

Aleksandra Vujović

Faculty of Media and Communications, Singidunum University, Belgrade, Serbia

The Bauhaus Viewed from the Perspective of Jacques Rancière's Theoretical Concept of the Aesthetic Revolution

Abstract: The philosophical platform of the contemporary French theorist Jacques Rancière is one of the crucial interpretations of the way art is identified and acts in various social and historical conditions. Encompassing the domains of political philosophy, social history, education, and aesthetics, Rancière's oeuvre is vitally important for recognizing the import of aesthetic experience as vital for anticipating the community of the future as well as for understanding the relationship between art and politics. The initial basis of this text comprises Rancière's aesthetic conceptions, a constitutive element and axiom of which is the principle of equality, which he uses to illuminate the synthesis of art and social context. The text focuses on analyzing the work and creativity of the Bauhaus as an aesthetic practice from the perspective of the aesthetic revolution, as theorized by Rancière. Using analytical and historical methods, the text shows how the Bauhaus successfully used its intentions and practice to overthrow previously imposed hierarchies and conventions of art and, by analogy, social divisions as well, and became a major outcome of the aesthetic revolution as theorized by Rancière.

Keywords: art; aesthetics; politics; distribution of the sensible; aesthetic regime; aesthetic revolution; Bauhaus.

Reflecting on the concept of the aesthetic revolution from the perspective of Jacques Rancière's theory forms an initial point of reference in illuminating the relationship between art and society, as well as the way in which the idea, intention, and practice of artistic work at the Bauhaus made its mark on social experience and the environment of everyday life. Recognizing art as a pursuit equivalent to all other human pursuits taking place in the sphere of the sensible, Rancière forms a specific understanding of politics, whereby new forms and new life may be recognized and constructed.

Problematizing our common reality, which is for Rancière "always a polemical distribution of modes of being and 'occupations' in a space of possibilities",¹ Rancière posits his theory of *the distribution of the sensible* as the fundamental concept in interventions that re-examine the relation between aesthetics and politics.

¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Continuum, 2011), 42.

I call the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it. [...] This apportionment of parts and positions is based on a distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution.²

In other words, the distribution of the sensible defines the sensible order of our common reality and its delimitations that allow us to perceive the places, functions, and stakes of social subjects, themselves constituted by that very distribution. The distribution of the sensible enables us to perceive the position and participation of individuals or the practices they pursue in relation to interest and the distribution of time and space.

The configuration of the sensible order, enabling the visibility of the hierarchy of rights, capabilities, and possibilities of participating in the common domain, as well as the degree to which this common domain lends itself to participation, establishes what Rancière, departing from the traditional understanding of politics, calls the *police*. The *police* denotes the many procedures that regulate the social community, the distribution of places and functions within it, as well as systematizations of power and accreditation of these processes. Accordingly, the police order generates distinctions between individual social positions and roles, providing visibility and the ability to participate to certain subjects in the public sphere, who thereby both form and create their shared social experience. Arguing that inequality may be recognized only if we take the principle of equality as our starting point as well as the goal of our aspirations, Rancière maintains that *politics* occurs when the police logic confronts the logic of equality. Re-examining the systematization that apportions parts and positions in the community, as well as deprives one of their position, political activity operates as disagreeing with the distribution imposed by the police order on the part of those who were hitherto deprived of access to time, speech, and space. Subjects who are recognized as diverging from the identified pattern of experience intervene and adapt a new distribution of the sensible, thereby legitimizing their equality. Asserting that politics does not only imply the existence of authority, the exercise of power, and the rule of law, Rancière argues that politics is the site of conflict that effects a twist in the political domain shaped by the police.³ The reconfiguration and configuration of space and time, positions and parts, the visible and the invisible that take place in the encounter of politics and police and results in the completion of the existing order and impacts the affirmation of a new order is called the *redistribution of the sensible*.

Precisely this political redistribution of common, empirical reality places aesthetic experience at the very essence of political and social experience, and implies a

² Ibid., 7.

³ Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2010).

re-examination of the relationship between aesthetics, art, and politics. For Rancière, aesthetics constitutes a way of identifying and understanding the existence of that which pertains to art, that is “a mode of articulation between ways of doing and making, their corresponding forms of visibility, and possible ways of thinking about their relationships (which presupposes a certain idea of thought’s effectivity)”⁴ In other words, aesthetic experience is not exclusively bound to sensory perceptions, but also to the subject’s experiences of reality and intellectual perceptions. Just as he posits politics as an aesthetic activity, Rancière views art as a political activity that intervenes in the existing distribution of the sensible and with its new forms enables new forms of reality. In that sense, for Rancière, engaging with history or politics does not constitute discourses that are separate from the discourse of aesthetics, with political activity taking place in the constitution of the domain of aesthetic, sensory reality, where every occurrence, content, or subject may be viewed as political.

Aesthetics opposes to both the practices of political dissensus and the transformations of state-power the metapolitical project of a sensory community, achieving what will always be missed by the “merely political” revolution: freedom and equality incorporated in living attitudes, in a new relationship between thought and sensory world, between the bodies and their environment.⁵

In other words, for Rancière the politics of aesthetics constitutes a meta-political activity that reconfigures social reality.

Rancière found initial support for his conception of the aesthetic in Friedrich Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, who, by postulating the domain of the aesthetic in conjunction with various human activities, linked art with the domain of politics, thereby refuting its conception as autonomous.

Though need may drive Man into society, and Reason implant social principles in him, Beauty alone can confer on him a social character. Taste alone brings harmony into society, because it establishes harmony in the individual.⁶

Schiller’s treatise points to the potentiality of freeing man from the discrepancy between his mental and sensuous nature through aesthetic education, which, by establishing harmony in him, simultaneously engenders harmony in society. Schiller developed an aesthetic theory that recognized art as a way to emancipate and transform humanity. Maintaining that every individual is torn by mutually opposing forces,

⁴ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 10.

⁵ Jacques Rancière, “The Thinking of Dissensus: Politics and Aesthetics,” in *Reading Rancière*, eds. Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp (London: Continuum, 2011), 9–10.

⁶ Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2016), 138.

which he calls drives, Schiller indicates the importance of affirming those drives⁷ as the path toward overcoming the imperfection of human nature. Pursuing the *play drive*, which, in the broadest sense, focuses on beauty as an aesthetic quality of objects, and the perfection of human nature and life, man, according to Schiller, attains the *aesthetic condition*. This middle condition or disposition, enabled by a balanced activity and confrontation of sensuality and reason, whereby the spirit, along the relation from feelings to thought, attains a free disposition, liberated from the pressure of the physical and moral drive, is called the aesthetic condition. In the aesthetic condition, a state of union between his sensuous and spiritual nature, man approximates the ideal of an emancipated and free man. In an analogy with the idea of transforming man through aesthetic education, Schiller formed the idea of a possible transformation of the community, concluding that such an idea could support “the whole fabric of aesthetic art, and the still more difficult art of life”⁸.

Inspired by Schiller’s philosophical explorations and analyzing the relationship between art and life, Rancière derives and distinguishes *three regimes of art*, that is, three different systems governing the recognition of art and its visibility. In the first regime, the *ethical regime*, artworks are viewed as images, representations, whose purpose, authenticity, and effects are examined in relation to the *ethos*, the moral beliefs of the individual and community. The ethical regime is characterized by Platonist views, a distinction between the representations of deities and those of everyday phenomena, which form a hierarchy of subject matter and skills in relation to their role in education. In the ethical regime, art is not examined in relation to politics, because it is not viewed as a separate, autonomous pursuit, but merely as a skill. Rancière derives the second, *poetic or representative regime*, from the Aristotelian understanding of poetics based on the *poiesis/mimesis* duality. The representative regime’s mimetic principle separates art from craft on the basis of classifying their respective ways of doing and making, enabling an order wherein the value of an artwork is not assessed on the basis of the criteria of truth, religion, or *ethos*. The poetic regime separates the “fine arts” from all other skills, and forms its criteria of identifying and valuing works of art in relation to the subject of imitation. In that sense, the poetic regime defines art, delimits its genres, sets the standards for assessing its visibility and thematic pertinence, granting it autonomy and mapping it away from the general order of work and occupations. The logic of the representative regime, with its hierarchical division of the arts on the basis of their ways of doing and making, genres, and subjects, supports the hierarchy of social positions, parts, and occupations.⁹

Artistic phenomena occurring from the late 18th century onward that do not conform to this representative regime Rancière identifies with a new, third regime, which he calls the *aesthetic regime*.

⁷ In the synthesis of the *sensuous drive*, inseparable from human existence and sensuous nature, and the *formal drive*, which stands for mental power, Schiller defines the emergence of the *play drive*, which reconciles the powers of feeling with that of thought – while at the same time preventing the laws of the mind from taking precedence over the needs of the senses.

⁸ Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 80.

⁹ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 20–22.

The aesthetic regime of the arts is the regime that strictly identifies art in the singular and frees it from any specific rule, from any hierarchy of the arts, subject matter, and genres.¹⁰

In other words, the aesthetic regime opposes the representative regime of the arts by repudiating its double logic of mimesis. This turn manifested itself in art's abandonment of producing the artistic in terms of imitation whose autonomy was reflected in its independence from the criterion of *ethos* and from heteronomy, mirrored in upholding social division and hierarchy by separating subjects and genres. Unlike the mimetic regime, which viewed every artistic discipline individually, the aesthetic regime provided a common surface for acting together, supplanting the mimetic regime's separate areas of imitation, simultaneously illuminating the unity of art rather than separating its forms from those that emancipate life. In the aesthetic regime, according to Rancière, art also supports the idea of autonomy, because it becomes art in the singular, as well as the idea of heteronomy, in refusing to delimit itself from non-art. The autonomy of art in the aesthetic regime is viewed as the autonomy of life, because art is viewed as inseparable from it and its products are seen as its reflections. Namely, art in the aesthetic regime is art only when it is not viewed exclusively as art. Its expressions become aestheticized expressions of life.

The key formula of the aesthetic regime of art is that art is an autonomous form of life.¹¹

Referring to Schiller's aesthetic condition, which he calls the first manifesto of this regime, Rancière highlights the unbreakable bond between manifestations of art and manifestations of life, which, in the spirit of Schiller's idea coming to fruition, marks "the moment of the formation and education of a specific type of humanity".¹²

Stimulated by his reflections on the relationship between aesthetics and politics, Rancière found the concepts of modernity and avant-garde inadequate for analyzing and observing artistic creativity, activity, new practices and forms. In a critical turn on the concept of modernity, Rancière asserts that it constitutes a view of the shift from the traditional to a new type of artistic creativity, but not an adequate overview of the reconfiguration of art along with the domains of the shared experience of the individual and community. The aesthetic regime of art constitutes a logic that does not insist on an artistic rupture, but that, in its very essence, encompasses both the social and historical context as inseparable from the historicity of the period under consideration. In modernist terms, the notion of the avant-garde is viewed as a link between aesthetics and politics in a direct connection between artistic innovation and the idea of a politically guided movement. On the other hand, Rancière attaches significance to

¹⁰ Ibid., 23.

¹¹ Jacques Rancière, "Chapter Nine: The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes," in *Dissensus*, *op. cit.*, 118.

¹² Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 24.

the notion of the avant-garde in the aesthetic regime only in the domain of inventing “sensible forms and material structures for a life to come”.¹³ With his singular stance on politics and political subjectivity, Rancière discusses artistic creativity and activity as an aesthetic avant-garde whose practice in the existing distribution of the sensible qualifies it as meta-politics in all forms of life. In that sense, the transformation that takes place in the demise of the representative regime of the arts also brings about a different view of the valorization and positioning of artistic work in the general division of labor. This shift treats artistic labor on a par with other modes of work, recognizing its role and activity in the communal aspect. Thus positioned, artistic practices attain a new range of visibility and are viewed as aesthetic practices.

Rancière’s draft of “art becoming life”¹⁴ is an image of the politics of aesthetics, that is, what he calls the meta-politics of aesthetics, which he uses as a theoretical basis for positing the outcomes of his *aesthetic revolution*. Differentiating, but also, at the same time, intertwining his three regimes of thinking art, Rancière highlights the point of contact between the ethical and aesthetic regimes, which come together in the basic idea that forms of art are also, in fact, forms that relate to the self-education of life, which, ultimately, generate a new *ethos* for the community. In his reading of *The Oldest Systematic Programme of German Idealism* by Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling, which implements the aspirations of aesthetic education and creates a spiritually developed community of equality and freedom by means of poetry and turning ideas into sensory objects of reality, Rancière identifies a new notion of revolution defined as a “shift in the course and order of things”.¹⁵ Despite his assertion that Karl Marx never read this program, Rancière notes the same idea in his texts:

The coming Revolution will be [...] no longer merely “formal” and “political”, it will be a “human” revolution. The human revolution is an offspring of the aesthetic paradigm.¹⁶

Elaborating on that conception, Rancière also asserts that he perceives such a notion in the achievements of the 1920s avant-garde as well: “the construction of new forms of life in which the self-suppression of politics matched the self-suppression of art”.¹⁷ Taking his cue from Schiller’s view, where a shift in reality may take place only when the individual and society have reached the aesthetic condition, Rancière posits the aesthetic revolution as the constitution of a new distribution of the sensible by using the aesthetic mode of reflection as the mechanism for reconfiguration.

¹³ Ibid., 29.

¹⁴ Rancière, “The Aesthetic Revolution,” 119.

¹⁵ Albert Abinun et al., *Mala enciklopedija Prosveta* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1970), 425.

¹⁶ Rancière, “The Aesthetic Revolution,” 120.

¹⁷ Idem.

According to Jacques Rancière, the aesthetic revolution forms the completion of an order of relations that enables what can be seen and said, that is, what may be learnt and done.¹⁸

In other words, the confrontation between two different regimes of identifying art, the mimetic and aesthetic, highlighted a change in the order of the sensible, that is, a redistribution of the sensible, which demonstrated, by analogy with the demise of all hierarchies in art, also the possibility of doing away with all hierarchies in society.

The aesthetic revolution developed as an unending break with the hierarchical model of the body, the story, and action.¹⁹

Rancière's observations of art's mode of existence and his articulation of art in its socio-historical context constitute the dominant theoretical basis for discussing 20th-century artistic practices from the perspective of the aesthetic revolution. By reflecting on the changes that the aesthetic revolution achieved in the constitution of a common egalitarian field of art, work, and life, one also identifies the possibility of realizing the reach of aesthetic practices, aiming to reconfigure the community as a space for thinking the idea of equality.

It can be said, regarding this point, that the “aesthetic revolution” produced a new idea of political revolution: the material realization of a common humanity still only existing as an idea.²⁰

A Case Study: The Work and Impact of the Bauhaus

The avant-garde and revolutionary Bauhaus school of art constitutes an inalienable segment and reflection of German history at the unique socio-historical moment of the creation and development of the first German republic – the Weimar Republic. Seeking to establish a new, democratic, and more humane Germany following the First World War, the Weimar Republic during the 1920s, despite political instability and economic crisis, did produce outstanding achievements in the domains of culture and art. The Staatliche Bauhaus school was founded in 1919 in Weimar, pursuing the architect Walter Gropius's vision of a merger between the Grand-Ducal Saxon Academy of Fine Art and the Grand Ducal Saxon School of Arts and Crafts. Gropius's ideas were expounded in the school's program and manifesto, published the same year, while their enactments remain visible even today. Gropius based his conceptions on the notion of uniting all the arts under the leadership of architecture

¹⁸ Miško Šuvaković, *Pojmovnik teorije umetnosti* (Belgrade: Orion Art, 2011), 228.

¹⁹ Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art* (London: Verso Books, 2013), xiv.

²⁰ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 27.

and abolishing all distinctions between artists and craftsmen. He formed a new creative artistic community that, oriented to the future and pursuing a common social agenda, became an answer not only to the newly emerged industrial reality, but also to the aesthetic revolution.

So let us therefore create a new guild of craftsmen, free of the divisive class pretensions that endeavored to raise a prideful barrier between craftsmen and artists! Let us strive for, conceive and create the new building of the future that will unite every discipline, architecture and sculpture and painting, and which will one day rise heavenwards from the million hands of craftsmen as a clear symbol of a new belief to come.²¹

Viewed from Rancière's theoretical framework, the goal of the Bauhaus was to reshape and beget a new shared sensible reality through the unity of all the arts, breaking with mimetic hierarchies.

Since machine production had generated a distinction between craftsmen and artists, but did not pursue aesthetic values, Gropius sought to affirm the potentials of developing collaboration between craftsmen and artists, de-hierarchizing the distinction between their respective modes of work. Gropius's realization that there were no artists with adequate technical knowledge or craftsmen with enough creative initiative led him to a different perception of work, in which he recognized the value of collective creativity. The realization of this idea, in the early period of the Bauhaus, was manifested by assigning each course to an artist and a craftsman on an equal footing, guided by the principle of equality.

Architects, sculptors, painters – we all must return to craftsmanship! For there is no such thing as “art by profession”. There is no essential difference between the artist and the artisan. The artist is an exalter artisan.²²

Confronting himself with specialized education, which was based on contemporary traditional schooling, Gropius maintained that specialized knowledge provides an individual with no insight into the role of his work in relation to the problematic of his social community. Realizing and asserting the advantages of machines, in the school's later period, as instruments that provide one with time and space for engaging in further creative work and improvement, Gropius pointed to the possibility of changing the community by analogy with changing one's interior and exterior environment. This kind of approach may also be seen in Schiller's theory of the potentiality and importance of aesthetic education. By critiquing the isolation of artists and the autonomy of art, with his anti-academic views and idea that with a new mode

²¹ Walter Gropius, “Program of the Staatliche Bauhaus in Weimar (1919),” <https://bauhausmanifesto.com/>, acc. on September 23, 2020.

²² *Idem.*

of education, in contact with modern means of production, one could change society, Gropius devised a Bauhaus program to be implemented as that of a social project.²³ Although not strictly formulated as a political program that one could identify as related to a specific political ideology, the Bauhaus, viewed from Rancière's perspective, constituted a meta-political project aimed at changing society by means of changing the perception of the identity of art, ways of articulating its work, possible ways of reflecting on its activity in the general order of things and its visibility therein.

With a multidisciplinary approach that treated various artistic disciplines (architecture, painting, photography, typography, weaving, theatre, etc.) as equal and a cosmopolitan outlook that assembled distinguished artists from various countries,²⁴ the Bauhaus successfully established artistic creativity as a reflection of its time's shared intellectual intentions in terms of building a new aesthetic.

The school's working principle made it mandatory to take a preparatory course led by Johannes Itten. The outcome of the course envisaged abandoning previously established conventions of creating and perceiving a work of art, enabling the students' creativity and experience to develop their own ideas by experimenting with various materials and studying the relations between color and form. With his metaphysical approach and exercises in meditation, Itten initiated an expressionist conception of the relationship between the work and the subject. A similar approach was pursued by Wassily Kandinsky, whose didactic pursued abstract forms and analytical drawing in his course on free painting. In his theory of colors, which re-examined the relations between different colors, and theory of form, based on observing form, geared toward positing their correlation in his theory of composition, Kandinsky based his painting principle on practicing a different type of representing objects.²⁵ Kandinsky's theory and practice established abstract or non-figurative art, which represents its objects with stylized shapes. Analyzing the purpose and content of a work of art and performing technical-structural exercises, Kandinsky "established procedures for abstracting forms, from mimetic representations to abstract schemes on the surface of the painting."²⁶ It is precisely this change, dubbed "abstract painting" and interpreted within the concept of artistic modernity as a change in the practice of painting and turn away from mimesis, narrowly viewed as the law of imitating similarities, that may be viewed from the perspective of Rancière's critique of that concept as a break with the representative regime. Analyzing the logic of mimesis, Rancière points out that the concept does not only connote an analogy between the model and the work, but also a regime that made visible and intelligible the work of similarity in the overall system of labor and social positions, as well as breaking away from the ethical or religious social norms that hierarchized such imitations. Establishing an art practice in a general

²³ Miško Šuvaković, *Pojmovnik teorije umetnosti* (Belgrade: Orion Art, 2011), 135.

²⁴ Some of the best-known artists affiliated with the Bauhaus included Johannes Itten, Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, Lyonel Feininger, László Moholy-Nagy, and Oskar Schlemmer, among others.

²⁵ Šuvaković, *Pojmovnik teorije umetnosti*, 137.

²⁶ *Idem*.

regime of relations, Rancière interprets the switch from the mimetic to the aesthetic regime not only as an artistic shift, but also as a new way of reinterpreting of what art is, whereby the medium of art no longer constitutes space for conquering a specific artistic discipline, but is posited as the surface of the field of transformation and de-figuration. According to Rancière, de-figuration constitutes the kind of approach that, on the surface of the medium of painting, takes the same figures from the regime of representation and reshapes and makes them visible as a means of expression. In that sense, Kandinsky's practice, breaking with artistic conventions, places forms on the surface of the painting that reveal their new visibility and a new way of reading the work of artists.

For the representative relationship he substitutes the expressive relationship between the abstract ideality of form and the expression of a content of collective consciousness.²⁷

What Rancière suggests here is precisely that the medium of art does not simply represent a surface where only forms of art are constituted, but also a manifestation of the shared field of what may be thought and seen in the sensible order, which exceeds the existing limits for observing autonomous art, aesthetics, or politics.

While Kandinsky pursued abstract painting, under the influence of Theo van Doesburg,²⁸ the Bauhaus found a way to venture a step further and reshape common reality by turning to constructivism, creating a different kind of artistic consciousness, and pursuing a collective practice. This turn away from combining art and craft to art and technology led from the neo-romanticist ideas of Gropius's program to the constructivist works of László Moholy-Nagy and Josef Albers. The preparatory course was modified in 1923, when they transformed it into an experimental workshop focused on the principles of modelling and examining the properties of materials. That same year, under the motto of "Art and technology – a new unity!", Gropius declared a new, changed vision of the school's future work:

The explorations of Moholy-Nagy and Albers were geared toward defining experimentation, i.e. working with visual phenomena by means of specifying, denoting, and schematizing the problem of shaping things in a rationally determined pro-scientific or pro-technical way.²⁹

²⁷ Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image* (London: Verso, 2007), 86.

²⁸ Theo van Doesburg, who founded the group *De Stijl*, spent some time at Weimar, where he made an impact on the ideas and work pursued at the Bauhaus, attracting artists, members of *De Stijl*, dadaists, and constructivists. He organised a conference titled *The Constructivist International Working Community*, which gathered renowned artists, such as László Moholy-Nagy and El Lissitzky.

²⁹ Miško Švaković, "Kontekst i teorija Bauhausa," in: *Bauhaus: ex-Yu recepcija Bauhausa*, ed. Miško Švaković, (Belgrade: Orion Art, Beograd, 2014), 99.

In other words, departing from Itten's intuitive, metaphysical approach to materials, they introduced the principle of economy, which entailed designing forms rationally, with a view of using all materials as efficiently as possible. Thus they formed the principle of economy as the main aesthetic criterion of functionalism, assessing every object on the basis of its economically shaped form and use value.³⁰ The school's artisanal workshops were turned into industrial units that made use of modern technology in the production and shaping of spaces, interiors, and objects in the human habitat. This was the beginning of the Bauhaus's industrial design practice, which configured a new aesthetic reality by designing aestheticized products for mass industrial production and social use, bringing artists and technology together. Constructivism at the Bauhaus, reflected in its "conceptions and procedures for constructing the industrial production of artworks",³¹ appeared as a means for constructing a new social community where the entire sensory reality would become an artistic medium. The principle of economy and the mechanization of work also opened space for developing one's creative and spiritual faculties, which, in line with Schiller's idea, used the power of art to pursue the aim of overthrowing a social order that made a distinction between those who "think and decide and those who are doomed to material tasks".³² Discussing the aesthetic program of German Idealism, Rancière points to "art as the transformation of thought into the sensory experience of the community",³³ which, in the practice of the Bauhaus, no longer constituted a separate activity, but returned to work, affirming its value. Unlike the representative regime's view of the role of art and artistic creativity, the Bauhaus recognized the social position and responsibility of artists. Thus the practice and conception of industrial design at the Bauhaus gave rise not only to artistic forms, but also worked in a productive-technological consolidation with artistic innovations to produce objects, types, which symbolically and materially erased the artificial borders between art and life and redistributed not only the position of art in the general order of work, but also the already distributed sensory reality.

Types are the formative principles of a new communal life, where the material forms of existence are informed by a shared spiritual principle.³⁴

In line with its functionalist ideas, the Bauhaus intended its industrial design products to approximate their own function by reducing them to simplified forms free of ornamentation. Unburdened by ornaments, these simplified forms stood for a sort of life philosophy of equality. Simplified forms as types, combining industrial and artistic forms, were also an implementation of *Werkbund*³⁵ ideas concerning the fulfilment

³⁰ Idem.

³¹ Šuvaković, *Pojmovnik teorije umetnosti*, 379.

³² Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 44.

³³ Idem.

³⁴ Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 95.

³⁵ The *Werkbund* was founded in 1907 as a German group of artists, architects, designers, and artisans, whose aim was to improve the competitiveness of German products on the global market. Realising the importance of recognising the relentlessness of industrial growth and insisting on its synthesis with manual labour skills, the *Werkbund* gathered major figures, such as Walter Gropius, Peter Behrens, and others.

of new social and life needs. As Gropius asserted himself, the importance of creating standard types as optimally perfected products that would then be marketed for mass consumption related to attaining an advanced stage of civilization. By way of stylizing life, a new configuration of common reality may be formed and “lead us to reassess the dominant paradigms of the modernist autonomy of art and of the relationship between art forms and life forms”.³⁶

Following Gropius’s own decision, after the school’s relocation to Dessau, the management of the Bauhaus was entrusted to Hannes Meyer. Meyer’s ideas were informed by functionalist views that replaced artistic and aesthetic criteria with economic criteria. Such intentions were closely related to the positions of Soviet constructivism, bringing architecture in line with the material demands of modern society.³⁷ A transformation in the school’s working mode under Meyer and its relocation to Berlin due to economic and political pressure was implemented by Mies van der Rohe. The main principles of Mies van der Rohe’s architectural aesthetic referred to the idea that the building should be informed by an unpretentious aesthetic, whereas its technical construction should become a work of art. Such an approach recognized architecture’s meta-political role – shaping the living conditions of humans in order to change their social environment. Known for his penchant for using steel constructions and glass as a standard for design and planning, he made a significant impact on the way even today’s architects and designers conceive of space – in the belief that every edifice is a mirror of its time. As noted by Rancière, the functional architecture of the Bauhaus was not only an architecture adapted to utilitarian purposes, but also “the artistic affirmation of a society in which these ends themselves are subordinate to an ideal of social harmony”.³⁸ Re-examining form, function, and production, pursuing a new way of life, the artists of the Bauhaus created new buildings, objects, as well as a new kind of human subject, and, following the school’s closure in 1933, their unbroken creativity and activity continued to spread the influence of the formal and aesthetic principles of the Bauhaus.

Conclusion

The time distance of a century gives us enough space for highlighting the Bauhaus as an outstanding example of an aesthetic practice whose significance exceeds even the domains of a revolution in education, art, architecture, or design. The importance of the Bauhaus suggests a reinterpretation of the philosophy of art from a scientific and technical perspective, placing art at the very essence of an emancipatory outlook and aesthetic reality. The artists of the Bauhaus bequeathed to us the realization of the idea that artistic work is not only intended to create new objects, but that it also concerns the self-education and self-emancipation of humanity, and thereby also

³⁶ Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 103.

³⁷ Šuvaković, *Pojmovnik teorije umetnosti*, 136.

³⁸ Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 148.

a new distribution of the sensible. With its cosmopolitanism, pursuit of the principle of equality, conceptual and theoretical perspectives, as well as its tangibly-implemented practice and its achievements, the Bauhaus also found a way to reassess our view of the idea of work, proving that in any existing social and economic domain, artistic practices can attain visibility in the system of its existing hierarchy of practices and that they may reshape it. Confronting the patterns of the mimetic regime, the Bauhaus intervened with its practice and impact in the domain of shared reality and adapted a new redistribution of the sensible. Achieving a synthesis of the artist's role with those of the architect and engineer, the Bauhaus transposed the artist out of his isolated position and appointed him as an integral part of a new social reality. Transcending its own contemporary projection, the Bauhaus even today remains a current phenomenon, a practice whose ideas and activity successfully impacted the reshaping of social reality and, with its achievements, a major manifestation of the aesthetic revolution as theorized by Jacques Rancière.

References

- Abinun, Albert *et al.* *Mala enciklopedija Prosveta*. Belgrade, Prosveta, 1970.
- Rancière, Jacques. "Chapter Nine: The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes." In *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, 115–34. London: Continuum, 2010.
- Rancière, Jacques. *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*. London: Verso Books, 2013.
- Rancière, Jacques. "The Thinking of Dissensus: Politics and Aesthetics." In *Reading Rancière: Critical Dissensus*, edited by Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp, 1–17. London: Continuum, 2011.
- Rancière, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. London: Continuum, 2010.
- Rancière, Jacques. *The Future of the Image*. London: Verso, 2007.
- Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. London: Continuum, 2011.
- Šuvaković, Miško. "Kontekst i teorija Bauhauusa." In *Bauhaus: Ex-Yu recepcija Bauhauusa*, edited by Miško Šuvaković, 95–107. Belgrade: Orion Art, 2014.
- Šuvaković, Miško. *Pojmovnik teorije umetnosti*. Belgrade: Orion Art, 2011.

Article received: April 16, 2020

Article accepted: July 1, 2020

Original scholarly paper