis presents this "necessity" as a merely scientific account of the reality of what people can experience. But the philosophical prescription and the so-

ciological description are only the two sides of the same *dispositif*: the ethical *dispositif* which prescribes the way in which an ethos—a position—determines an ethos—a set of sensible capacities and incapacities—in a way that cannot be denied but by ignorance. Now, there are two ways of understanding this "ignorance." Bourdieu renders it as the illusion generated by a social position. Consequently, he has to locate knowledge in a position of extra-territoriality, a vantage point outside the distribution of positions. Plato is more brutal: ignorance is not the illusion determined by the fact of being at a certain place. It is just another name for this fact. The ignoramuses are the people who are located at a place which is the place of ignorance. Plato tells us of this in the guise of a narrative: the deity has given them an iron soul, while it has given a golden soul to those who were destined to knowledge and government. But he says something more: this distribution of aptitudes and competences by the deity is a story, or a lie. It is a fiction that has to be believed in order for the community to work. A belief is not an illusion; it is a way of playing one's part. Plato does not demand that the workers have the inner conviction that a deity truly mixed iron in their souls and gold in the souls of the rulers. It is enough that they *sense* it, that is, that they use their arms, their eyes, and their minds *as if* it were true. And they will do so to the extent that this lie about "fitting" actually does fit the reality of their condition. Their belief is not ignorance opposed to knowledge. Instead, it is a determinate combination of knowledge and ignorance. The artisan knows of his condition as the condition of those who have to use their technical knowledge for making objects of needs and desire, thereby leaving to the others the privilege of knowing what the end of making and consuming objects of need and desire is in relation to the superior ends of knowledge. The ethical order is this whole set of relations between a distribution of positions, a distribution of capacities, and a play of knowledge and ignorance.

The singularity of the aesthetic supplement has to be thought of in regard to this distribution. When Kant defines the object of the aesthetic judgment as being neither an object of knowledge nor an object of desire, when Schiller emphasizes the absence of will and care on the face of the goddess, and when Hegel transfers this blissful absence of care to the kids of the street, what they determine as the aesthetic effect is a supplement to the ethical distribution. Now, this supplement is not an ideal situation located outside the ethical logic. Rather, is it an inner disruption of the set of relations between ethos and ethos, between positions and aptitudes, needs and desires, ignorance and knowledge. This inner disruption is not reserved for aesthetes condescendingly looking at the representation of the blissfulness of lesser people. Instead, it takes on its full cogency when it is appropriated by those people themselves, when this appropriation produces a disruption of the ethical circle within which they have been enclosed. In an essay that came out recently,[4] I proposed to illustrate this aesthetic subversion of the ethical order with a text that apparently comes from outside the field of aesthetics, yet which constitutes the most illuminating account of what is at stake in Kant's analysis of the "disinterested" look at the form of the palace. I culled the text from an article published in a workers' newspaper during the French Revolution of 1848, in which a joiner describes the day's work of a jobber as he lays the floor of an opulent house.

> Believing himself at home, he loves the arrangement of a room so long as he has not finished laying the floor. If the window opens out onto a garden or commands a view of a picturesque horizon, he stops his arms a moment and glides in imagination towards the spacious view to enjoy it better than the possessors of the neighboring residences.[5]

What this text apparently describes is exactly what Bourdieu denounces as the aesthetic illusion. The joiner seems to acknowledge it himself as he speaks of "belief" and "imagination" and opposes their "enjoyment" to the reality of a possession. However, it is not by accident that this text appears in a revolutionary worker's newspaper a few days before a workers' insurrection. Aesthetic belief or imagination entails the disruption of the relation between ethos and ethos, a disruption which begins with the disconnection between the activity of the arms and that of the gaze. The perspectival gaze which had been associated for a long period with mastery and majesty is

re-appropriated as a means of splitting up the adequation of a body to its ethos. This is what "disinterestedness" or "indifference" means: the dismantling of a certain body of experience that was well suited to the ethos of the artisan who has to do the job for which he has an "aptitude" and nothing more. The joiner ignores the question of to whom the perspective actually belongs in the same way that the Kantian beholder has to ignore the vanity of the nobles and the sweat of the people incorporated in the palace. This ignorance is not a lack of knowledge. It is a shift in the distribution of knowledge and ignorance, a shift in the relation between the science of the means and the science of the ends. In ethical logic, the science of woodwork was coupled with the awareness that the joiner has to stay in his place because he ignores the general aims of the community within which his work takes place. In aesthetic logic, the place where the joiner works becomes a viewpoint from which the surrounding edifices and their perspective are no longer seen as objects of knowledge, desire, and frustration. This is what the Kantian "finality without an end" may mean: a rupture in the chain of the ends and means which is also a rupture in the hierarchies of science and desire. The "disinterested" look at the palace and the look of the floor-layer through the window disrupt the set of relations linking what people see with what they do, what they do with what they are, and what they are with what they can do and be. This is what the aesthetic "doing nothing" means: the disruption of the relation between a way of doing, a way of seeing, and a way of being. Though the joiner never read Kant, his text may be read as a free paraphrase of the second paragraph of the *Critique of the Power of Judging*. Conversely, that unwitting "paraphrase" of Kant is right in place in a workers' revolutionary newspaper. The constitution of a "voice" of the workers presupposes this "aesthetic" redistribution of the whole set of relations between doing, seeing, and being, which means a redistribution of the relations between activity and passivity, ignorance and knowledge. "Anything can come of these youths," said Hegel. This is what this "anything can come" may mean. The consequence is indeed far beyond what he had in mind when he spoke to his students in his lectures on aesthetics. But it is part of the configuration of thinking that allowed him to cast this gaze on the picture of the two boys. It is part of the configuration that makes it possible to teach such things as "lessons on aesthetics." It is part of a "politics of aesthetics." Correspondingly, the freedom that the individual worker and the collective of the workers can affirm is not the effect of any politics of art. But it is part of an "aesthetics of politics." The politics of aesthetics comprises a new sphere of visibility, where the products of art are the object of a specific experience that annuls the hierarchy of human activities as well as the hierarchy of subjects and forms of representation. The aesthetics of politics comprises a new set of relations between what the workers do and what they can see and think, a new configuration of sensible experience where "passive" people can experience a form of "inactivity" which enhances the possibility of a collective action. This is what makes a "voice of the workers" possible: a "voice of the workers" is not the expression of the workers' pains and claims; it is instead the neutralization of the barrier separating those who are recognized as having the capacity to discuss common matters from those who are only supposed to voice their pains and claims.

What is thus at the heart of the aesthetic experience can be called a "heterotopia." I use this term independently of the use that Foucault made of it. "Heterotopia" means a certain way of thinking of the "heteron" or the "other": the other as the effect of a reconfiguration of the distribution of places, identities, and capacities. The conceptualization of the beautiful in Kant's Analytic constructs a heterotopia, since it subtracts the form of the palace from the various "topoi" within which it is located either as a functional architectural building or a place of power, an exhibition of aristocratic pride, an object of social or moral reprobation, etc. It does not add another topos to all the topoi that were defined by the ethical configuration. Instead it creates a point where all those locations and the oppositions they define are neutralized. In the same way, the description of the little beggars is a heterotopia, a point of rupture of the relation between social characterization and artistic appreciation. The gaze of the joiner through the window also constructs a heterotopia as it produces a disjunction between the eye and the hands, a disruption in the relation between a concrete

place in space and a place in the ethical order of the community. What is common to all those forms of aesthetic heterotopia is the determination of a place of the indeterminate, a place anyone can occupy.

It is possible to widen the field of the aesthetic and give a general form to this interpretation of the aesthetic judgment as the construction of a heterotopia. It is possible to deduce from it an aesthetics of politics. Elsewhere I have proposed to rethink in that way the meaning of the word "democracy," to make it designate no longer a form of government but instead a form of heterotopic community, a community constructed as a supplement to—and a form of neutralization of—the distribution of social groups. The power of the demos—signified by the word "democracy"—is not the power of a population, nor is it the power of the majority or of the lower classes of the population. Instead it is the power of a collective that emerges over and above the sum of the parts of a population, the distribution of its places, identities, occupations, and functions. If political power or the power of a collective called "the people" is to mean anything at all, it must be a power distinct from all the forms of authority that work in society: in families, tribes, workshops, schools, armies, churches and so on. All those forms of authority predicate the exercise of power on a specific entitlement to exert it, which also means on a distribution of places and competences separating those who are destined to rule from those who are destined to be ruled. The democratic supplement thus is a supplement to that distribution. This supplement is heterotopic in the sense that I defined earlier: it supposes the construction of a specific place where all those distributions of places and competences are neutralized—a competence of the incompetents or a specific titling of those who are not entitled to exert power. In that way, we may think of the action of political subjects as the reconfiguration of the field of the common, enacting, against a given distribution of the parts, places and competences, the power of the demos, which means the power of the "whoever," the power of those who are not countable as qualified parts of the community, or the power of the uncountable collection made by the capacities of those who have no specific "aptitude" to rule or to be ruled.

Aesthetic heterotopia can thus be viewed as the principle of a political form of dissensuality that dismisses the ethical distribution of the sensible. But this means that the *heteron* specific to heterotopia has to be distinguished from another concept of the *heteron*, the concept of the absolute Other which defines *heteronomy.* The tension between these two forms of the *heteron* is at the heart of the interpretation of aesthetic experience. It can be summarized as a conflict between two concepts of the indeterminate. Kant's palace or Hegel's inactive beggars/gods bear witness to a certain form of the indeterminate: a *neither ... nor* that neutralizes the social system of hierarchical differences underpinning the hierarchies of representation. This is a totally different idea of the *heteron* or the indeterminate that appears when Jean-François Lyotard sets out to reinterpret the Kantian *dispositif* along with the very signification of the "loss of destination" of the works in the space of the museum. I will illustrate this reinterpretation with his essay entitled "Scapeland," in which he sets out to transform the palace into a burrow and the paintings of the museum into "landscapes." "A burrow is like that landscape, he writes; habitable because UNINHABITABLE."[6] (The whole text makes a systematic use of capital letters to dramatize an effect of estrangement.) A landscape, he tells us, is the opposite of a place. It is a place without a destiny. And such is the museum, where the works of art are exhibited as "landscapes" when they have lost their destination: "A cove, a mountain lake, a canal in the metropolis can be hung short of any destination, human and divine and left there. When they are hung in this way, their "condition" is impalpable, unanswerable."[7]

This "being-unanswerable" epitomizes the transformation of the aesthetic heterotopy into heteronomy. It is clearly opposed by Lyotard to the Kantian conciliation of the "higher" and the "lower" faculty in the appreciation of a form. Lyotard boils the latter down to an old idea of harmony, which, he says, has been made impossible precisely by the loss of any type of correspondence between the norms of the beautiful and a socially determined public of art connoisseurs. The paradoxical concepts of the analytic of the beautiful add up for him to a monstrous re-plastering of a lost world of harmony. Once he has discarded in this way

the heterotopy of the beautiful, Lyotard affirms that the true essence of modern art has been spelled out by Kant in the analytic of the sublime. The law of the sublime is the law of a disproportion, of the absence of any common measure between the intelligible and the sensible.

In the first stage of his argument, Lyotard equates this disproportion with the overwhelming power of pure presence. A landscape is, he says, "an excess of presence." "Presence" is supposed to define the mode of being of the work of art or the mode of being of the object of aesthetic experience in opposition to the old tradition of representation. This pure presence is the presence of matter which is the "datum which has no destiny." It is the singular, incomparable quality of a color or the grain of a skin or the presence of an aroma. But it soon appears that the singularity of those sensible qualities is not their own. It is instead the singularity of the event in general. And this singularity in turn is just the indifferent singularity of the shock of which the mind is "passible," or the "shock" that "desolates" it. This desolation appears to be the core of the experience of the sublime. All of this presupposes, of course, a full reversal of the Kantian analysis. In Kant, the experience of the sublime is an experience of transition, a passage from one sphere of freedom (the free play of the understanding and imagination in aesthetic judgment) to another: the freedom of the rational being who has discovered, beyond any form of sensible agreement, the power of giving the law to himself. Lyotard isolates and absolutizes the moment of disarray in this experience, the incapacity of the imagination to offer a synthesis of the given. He transforms it into an experience of the dependency of the mind on the event of an untameable sensuous shock. And this sensuous shock in turn appears as the sign of a radical servitude, the sign of the infinite indebtedness of our mind to a law of the Other which may be the commandment of God or the factual power of the Unconscious. This is what being-unanswerable means in the end. It signifies an experience of radical dissymmetry. The "indeterminate" no longer denotes the place of the "whoever," the place where anyone can come. On the contrary, it means at once the place where the subject cannot go and the place from which he receives his status of "enslavement."

I analyzed this reversal in an earlier text as an "ethical" turn. What I want to focus on today is the opposition of the "aesthetic dimension" to both sides of the ethical configuration. On the one hand, the ethical distribution is the distribution of places and identities that constitutes the consensual order of the community. But this ethical order also has what can be called its own outside. This set of determinations is coupled with a specific form of the indeterminate. At the beginning of his *Politics*, just after the analysis of the basic human community and before his statement on the "political animal," Aristotle briefly conjures up and dismisses the figure of the subject who is "without polis": a being that is inferior or superior to men, a monster or a divinity perhaps, a being, anyway, that is *azux* (unbound), a subject that cannot be in relation with any being like it, one that is necessarily "at war" with others. This being *azux*, this god/monster or monster/god can be thought of as the opposite of the urchin/god of Hegel. We know that this figure has been revived in recent years not only to reconstruct aesthetic experience under the category of the sublime, but also to name that which is at the core of the ethical experience: the unanswerable being, the un-measurable or the un-substitutable from which all that is measurable, substitutable, and connected according to a law of distribution has to take its law. This "unanswerable being" is the principle of another form of radical dissymmetry which opposes to what I call the aesthetics of politics an "ethics of politics," a view of communities and conflicts structured by this dissymmetry. I analyzed in the aforementioned text how Lyotard elaborated on that basis an idea of the "rights of the other," which, in the last instance, was harmonious with the infinite justice of the American armies. I would like to focus now on a more complex case of this tension, which is the case of the Derridean democracy to come. Derrida was concerned, as I am, with the elaboration of a concept of democracy that would break the consensual-ethical view of democracy as the way of governing and the way of being of the wealthy countries. But there is something that cannot have a place in the "democracy to come" which he opposes to it: it is the idea of aesthetic neutralization,

the idea of the place of the indeterminate as the place of the whoever, the place that can be occupied by anyone at all. This means that democracy in Derrida's thought cannot be the political supplement to the sum of the parts. It is instead a supplement to politics. On the one hand, Derrida takes up the traditional idea of politics as sovereignty. In that context, the idea of a capacity of the "whoever," the figure of the demos as the political supplement, cannot emerge. Just as he identifies the concept of politics with the concept of sovereignty, Derrida equates the notion of the political subject with the notion of brotherhood. As he conceives of it, a brother is whoever can be substituted for another, whoever bears a trait of substitutability with another. Where substitutability reigns, what reigns, he says, is the rule, the automatic "calculating machine" of the rule. It is not the justice of an absolute decision. This is why the "heteron" of the democracy to come has to be an "outsider"—outside the order of the nation-states, but also outside any community of equals. The New International as he thinks of it takes on "the figure of the suffering and the compassion for the ten plagues of the International order." The com-passion, the suffering with, is a form of relation that precludes reciprocity. It is only where reciprocity is impossible that he can find true otherness, an otherness that obliges us absolutely. At this point, "suffering with" the other is the same as obeying the law of otherness.

The heterotopia of the demos is thus replaced by the heteronomy of the *hospes*: the *hospes* defined as a relation of un-substitutability. Because of this, one cannot be the subject of a political dissensus. One cannot play on any stage the relationship between one's inclusion and exclusion. For this, Derrida offers the name of the "first comer," borrowed from Jean Paulhan. But the first comer is not the "whoever" who affirms the capacity of those who have no capacity. The inactive-active subject of aesthetic neutralization has been replaced by a new figure of the "being-unbound." The first comer is "anyone, no matter who, at the permeable limit between who and what, the living being, the cadaver and the ghost."[8] This is a radical formulation of the being-unbound, the being that is less or more than the human being, one that is always in an asymmetric relation with us. On the one hand, it is less: it is the animal, the cadaver, or the ghost which is entrusted to our care. The other, in that sense, is whoever or whatever needs me to answer for him, her, or it. But, on the other hand, the other is the ghost that possesses a power without reciprocity over me. This is the demonstration that is epitomized in *Spectres of Marx* by the analysis of the visor effect or helmet effect. The ghost or the thing looks at us in a way that rules out any symmetry. We cannot meet/cross its gaze. Derrida adds that it is from that visor effect that we first receive the Law—the law of the strictly speaking unanswerable being: "The one who says 'I am thy Father's spirit' can only be taken at his word. An essentially blind submission to his secret, to the secret of his origin: this is a first obedience to the injunction. It will condition all the others."[9] Though this sentence refers to *Hamlet* and to the ghost of his father, it is clear that what Derrida has in mind is Abraham and the God who orders him to kill his son. As he puts it in *Rogues*, when he emphasizes the principle of heteronomy which is at the heart of this relationship: " It is a question of a heteronomy, of a law come from the other, of a responsibility and decision of the other, of the other in me, an other greater and older than I."[10]

It is at this point that Derrida offers us, with the help of Kierkegaard, a theoretical *coup de theatre*: the God who commands Abraham to kill Isaac does not ask him to obey his order. He says: you have to obey me unconditionally. But what he wants Abraham to understand is this: you have to choose unconditionally between betraying your wife and son or betraying me, and you have no reason to choose me rather than Sarah and Isaac. Sacrifice signifies choice, and the choice between the absolute Other and the member of the family is no different from the choice I have to make whenever I enter into relation with any other, which obliges me to sacrifice all the others. To obey the law of the absolute Other turns out to be the equivalence of anyone with any other. "*Tout autre est tout autre*" (any other is wholly other)—this is the formula of the identity of contraries, the formula of the identity between absolute inequality and full equality. Anyone can play the part of the "any other" that is wholly other. Thanks to the God of Abraham, anyone can play the role of the God of Abraham. The formula of radical heteronomy can

be turned into the formula of political equality, but at a cost: the ethical anyone becomes the political anyone. But it does so only through the self-negation or self-betrayal of the ethical law of heteronomy, which means, in my view, that the whole construction of politics as sovereignty and of the ethical supplement as heteronomy has to be self-cancelled in order to make a politics of the "anyone" possible. That reversal still confirms the tension between the aesthetic and the ethical concept of the *heteron*.

I am aware that all these statements need to be substantiated. I have tried to discuss Derrida's notion of the "*hospes*" in greater detail in a previous text about Derrida's politics.[11] I wish here only to point out very roughly what is at issue in the conceptualization of the "indeterminate" that is at the heart of the tension between an aesthetic interpretation and an ethical interpretation. I must now move on to my conclusion. In spite of the accelerated rhythm of my journey through some philosophical and extra-philosophical scenes and narratives, I hope that I have shed some light on my thinking of aesthetics. Aesthetics, for me, does not refer to a theory of the beautiful or a science or philosophy of art. It refers first and foremost to a form of experience, a mode of visibility and a regime of interpretation. The aesthetic experience reaches far beyond the sphere of art. What is at issue in the description of the painting of the little beggar boys is not the analysis of the procedures of a painter; nor is it the quality of the paintings. The issue is what "doing nothing" means. It appears that this "absence" of activity implies an entire redistribution of the categories of activity and passivity, along with those of appearance and reality. What is at issue is the configuration of the sensible landscape in which a community is framed, a configuration of what it is possible to see and feel, of the ways in which it is possible to speak and think. It is a distribution of the possible which also is a distribution of the capacity that these or those have to take part in this distribution of the possible. The description of a painting is at once the result and the condition of a certain framing of the possible; the same goes for the disconnection between the eyes and the arms of the worker in its relation to the elaboration of a "voice" of the workers. "Aesthetic "issues are issues of the configuration of a common world. They are controversial, since the aesthetic heterotopy is constructed in the space in-between two forms of ethical heteronomy: a hierarchy of positions and aptitudes on the one side, a relation to the "unanswerable" Other on the other. The reflection on these "aesthetic" issues requires, I think, a form of aesthetic discourse which is not a specialization within philosophy, but, on the contrary, crosses the frontiers of the disciplines and ignores the hierarchy of levels of discourse. The description of a genre painting, the philosophical myth of the distribution of the souls, the description of the experience of the joiner at work, Kant's analysis of the form of a palace, the storm of the Sublime, the philosophical restaging of the ghost of Hamlet's father or the Sacrifice of Isaac, and even the typography of a page in a philosophical essay, etc., are all configurations of the visible, the sayable and the thinkable that must be looked at apart from disciplinary boundaries and hierarchies of levels. They are equal inhabitants of a topography of the thinkable. There is no specific territory of thought. Thought is everywhere. Its space has no periphery and its inner divisions always are provisory forms of a distribution of the thinkable. A topography of the thinkable is always the topography of a theater of operations. We have to hear the rumble of the battle, said Foucault in a famous text. In order to make the rumble audible, one has to re-inscribe descriptions and arguments in a war of discourses where no definite border separates the territories, where no definite border separates the logos of philosophy or science from the voices that are their objects. One has to re-inscribe them in the equality of a common language and the common capacity to invent objects, stories and arguments. The thinking of the aesthetic heterotopia requires the practice of indisciplinary discourse.

ENDNOTES

1. G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1:170.
2. Ibid.
3. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. C. Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 43.
4. Jacques Rancière, "The Aesthetic Dimension," *Critical Inquiry* 36 (2009): 1–19. See also "The Method of Equality: An Answer to Some Questions," in G. Rockhill and Ph. Watts, eds., *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 273–88.
5. Gabriel Gauny, "Le Travail à la tâche," in *Le Philosophe plébéien* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes), 45–46.
6. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. G. Bennington and R. Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 183.
7. Ibid.
8. Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 86.
9. Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 7.
10. Derrida, *Rogues*, 84.
11. Jacques Rancière, "Should Democracy Come?" in P. Cheah and S. Guerlac, eds., *Derrida and the Time of the Political* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 274-90.

Paris, France