

SECOND PERSON POETICS FOR THE AGE OF MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION

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Bruno Latour, the anthropologist and sociologist of science, has repeatedly theorized the hybridization of things, spaces and identity. Things enable inscriptions to be made public so that re-presentation is possible (or in his own particular jargon, re-inscription is the shift of inscriptions from space to space). Collections, samplings, household furnishings, archives and libraries, museums, laboratories, digital networks and data clusters are conditions that are neither above or below the social nature of cultural productions. In culture, spaces, artefacts and communities are inextricably intertwined, constituting the various forms of identity that characterize our experiences. The identities that we refer to in this paper are epistemic and aesthetic identities –particularly the latter (although the concepts that arise out of almost everything that we might say about aesthetic identities translate well to epistemic identities). We understand such identities to be social groups that are normatively organized around certain properties that, in the first case are aesthetic properties or in the second case, are epistemic properties (that is to say, these are groups which are organized, respectively, in the spheres of history of art and literature or in the areas of history of knowledge in its various academic disciplines).

1. Spaces and identity

The spaces in which identity is configured have two notable features. Firstly, these spaces are loaded with a special normative quality as regards the rationality of a subject's behaviour. The type of behaviour in public, institutional or impersonal space includes among its causes the type of normativity that regulates these spaces. Generally we identify this normativity by rules based on general conditions, paying particular attention if not to the universality then at least to the impartiality of the reasons for the action. In private spaces, that is to say, in spaces of action that are the jurisdiction of the pure individual, even though this category is intersected by social relations, what determines an action is generated in the subjects' plans, desires, and beliefs and the rational validity or general normative quality of this action is only determined by these categories (which may include rules and norms of rationality). In intimate spaces, however, it is the forms of relation that constitute these spaces that generate reasons for action. Thus, for example, the fact that one day a friend asks me to keep him company because he feels lonely is reason enough for him to take this course of action –the only justification being the friendship we have. In this space all reasons are reasons in the second person.

On the other hand, intimate spaces—universally widespread though they may—are however the result of historical contingencies and developments of which they are constituted. The fact that sentimental relationships are formed, for example, is the result of contingency not only in personal histories but also in the cultural history of erotic forms, which may or may not include what in our societies we daily understand as a couple, that is to say, a stable relationship based on mutual declarations of affection, and not, to the contrary, on a (legally defined) marital bond (although this may also occur).

The history of intimate spaces has not been written with details in those *close environments* that enable the development of identities. Such an account does not belong to pure cultural history, as if it were independent of the history of concepts of identity. Neither does it belong to the history of forms of power, because even if they are intersected by relationships of power, intimate spaces are seeds of heterotopia in which paths of dissidence and emancipation are created. This history has not been written because the account would belong to a domain that we have not yet thought of, or which has perhaps been thought of using categories that belong to other areas: the legal principles that define public spaces or the norms of egocentric rationality that are ascribed to private spaces.

We have used “an intimate space” for want of a better name because the environment it describes is governed by a special form of relationship that requires “face-to-face” contact—the presence of the face, of the idiosyncrasy, of the other; a relationship in which the existence of the other cannot be denied even under the sign of violence because the face of the enemy, as with the warriors of old, is always present in the act of aggression. Intimate space is thus also that which unites and separates Abraham and Isaac in the very moment that the father raises his hand against his son. And intimate space is also the space of sexist violence, when the vulnerable and beaten face mirrors the male terror of a different type of relationship—the terror of a relationship governed by equality and not one built upon an expression of fear. Yet it is also a space in which the act of love or the declaration of friendship heralds their arrival like a new luminosity in the overall darkness.

Habermas saw that in modern capitalism there had been a development of the intermediate spaces that exist between the normative domains of the public and the private. He maintained that the expansion of the mass media, institutions and social movements, etc., constituted the *social sphere*. Thus, the development and transformation of capitalism and of contemporary societies has generated multiple spaces in which the private is intertwined with the public in a two-way direction of influence. Discussion has also been conducted on the over-exposure of personal identities to the public view (phenomena such as the so-called “social networks” on the Internet: Facebook, Fotolog, etc., or the addiction to “Reality shows” on TV). These are phenomena that would indicate a tendency towards the formation of identities that uses media from the public space. These new strategies of identity would not only be a result, but also sometimes a cause, of the growing importance of these means of communication. On the other hand, many authors have pointed out a process that moves in the opposite direction—that is, the massive withdrawal towards the private sphere and the abandonment of public space (R. Sennett). What has occurred, according to these authors, is that there has been an increase in the search for personal identity at the price of collective identities that can only exist in public spaces.

Despite appearances, both tendencies are not contradictory but rather are symptoms of a permanent restructuring of public and private spaces in modernity. A product of this restructuring is the continual creation of new intermediate spaces between the private and the public that we will call “spaces of intimacy”.

Intimacy has traditionally been conceived of as an area that is restricted to the private (and paradigmatically constituted by elements which are sexual and/or bodily, family-related and emotional, that is to say, by that which is not exposed to the public domain or whose nature is not determined by this exposure). The resulting formation is

parallel to the public sphere (Habermas) and is also product of a process of subjectivization under conditions of capitalism. The conversion of the intimate into a utopian space is also part of this process: elements of normativity are introduced into processes that by their nature are an extension of new forms of production and reproduction (work-home).

Sociologists such as Anthony Giddens and Zygmunt Bauman have indicated that the recent transformations in the constitution of contemporary identities point towards the permeability of the intimate and the public. Thus the increasing extension of public policies on health, education and, in general, the appearance of the welfare state signifies a permanent irruption of the public in the private domain (Negri: invasion of the state) with the result that much of what we call 'intimate' seeks refuge in imaginary territories which are filled with positive properties such as rest, emotion, personal development, etc. This is the domain where Art, Religion, and Eroticism occur. What is certain, however, is that it is already configured by social forces, and as demonstrated by feminist literature, is intersected by power relations.

We would not be able to understand modern public institutions without understanding their foundation upon bases of intimacy. Thus, in the formation of modern capitalism there is a cause-effect "privatization" of modern religions, which have come to internalize forms of religious life in the domain of the intimate. Yet this phenomena, which took place in religions also spread to all areas that had to do with the social structuration of professional ideals. The modern army, for example, is not only built upon discipline but also upon certain forms of intimacy among the troops (Hollywood iconography: "they go to war for their country but die for their buddies"). In science –another example–the construction of spheres of intimacy has been detected by sociologists of science; spheres without which scientific communities would have been impossible. These processes are universal and universalizable and explain much of contemporary society's resistance to functioning according to the norms of impartiality and objectivity (ideals no less imaginary than those that articulate the intimate).

Many other critics have identified a new form of contemporary capitalism: addiction to overexposure of the intimate in the public space as an identity-formation strategy. The influence of the mass media, with its spectacles of private life as object of inspection, and the development of the so-called social networks, would be symptoms and perhaps causes of a spectacularization of the intimate. This would thus be an expansion of the limits of the society of the spectacle into areas of intimate spaces. This criticism is not unwarranted. Attention has gradually been taking shape as the privileged site of the contemporary production of economic value. New economic forms based on prosumerism (that is to say, productive consumerism), such as those that represent new uses of the social networks, belong to this domain of economically productive attention.

Throughout this process, relationships are established between networks of artifacts that sustain spaces, and which must also be regarded as networks of meanings, and the formation of processes of subjectivity and of contemporary experience. The cultural material here is that of the home-castle inhabited by private beings, peering through their electronic windows that connect them with public spaces.

2. The unknown masterpiece

Let us look at how aesthetic identity and the technical configuration of spaces of creation and consumerism are intertwined in the avant-garde aesthetics that have constituted modernism in the last two centuries.

In *The Unknown Masterpiece*, old Frenhofer declares in front of the young Poussin how the narrative of artist's identity will have to be in modernity (which also includes modernism and the ideals of the avant-guard): "The mission of art is not to copy nature but to express it!

"You aren't a vile copyist but a poet!" In Balzac's story, the old master hides a masterpiece that he will only reveal, thus betraying himself, in exchange for Poussin's beautiful lover. Poussin in turn betrays his lover by obliging her to model naked in front of the old artist. The culmination of these two betrayals is a painting which has been portrayed as the work of a lifetime but which is incomprehensible but for the single blurred image of a foot. The old man's madness inevitably leads to tragedy and he burns the work, along with himself and his workshop.

The story has the virtue of representing, ahead of its time, the ideals and collective imagination of artists of nineteenth century modernity (which were more purely and radically expressed in the modernism of the early twentieth century). It is these forces, in the story, that link the fate of art work from romanticism to avant-garde radicalism, as if Frenhofer were summing up in his own life the aesthetic history of a century. Picasso and Cezanne identified with the figure of the old painter and with his discussion of the function of form in art (Picasso dedicated a long series of etchings to the subject). The contemporary perspective, in which we can glimpse *Large Glass* by Duchamp and his *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*¹, is already present in this fable.



(figure 1)

In this narrative on the autonomy of art there are certain areas that deserve to be examined in the light of perspectives that do not derive from pure critical theory. I refer here to what we might regard as the basis or the material culture of aesthetics understood as a "distribution of the sensible". In this allocation of visibilities, there are aspects that are both "superstructural" and "infrastructural", to employ an old Marxist dichotomy. Thus, aesthetics, disconnected from the context of material culture, do not allow us to understand the spaces of production

and the distribution of the sensible. However, embodied in aesthetics are revealed deep modes in the constitution of social spaces and in the forms of identity in each historic moment.

By material culture, I take this to be the material substrate of practices that are found where multiple forms of agency configure personal and collective identities. Material culture is thus not a mere group of artifacts that characterize a space-time vector, in the way that archaeologists or palaeontologists use these groups as indicators of historical time. Material culture, on the contrary, occurs as a result of the "embodied and embedded" nature of the agency. It forms the environment in which intentional action not only takes place in the world-at-hand, in a Heideggerian sense, but is also an authentic constituent of beings in which the double aspect of sociality and technology are intrinsic aspects of their existence.

The overall hypothesis behind this paper is that there is a non-contingent and mutual relationship between modes of production and reproduction in works of art which is present in the areas of modernity and the metaphysics of the agents involved (as revealed by the great modernist thinkers, primarily Wittgenstein and Heidegger). In particular I would like to refer to one aspect of this correlation: one that may be seen in the parallels to be drawn between the asymmetric relationship between first and third person (an enigma which is central to the philosophy of modernism) and the relationship between spaces of production and distribution of art. Characteristic of this last would be the asymmetric relationship between the artist's studio

1 As astutely observed by Ángela Molina in a review of an exhibition with a Balzacian title held in Artium in 2006 (Molina, A., *El País*, February 11, 2006), also, cf. Argullol "Picasso y la obra maestra desconocida" (*La jornada semanal*, July 23, 2006).

and the means of distribution –of which the art museum or gallery are stereotypical examples.

The dichotomy between first and third person has its roots in the modernity which is based upon an Augustinian or Cartesian metaphysics of the subject –one that divides agency between the virtual world of the intentional that is found in consciousness and the material world of physical transformation that is found in bodily action. When observed from this ontological context, the work of art –the result of the action– is revealed as an unstable place in which there appear, on the one hand, some of the author’s intentions, such as those that respond to an inner authority, and on the other hand, the interpretative attitudes of the spectator. The problem, of course, lies in the symbolic or merely significant “content” that is found in the work and that, on one hand, may be tied to the author’s intentions or, on the other, tied to the interpretation of the spectator that attempts to guess those intentions (and of which he or she will sooner end up being skeptical).

One way of understanding the subject of modernity and modernism, as Cavell has shown us in his lucid interpretation of Wittgenstein, lies on the horizon of skepticism. In aesthetic terrain, this skepticism, already present in Balzac’s fable, takes the form of an irreversible drift towards illegibility as the work’s mode of existence.

This illegibility was one of the recurrent themes in the work of José Luis Brea. In his *Un ruido secreto* (Brea, 1996), Brea used the title of Duchamp’s work as an indication of the direction that art was to follow in the era of postmodernity, following premises already established in postmodernism. What is interesting about illegibility, or to put it another way, about the difficulty of interpretation, is that it



(figure 2)

is the aesthetic form that shows the enigma of the subject in terms of the split between first and third person. If its action is located in a no-man’s land between the interior gaze and the hermeneutic exterior, this distribution of the sensible is expressed in a way similar to that of a work of art that holds a symbolic message in its interior that cannot be accessed by form –a symbolic message that is either a secret or simply does not exist and as such leaves the spectator either completely perplexed or free to think up any possible type of interpretation.

The *Black Square* of 1923 is the result of a long journey “searching for zero” (Delgado-Gal, 2005) –a natural progression towards artistic purity that had already commenced in Balzac’s parable (Rodríguez de la Flor, 2001). The move that it proposes– away from natural forms, as the sole coherent exercise of manifest creative will –is an effect of the *aporia* displayed by the aesthetic agency of modernity. That is, in as much as these natural forms belong to the field of artistic endeavor and not to the merely artisanal, they are the expression of a novelty that may only be regarded as such because they break up the common space of intelligibility that enables the artist’s agency to be recognized as skillful and clever. However, in as much as this

space is broken up, the artist may only be recognized because his or her work will have caused a transformation of the viewer –a transformation precisely aimed at achieving recognition of this work. As a project, the avant-guard is anchored to this paradox of aesthetic creation, one –without departing from the context of Romanticism– which is based on a mythic origin of the agency of genius and which aims to achieve the transformation of the average, unknown and common viewer. The tension between high and low culture, between art and life thus comes together in a project of the subject which is exposed to the tension between the first and third person.

During the period of the artist-craftsman, a period that still includes the era of Baroque patronage and even to some extent neoclassic sculpture and painting, the artist's skills were shown in a public space and were also recognized by an educated public who consented to the qualities of the works in as much as they expressed common aesthetic expectations. Michael Fried dedicated a well-known essay to examining, within the context of the first art galleries of the age of the French Enlightenment (Fried, 1990), the ideal of "absorption" as the aesthetic expectation of the public who attended the salons. The artist's recognition still depended upon the recognition of his or her ability to express an ideal that was shared by the public and the artist. Identity and agency were not yet subjected to the instability that the work of art –as a strange and unstable object– produces among the artist's "creative" internal capacities and the public space of recognition (at least not intrinsically, as would occur from Romanticism onwards).



(figure 3)

The emergence of the "creation" as an indicator of the aesthetic quality of the work of art and the identity of the artist establishes a parallel, which, I insists is not accidental. Thus, on one hand, there is the metaphysics of the agent divided between an inner creative authority, defined in the first person, and the social space of recognition and, on the other, the material culture that defines spaces where art is produced, exhibited and consumed. An asymmetric parallel is thus produced between the artist's studio, as a material space of private creation, and the museum or gallery as a public space where the work is exhibited, consumed, evaluated and recognized.

The story behind Courbet's painting-manifesto, *The Painter's Studio*, is well-known. Rejected by the jury of the Paris World's Fair of 1855, which accepted other works of his, the work was shown in an act of self-affirmation in the Pavilion of Realism, an alternative and rebellious space opposed to official taste (Fried, 1990). For various reasons, among them being the self-affirmation of the artist, this work is familiar to *Las Meninas*, but what is particularly interesting is that it converts the space between the physical and symbolic of the studio into a story. Much has been written on the allegorical meaning of the painting, but as also occurs with Velazquez and Vermeer, the allegory takes the studio to be an identitary space of signification. The creative liberty of the artist thus takes place in a space that has been converted into a hybrid of craftsmanship and symbolism. The very title of the work alludes to this place between the imaginary and the material: "The painter's studio, a real allegory that determines a seven-year period of my artistic and moral life". The painting itself is divided into two parts, a self-referential center in which the painter portrays himself painting a landscape and is observed by two strange characters, a boy and a semi-naked model (innocence and truth?), and an outer circle of characters that abstractedly take up the studio's space. What the work shows is the metaphysical vertigo of those works that attempt to portray the unportrayable, the very act of painting not as a simple accumulation of gestures and splashes of paint but rather as an expression of agency that reveals the artist's world and his intention.



(figure 4)

The iconography of the artist in his or her studio is not uncommon in contemporary history. Many photographs that we are familiar with have this same unstable and enigmatic character that derives from the impossible attempt to refer to the identity of the author as author. A well-known photograph shows Picasso taking some tentative dance steps under the watchful eye of his wife, perhaps representing his cultured idea of aesthetic agency; while another shows Duchamp playing chess with a naked model against the background of the *Large Glass*, which allows a glimpse of



(figure 5)

“the bride stripped bare by her bachelors”; or in the case of the many representations of Bacon’s studio, the painter appears as a still young man in the middle of a chaos of objects and remains that defined his creative space.

This hybrid space, in which the artist’s individuality reveals itself, appears to externalize its interior space as an area of creation. The mind and body of the author carry out their task of transforming sensibilities within the context of the studio, transferring or attempting to transfer to his or her work the agent’s capacity to

change the judgment and sensibility of the spectator in a context other than that of the studio: in the public context of the “container” or storage of works of art, e.g. museums or galleries.

3. Critical theory, determinism and asymmetry of spaces

By making these metaphysical components clear (components which are inserted into the material culture of contemporary artistic practice), I am not attempting to carry out an exercise in critical philosophy aimed at denouncing or exposing some sort of hidden reality which has the characteristics of a supposed determinist mechanism of power. But it is indeed essential to qualify the critical potential offered by the philosophical examination of certain forms of material culture. To make this clear, we need to digress but not on the critical potential of certain concepts but rather on



(figure 6)

the very possibility of a criticism of cultural forms. In order to do so, I will employ some concise and wise reflections made by Jacques Rancière on certain forms and attitudes that are very widespread among cultural studies and aesthetic theory.

In a monographic edition of *Estudios Visuales* (Rancière, 2010: 82-89) dedicated to the aesthetics of resistance, Rancière maintains that we live in a time in which the “criticism of criticism” has taken a direction that may result in a good deal of confusion. As symptomatic and paradigmatic cases, he discusses two authors and various books quoted with great frequency in current literature: the postmodern guru Peter Sloterdijk and the sociologists Boltansky and Chiapello in their *The new spirit of capitalism* (Sloterdijk, 2005). While both cases employ different arguments, they share the same message regarding the place held by contemporary cultural criticism: that the postulates of critical theory have now become mechanisms adopted by a new capitalism, which is post-Fordist, informational and globalized. To persist, therefore, in using terms of critical ideology inherited by modernity, is simply to contribute to reinforce the mechanisms of global capital. Rancière reconstructs Sloterdijk’s line of reasoning by focusing on the diagnosis that the new situation produced by the technological forms of contemporary merchandizing has transformed the very definitions of life and necessity. While we still continue to think of scarcity in terms of concepts of basic needs, the argument goes, the fact is that the borders of the real and the imaginary have been erased, and with them the apparent “gravity” of the material, as would be the case with the concept of poverty. The world has become immaterial, liquid, ethereal and any type of “social demand today can only indicate either a hypocritical attempt to cover up the reality of abundance or the desire for further abundance”. The old individual of democracy or of the aspiration to democracy has become a bulimic consumer of goods and spectacle and all claims in favor of the new forms of distribution are no more than a mechanism that reinforces the system.

The work of sociologists Luc Boltansky and Ève Chiapello effects a diagnosis of contemporary capitalism which is less postmodern but more incisive. According to these authors, the new capitalism has incorporated the old protests of 1968 into its own productive structure. The authors claim that the transformations of the decade of the ‘60s resulted not only in the abandonment of a critical theory of society based on the structures of capitalism but also in claims that favored moral points of view held by individuals in democratic societies. Rancière highlights the common inference that the anti-authoritarian moves towards a new moral of customs and “its demands for autonomy and creativity paved the way for new forms of administration, based on individual initiative, creative collectivity and global flexibility” (Rancière, 2010: 84).

It is true that the new forms of capitalism have powerful tools to integrate criticism and which mean that this criticism is integrated into hegemonic forms of thought. It is also true that the environment created by technology does not only contain new artifacts and products of consumerism but also new functions that have transformed our identity itself. In a “cyborg” sense of the term “identity”, they constitute new modes of embodied relationships and of adaptability to society, especially via the flow of new modalities of information. Digital contact with the world converts our primary living spaces into “connected rooms of our own” to use the term employed by Remedios Zafra (2010). Undoubtedly, culture has experienced profound changes and the descriptions made of contemporary capitalism as an informational capitalism are essentially correct. In spite of this, these enormous socio-technological changes do not imply the consequences that have served as basis for the widely held idea of the impotence of any sort of cultural criticism.

There are two hidden assumptions in these positions that are worth clarifying. The first, pointed out so effectively by Rancière, is the determinist assumption that the new critics have inherited from old Marxist theory. One of Marxism’s most influential traditions was the belief that the transformations produced by the changes in the modes of production would necessarily bring about

specific changes in social forms as a whole –as if it thus gave permanency to the hoped for “science” of historic change and with it a higher form of political management of the masses. The new critics preserve this determinist and necessitarian assumption, as much as they may have abandoned the outmoded Marxist analytic device, and along with it the subsequent emptying out of any sense of a form of agency. Such perspectives thus regard any form of intentionality, as critical as it might appear, as just being yet another cog in the machine and the economic and cultural mechanisms of capitalism. But such an emptying out, fostered by the idea of the necessity of the global market as our only possible fate, has certainly been the greatest ideological and political success of contemporary capitalism. In fact it is an ideological motor of great politico-economic consequence, especially in the devaluation of political will, threatened as it is by an apparently blind drifting about of the markets which is these days presented as a sort of telluric force. Deliberately or not, the forms of historic necessitarianism have contributed to this spread of the cultural hegemony of new liberalism.

In second place, Rancière maintains, the real effect of these positions is a form of elitism in the cultural domain that has a hint of Platonism about it. Cultural aristocratism implies that the only criticism permitted for the popular classes would be that which refers to their material conditions of existence and that any criticism in the cultural domain would always be condemned to be part of the system. This would lead to the impotence of all political action in the cultural sphere and, from this the non-transformable character of aesthetic projects (which after all is the terrain in which the experts operate, whether they are artists or critics). A message, thus, which is no different to the old romantic idea of *Kultur* preserved in the metaphysic of the avant-garde and renewed today in these new forms of criticism of criticism.

If that is the case, the troubling question is whether it is still possible to speak of forms of aesthetic injustice based on the unequal distribution of sensibilities. Because injustice, Rancière argues, would not be as much in the presumed greater or worse quality of aesthetic judgment but more in the possibility of accessing forms of experience which are represented by different artistic and cultural practices. It would not matter whether or not forms of experience are mechanisms of cultural capitalism but rather how they are distributed and how they are appropriated in social formations. Because it is often forgotten that the misery of capitalism is not the economic form itself but rather the injustice, discrimination and dehumanization that are part of its nature. As a consequence, the critical part of critical theory would not have to focus exclusively on the quality of aesthetic judgments but also on the conditions that might enable non-hegemonic forms of distribution of sensibilities and possibilities of experience.

This somewhat long parenthesis now allows us to qualify our hypothesis regarding the relationship between the dichotomies of identity and the modalities of the material sites of contemporary cultural practices. The problem posed by this question is how diverse artistic and cultural practices may contribute, via the spaces generated by material culture, to the also diverse forms of distribution of sensibilities and experiences.

We have suggested that in the artistic domain, the dichotomy between first and third person may be seen in terms of the hegemonic tradition, that is, in the tension between the artist’s creative spontaneity, understood in the first person, and the receptive passivity of the spectator and consumer, understood in the third person. This tension appears equally in two modalities of the spaces of production and distribution of art and culture. We may regard the first of these as “private”. In this space the artist *creates*, and via the mechanisms of the distribution of patronage or of the market, the spectator *appropriates* the work as both property and comprehension and experience. The art market and above all the publishing market are part of this modality that, on the other hand, has provided the underlying meaning upon which many aesthetic theories are based. The second modality, which we will call “public”, now denotes the existence of mechanisms of distribution of

the work in public reception spaces, such as the salons of the 17th and 18th centuries as well as the exhibitions, art galleries and other places of common collective experience that make up a city. Both modalities are very sensitive to changes in material culture. We are in Walter Benjamin's debt for having noticed the importance of these changes, which became apparent in the new modalities of reproduction that inaugurated photography, cinema and other mass media communication but which were already present in the production and circulation of goods in urban spaces in the 19th century, expressed in the design of objects and their exhibition in places aimed at stimulating desire.

We would be missing the point if we thought that the political relevance of aesthetics exists only or mainly in the public/private dichotomy of the work's spaces of distribution. This dichotomy refers to the form of distribution and access to artistic work and has the same importance as any other type of good but it leaves to one side the centrality of the tension between spontaneity/passivity in the distribution of sensibilities and experiences. Within this form, creation and above all the creation of sensibilities, is independent from the reception of the work –a reception that only and exclusively appears in the form of recognition and that, in turn, provides the basis for the commercialization of the work in the market. Thus, the only horizon in contemporary art has been made up of the threat from skepticism and its opposite, the wishes of the avant-guard. Seen from this perspective, we will be able to better understand the limits of various widespread types of cultural criticism.

Leaving aside many other approaches to critical theory, I want to focus on the line developed by Michael Fried in his criticism of minimalist art and generally of the work which is made in order to be shown in public spaces. According to Fried, in the trajectories of modern works there is a split between those that are "theatrical" and those that genuinely aesthetic. "Theatrical" would be those works whose spectacular-type nature does not touch the surface of the spectator's sensibility and does not create any mystery that might question this sensibility or lead to its transformation –as opposed to creative works, which would produce this effect. The task of the cultural critic would be, from the perspective of Fried, one of distinguishing between the vices and virtues of the work destined for public spaces. Certainly, Fried is aiming at a central area of growth in contemporary art under conditions of commercialization brought about by cultural capitalism. It is not unknown for the cultural market and its art fairs and literature fairs to base themselves upon theatricality and the spectacular, both qualities so often hidden when use is made of the amazement or even repulsion that is produced by works of art that function as mechanisms to attract and commercialize attention. But it should be noted that criticism only occupies itself with judgments regarding the viewer's ability or inability to perceive authors simply looking for recognition, along the same lines as the model that sees aesthetic criticism as a test of judgment. Here the good critic would be a refined individual who has developed a sharp eye for distinguishing between authors simply looking for recognition and authors who really transform sensibility. This way of understanding criticism, lucid though it may appear, is essentially threatened by the Charybdis of elitism, one that would separate lucid critics from viewers with bad taste, and the Scylla of indiscriminate judgment that settles upon the conclusion that "everything is theatricality and spectacle" and, as such, renounces the same critic's task of dealing with conditions which would allow the transformation of the distributions of experience. Tension is thus generated between the intolerance and skepticism that have characterized the landscape of the recent cultural wars between those in favor of establishing new aesthetic norms and postmodern authors who refer aesthetic judgment to other social contexts. But it is certain that both sides share the same undertones of necessitarianism and do not question whether there is any place for criticism other than that of intellectual analysis of the *status quo*.

There are many other aesthetic traditions whose critical postulates should be examined in the light of the metaphysical commitments they make and how they deal with these commitments in relation to the material culture of production and distribution. The reference to Fried, however,

helps to illustrate our goal of understanding the relationship between the problem of spaces and the problem of identity and how this acts as a framework to examine the political significance of art. Between the global skepticism that implies determinist theories such as those cited by Rancière and the ingenuity of many avant-gard movements that have, in effect, been integrated without the slightest problem into hegemonic culture, there is a growing space of alternatives and experiences that awaits philosophical reflection. It is not my intention to approach critical theory with the normative idea of establishing judgment values on artistic work, as appears to be at stake in the cultural wars between the pluralist or postmodern approach and the normative reactions of the new defenders of the canon. It is more about reflecting on the conditions of possibility in which certain forms of artistic agency may reveal the limits and dissensus of what we have suggested is a situation of aesthetic injustice – a situation that has to do with the distribution of sensibilities, visibilities and experiences.

4. Spaces of the second person

There have been many contemporary artistic movements and experiences that have questioned the political place of art. Among them, for example, has been the avant-gard, with its various traditional representatives through to those who were more philosophically sophisticated, such as those characteristic of the decade of the '70s (here I am thinking of the Situationists, the Fluxus movement and those surrounding it, and in Joseph Beuys). As well, we could mention initiatives in the areas of criticism, politics and activism, in particular those that have developed, since the decade of the '80s, fronts of resistance that have overtaken the traditional class struggle to open the way for feminism and the queer movement and for ecology, ethnic and post-colonial movements. One may learn from the experience of almost all of these and carry out criticism regarding the conditions of possibility of emancipation or at least a resistance, which is also aesthetic, in cultural capitalism. Many people, theorists and artists, have developed a similar approach², especially in the context of the postmodernism's meaning for aesthetics. I will not attempt to explore territory in which I feel like a mere tourist. My goal leads more towards the philosophical experience that may be extracted from the changes that occur in more or less radical artistic practices and also, above all, that occur in contemporary material culture. These are changes that allow us to rethink metaphysical assumptions of agency.

The question I want to put forward is whether all aesthetic agency that has political meaning must remain enclosed in the dichotomy between the sphere of private experience (or creativity) in first person, and the public sphere made up of art work's incursion into public space. A good number of the traditions that we might classify as "aesthetics of resistance" have focused their action on either one or both spheres. They have, for example, focused on the mobilization and change of private sensibility, as is the case with the avant-gard in its first period; on the production of work aimed at the public sphere, thus revealing social situations of discrimination in this sphere; and on the transformation of the artist from "private" and individual author to organic intellectual working collectively, etc. I am not going to raise objections to all of these projects nor will I participate in the postmodern game in

2 <<http://www.arteleku.net/vieja/desacuerdos/index.jsp>>, <<http://republicart.net/>>; <<http://gacgrupo.ar.tripod.com/>>; <<http://eipcp.net/>>; <<http://www.brumaria.net/>>; (consulted 04/08/2012); Blanco, P. Carrillo, J., Claramonte, J., Expósito, M. (eds.) (2001): *Modos de hacer. Arte crítico, esfera pública y acción directa*. Salamanca, Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca; Foster, H. (2001): *El retorno de lo real. La vanguardia a finales de siglo*. Madrid, Akal; Brea, J.L. (1996): *Las auras frías. El culto a la obra de arte en la época postaurática*. Barcelona, Anagrama; Zafra, Remedios (2005): *Netianas N(h)acer mujer en Internet*. Madrid, Lengua de Trapo. The essays contained in Raunig, G. and Ray G. (eds.) (2009): *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice*. Londres, MayFlyBooks; and especially, for their cultural proximity, essays by Marina Garcés and Marcelo Expósito. These are only some examples that I have particularly taken into account.

which everything can be accepted into the system. However, it is appropriate to question whether the conditions of transformation necessarily imply the dichotomy between the public and the private.

Michael de Certeau created a new way of looking at material culture in his *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1990). When organizing a broad study proposed by the incoming French socialist authorities in the first Mitterrand government, in which he examined the practices and places of the Lyonnaise working class, Certeau introduced the idea that if we are sufficiently alert and patient in examining the uses and customs of real scenes of everyday life, we will find highly diverse *modes of doing* (and not just seeing) that express strategies and tactics in which the agents involved have shown their ingenuity, their *metis*, in the most varied of circumstances. We might find, for example, that the dichotomy between spheres of production and consumption or between factory and home may be orthogonal to the strategies and tactics of aesthetic transformation (tactics, as Certeau indicates, are the reactions of the weak who have no place of their own but who raid the place of the other in order to resignify, temporarily appropriate, and poach about in spaces ordered by totalizing institutions and spaces). A little later on, Nicolas Bourriaud offered up the concept of *relational aesthetic* in order to refer to the overall group of interpersonal and material bonds that link the work of art to the context in which it occurs. In a broader context, interesting developments took place in analytic philosophy of mind and action with a turn towards a post-Cartesian conception of cognition and agency understood as “embodied and embedded”. Thus, by eliminating the dichotomy between the mental and the bodily and between the internal and the external, agency is mental, corporeal and extended in a material medium; in parallel to this, in the area of cultural studies, Donna Haraway put forward the powerful concept of cyborg identity to encourage going beyond the dichotomy between nature and culture in the metaphysics of identities. It is difficult to find a common thread to all these changes that make up part of our contemporary cultural panorama, yet when all of them are regarded as necessary steps in critical philosophy, they support the idea that borders are not inherited as such and that they allow intermediate territories in which the metaphysical varieties that occur are a lot more interesting.

I will employ conceptual tools that enable these conceptualizations in order to propose a spatial model that, although added and not alternative to the tension between the private and the public, will open up a range of new possibilities which may be more profound than those suggested in traditional movements of resistance aesthetics. I refer to spaces that I will call *spheres of intimacy*. These are spaces that are made up of relationships and connections, movements and actions that can only be defined in the second person. In first place, the second person form of address, *tú* or *vosotros* in Spanish, implies the intrinsic individuality of the other. There is no room for a “generalized *you*” as there is no universality in the second person –it is intrinsically singular and situated. In second place, it necessarily implies acknowledgment of the other’s interior world of desires and beliefs (skepticism or lack of acknowledgment of the other signifies the abandonment of discourse and action in the second person in order to convert them into a third person relationship). A corollary to this is that this acknowledgment is always, and before anything else, acknowledgment of intelligence, capacity and knowledge of the other: even under unequal or asymmetric conditions, knowledge is granted to the other that is not their own. In third place, it establishes the existence of emotional bonds made up of empathy, trust and authority, that is to say, the mutual game of granting permission and power over oneself to the other. In fourth place, the second person is based upon self-acknowledgement of the fragility, precariousness and dependency of the first person with respect to their use of the informal ‘you’. It thus also involves acknowledgement of one’s own ignorance with respect to what the other knows.

Continued use in the second person tense, that is to say, the constitution of the bonds that only exist in the second person, creates spaces of intimacy that are always material and that refer to the mutual constrictions that individuals establish because the other is present.

These spheres appear and disappear along with the bonds that maintain them. And they do so where before there was only privacy or public space. They take place in environments that are most characteristic of affective human relationships (families, friendships and lovers) but also in institutional public spaces. They are characteristic, for example, of places of education, therapy, research, of collaborative community movements, etc. They are at the interstices of public and private spheres; they convert agents into people who are interdependent of other people and they convert public spaces into structures full of networks of affective and human relationships.

In these spaces there is a redistribution of sensibilities and possibilities of experience which is different from the redistributions that occur in private and public. Spheres of intimacy have the effect of dissolving asymmetry: there are no experiences that are not held in common, that do not simultaneously transform the two poles of the second-person relationship. For example, education is a redistribution of knowledge but it would be intolerably reductive to think that it only acts unilaterally as an influence divided between spontaneity and passivity from one private individual to another (or to many others) in a private space. In contrast to military training, education establishes the mutual transformation of its participants and the mutual acknowledgment of cognitive authority and intelligence. Although there are institutional aspects and domains of the third person, education would be impossible without spheres of intimacy.

Spheres of the second person demand their own material culture; shared rooms, hallways, objects of common use, the exchange between goods and bodies, the stability of an environment which provides the basis for bonds of empathy, trust and authority. Thus to establish environments of intimacy we first need to transform the world: to cook for our friends, arrange dates with our lovers, re-order the classroom for our students, open the computer and its emails and Facebook pages in order to preserve the threads that link us to others. Without these environments, the spheres slip towards effervescence. If we stop making phone calls, writing to the other or going for a walk with him or her, then intimacy becomes indifference. Yet also: when our agency transforms the world it creates openings for emotional ties to recreate themselves in the second person.

There is thus also an art in the second person and an aesthetic of the second person: works, either individual or collective, that only exist because they create a redistribution of sensibility in the second person. They exist, as the tactics of Michel de Certeau, because of the reuse of the world in order to transform the significant other and to transform oneself. Aesthetic agencies in second person have always been part of the history of art, yet they have not been noticed because they have been wrapped up in dichotomies of the public and the private.

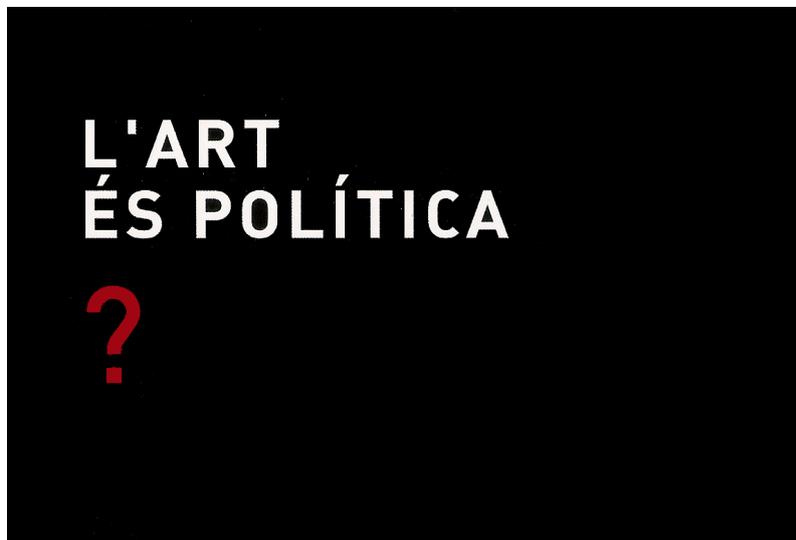
I would like to give two examples of artists in which the second person aesthetic is well known and sought after. The first is the Chilean architect and artist of public spaces, Alfredo Jaar. The Berlinische Gallerie and the Alte Nationalgalerie of Berlin have just dedicated a retrospective exhibition this summer to his work titled *The way it is. Eine Ästhetik des Widerstands/ An Aesthetics of Resistance*. In the



(figure 7)

exhibition it is easy to distinguish between the work dedicated to being shown in traditional spaces such as galleries or art museums and projects of intervention that, as a result of either activist initiative or institutional invitation, are carried out in various communities throughout the world. In both cases, above all the latter, Jaar is aware of the other's perspective and his actions are directed towards establishing a bond with him or her without which the work would not be finished. For example, during the Pinochet dictatorship in 1979, when the possibilities of artistic expression were as limited as any other form of expression, Jaar carried out the project *Estudios de* by filling the city with advertising posters with the phrase "Are you happy?" and asking people to answer the question. The aesthetic intervention, via a tool of mass propaganda, was reused and signified a connection which, in that context and situation, mobilized an emotional response that existed in the instantaneity of the action and that irrupted into the loneliness of the urban masses (Valdés, 2012).

A similar action was again repeated upon occasion of the Universal Forum of Cultures in Barcelona in 2004 when the space was filled with posters which asked the urbane citizen sophisticated questions such as "Is art political?".



(figure 8)³

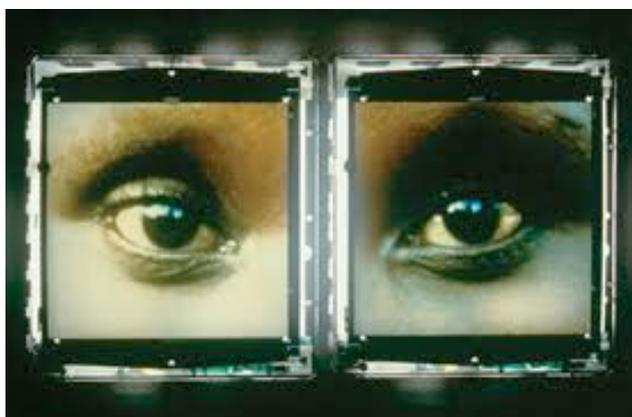
Other works, such as the Skohall Konthshall project, more clearly show the aesthetic aspects of the second person in his work. Established in 2000 to gift the Swedish city of Skohall with an art space, the project was actually not wanted by the community and so Jaar decided to act according to their wishes. He thus constructed a space made of paper (with material from a nearby factory) where for one week he exhibited the work of young Swedes, at the end of which the installation was burned in front of the local inhabitants. In a similar situation in Venezuela, in a neighborhood that preferred football to an exhibition center, Jaar handed out disposable photographic cameras among the population so that the locals could take photos of their neighborhood that were, just the same, temporally exposed without imposing an unsolicited aesthetic space. Jaar always develops his projects after a long period of research and interaction with the members of the community in which he is going to operate. Only after this period, and making the most of what happens being inserted into the community, does he develop a project that exists only as a result of this interaction. Currently, he has been brought in by the Basque Country to create a monument in Guernica to commemorate the victims of the Nazi bombardment of this town and also those of

3 Public intervention produced by Arts Santa Mònica – Departament de Cultura i Mitjans de Comunicació <<http://cultura2.gencat.cat/jaar/>>.

conflicts caused by ETA (Larrauri, 2012). In spite of contractual requirements, he has refused to provide any type of project until finishing his interaction with the local population and with the citizens of Basque Country, whom he has sought out for their expectations and opinions on the issue.

Caring for the other also appears in his more stable works, in which the work/image itself reflects empathy for the other that is never generalized. His works dedicated to the genocide in Rwanda, after fieldwork done in 1994, and in spite of warnings for his safety given by members of the military legations of the United Nations, are proof of this sensibility. Jaar took thousands of photographs that were exhibited in closed boxes on which you can only read a cursory description of what occurred in the place that was photographed.

His work *Los ojos de Gutete Emérita* take as its subject the case of a girl who escaped the genocide by hiding in a place from which she witnessed her whole family hacked to death by a machete. The installation is made up of thousands of slides that show the eyes of Gutete above an illuminated table which lights up the spectator.

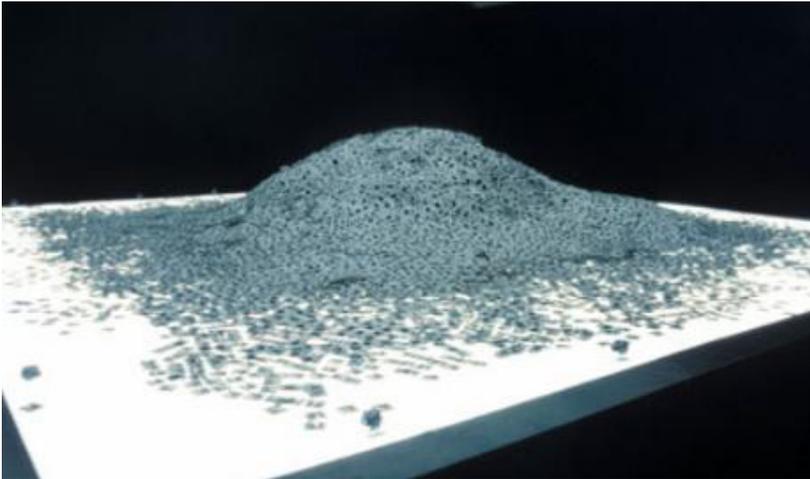


(figure 9)

In all of his works, Jaar develops an instinctive respect for the viewer's intelligence and feelings that begin with the first moments of creation and continue on to the exhibition. His work is at the same time a creator of moral and aesthetic experience, of reflection upon the act itself of representing and establishing relationships with the world through art (Rancière, 2006).

I have not presented Jaar's work here for its value in terms of standard norms of aesthetic value or for its political efficiency in terms of activist art. Its importance is in the density of the social bonds that are created or activated both in the moments of production and realization. A substantial part of the work's development takes place in second person spaces, however much it may then be reused in a public space or generate private experiences of an aesthetic or moral nature. What sets it apart is the urge to involve the particular other in the aesthetic act. The work exists because the other is a human being with whom one can establish a dialogue and can exchange of experiences at a level of equality and acknowledgment.

These displays of second person aesthetics do not signal an abandonment of the more traditional modes of art practiced in contemporary material culture. Art spaces, public or private, are part of this culture and will continue to be so in spite of the controversies they arouse. On the other hand, this way of using art to create communitarian social bonds is not a new invention but rather one of the ever-present dimensions in art. Art is a part of material culture –the most important way in which societies create possibilities for aesthetic experiences. It is thus not unusual that there has also been a way of creating shared experiences in communitary spheres or in spheres of intimacy. However, the question we face is one of whether the culture or material cultures in which we operate



(figure 10)

allow the possibility of an artistic agency aimed at creating and sharing aesthetic experiences that are part of a denser group of relationships. Critical theory on the political possibilities of art has operated exclusively within the dichotomy between the private and the public ever since Walter Benjamin's oft-quoted reflections on art in the age of technological reproduction. The paradigmatic example that was already operative in Benjamin was

that of the cinema as a possible exercise of artistic agency in large public spaces. In fact, if we continue to talk about the mass media it is because it seems that the outlook of an active author as opposed to that of the passive masses still functions as an interpretative conceptual framework. There have been no new alternatives to this framework –not even in postmodern theories of the rhizomatic as alternative to arboreal rootedness. Elitist assumptions continue to operate in the ways of looking at contemporary material culture and in the never abandoned separations between popular culture and high culture. And yet if we look about –at the technological, material or artisanal environments– we will find multiple examples of what Michel de Certeau called *tactics* of resignification, transgression and counter hegemonic resistance in many practices in popular culture.

At the beginning of this work, I drew attention to the ambiguity and the instability of certain practices such as recording and distributing images that are generalized by multiple artifacts that have now become prosthesis of our extended bodies. If indeed it is true that many of these practices are just exercises in submission in the economy of attention, equally true is the existence of other modes of recreating new spaces and relationships where the overall attention and sharing of experience become a redistribution of the sensible. The possibilities for sociality opened up by digital technologies have been examined with great clarity by Remedios Zafra and other theorists of Internet activism. It is not necessary, however, to focus on digital technologies to find examples of this reuse of images for alternative aesthetic politics. Graffiti art has been another well-known example that has often involved activities of what I have called second person aesthetics. Practices such as *tagging* which have transformed the visual quality of urban spaces have been modalities that in many ways recall the strategic use of the image to create social bonds. Neither the artistic level of these practices nor their political functionality are in question here; what is important is to observe how they appear as tactics to redistribute the sensible and that, as such, open up possibilities of reutilization in the dense fabric of urban material culture. Many activists still think of art as a mere tool of political dissent –as if access to aesthetic experience were prohibited to the popular classes, as if redistribution of experience were not part of the struggle for equality. The re-creation of spaces of experience in the second person, the articulation of shared experiences, however, is and will be part of the tactics that popular culture will continue to use as modes which are much more invisible than this redistribution. What its political efficiency may actually is largely depend on how we define political efficiency. Yet if we pay attention to its component, which reconstitutes the spaces of experience, it seems to me that this redistribution of the sensible may be seen as one of the clearest exercises of practices of resistance in a world that has so weakened the citizens' capacity as agent.

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