

The Emancipatory Potential of Aesthetic Experience: Rancière on Kant and Schiller

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Abstract. This paper examines the emancipatory potential of aesthetic experience through a comparative reading of Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller, and Jacques Rancière. It argues that Rancière both inherits and transforms the Kantian-Schillerian legacy by shifting the question of freedom from free accord of faculties or moral autonomy to a meaning-disruptive experience of equality. While Kant and Schiller conceptualize the disinterested experience of the spectator in aesthetic or ethical terms, Rancière interprets it as a condition that can trigger a struggle for equality. The article traces this entangled genealogy to demonstrate how Rancière's notion of aesthetic experience cancels hierarchies and opens a space for *dissensus*, only within which politics can occur. By clarifying the conceptual transitions from Kant's *sensus communis* to Schiller's *play drive* and Rancière's *dissensual common sense*, the paper demonstrates how, for Rancière, aesthetics is a field of disagreement, revealing aesthetic experience as a political act that disrupts the pre-established sensible orders; and how it generates equality through discord, transforming aesthetic contemplation into a mode of emancipation from the dominant orders of meaning and sense.

Keywords: Kant, Schiller, Rancière, aesthetic experience, equality, freedom.

Estetinio patyrimo emancipacinis potencialas: Rancière'as apie Kantą ir Schillerį

Santrauka. Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas estetinio patyrimo emancipacinis potencialas, tarpusavyje gretinant Immanuelio Kanto, Friedricho Schillerio bei Jacques'o Rancière'o tekstus. Tvirtinama, kad Rancière'as ne tik perima Kanto–Schillerio palikimą, bet ir jį transformuoja, perkeldamas laisvės klausimą nuo laisvo gebėjimų suderinimo ar moralinės autonomijos prie prasmę ardančio lygybės patyrimo. Kantas ir Schilleris nesuinteresuotą stebėtojo patyrimą apibrėžia estetiniais ar etiniais terminais, tačiau Rancière'as jį interpretuoja kaip sąlygą, galinčią sukelti kovą dėl lygybės. Straipsnyje bandoma atsekti visą šią painią genealogiją ir parodyti, kaip Rancière'o estetinio patyrimo suvokimas pašalina hierarchijas ir atveria erdvę *dissensusui*. *Dissensusas* yra vienintelė erdvė, kurioje gali „vykti“ politika. Išryškinius konceptualinius žingsnius nuo Kanto *sensus communis* prie Schillerio *žaismo varos* (*Spieltrieb*) bei Rancière'o *disensinio sveiko proto*, straipsnyje atskleidžiama, kaip, Rancière'o požiūriu, estetika pasirodo kaip nesutarimų sritis. Atskleidžiama, kad estetiškas patyrimas yra politinis aktas, sutrikdantis nustatytas reikšmių sistemas. Taip pat parodoma, kaip estetiškas patyrimas generuoja lygybę per nesutarimą, estetinę kontempliaciją transformuodamas į tokią būseną, kurioje pasiekiami emancipacija nuo įsigalėjusios prasmės ir reikšmės tvarkos.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: Kantas, Schilleris, Rancière'as, estetiškas patyrimas, lygybė, laisvė

Received: 18/05/2025. Accepted: 14/11/2025

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Introduction

In the 1980s, Jacques Rancière revealed a renewed connection between aesthetics and politics, which is closely tied to his understanding of aesthetics. This perspective meaningfully diverges from the classical interpretations of 18th-century aesthetics, particularly those of Baumgarten and Kant. In 1735, Baumgarten introduced aesthetics as a new domain of sensory knowledge and defined it as clear, yet somewhat confused or inarticulate, especially when compared to the clear and distinct knowledge found in logic. In contrast, Rancière argues that aesthetics is not merely a supplementary sub-branch of logic (2010: 5). He also diverges from Kant's perspective, which separates aesthetic experience from rational experience as a distinct sensory experience. After critically examining Kant's position in the classical genealogy of aesthetics, he notes that Kant borrows the term 'aesthetics' from Baumgarten but divorces it from its meaning. Aesthetics is no longer "the theory of forms of sensibility" in Kant, and thus, sensible is no longer a "confused intelligible" (*ibid.*). Moreover, Kant's efforts to elevate aesthetics to a status equal to that of theoretical and moral philosophy have not received support from Rancière. As we will discuss shortly, Rancière believes that this attempt assumes a quasi-freedom for the aesthetic realm. Although he gives Kant notable credit in discussions of his well-known notion, *the distribution of the sensible (partage du sensible)*, he distances himself from all the classical aesthetic theories, including Kant's. This is because, contrary to Kant and Baumgarten, who intentionally defined aesthetic experience as related to non-thought, Rancière believes that aesthetics entitles a mode of thought that relates to art, and this mode of thought can make us recognize artworks as objects of thought that can speak about society and dominant politics. In other words, he contends that the aesthetic realm should not be seen as separate from thought or treated as non-thought based on concepts like autonomy or the free play of faculties. Moreover, he believes that the freedom exercised in aesthetic experience, typically associated with classical aesthetics, is a form of quasi-freedom. This type of freedom is granted to a realm of non-thought that is considered outside the domain of rationality, and it fails to engage with the life as we know it. To put it in Rancière's terms, the *sound* of aesthetic judgment does not resonate as a *voice* within the theoretical realm. Thus, it goes unheard in the realm of social as well. Therefore, in the search for a *topography* that does not presuppose this position of mastery, Rancière opposes the hierarchical distinctions of classical theories of aesthetics.

According to him, Kant, Schiller, and later Hegel all proposed that spectators are equal when it comes to aesthetic judgment, as such judgments should be liberated from existing hierarchies of knowledge and social structures. However, in such a rendition, equality is not assessed in a general or revolutionary sense (Rancière in Carnevale et al. 2007). I think it is the status of the beholder that makes the difference. In the presently mentioned classical theories, aesthetic judgment belongs to the spectator who is regarded as a passive receiver, and not as an agent who acts or speaks. That is why, as Tanke rightly puts it, Rancière intends to redirect the focus of the aesthetic tradition from the models of freedom associated with aesthetic experiences towards an exploration of the new rela-

tions of equality established by the regime (2011: 143). In this sense, I think, Rancière's engagement with Kant and Schiller is not merely significant for its historical genealogy. It is also an intervention in the aesthetic-political tradition, showing that aesthetic experience itself carries emancipatory potential. Rancière transforms the Kantian-Schillerian model of consensus-oriented aesthetic autonomy into a dissensus-driven mode of perception that cancels social hierarchies.

Before proceeding, it is essential to emphasize that the intervention in the aesthetic-political tradition begins with Rancière's rejection of any teleological perspective in aesthetics, followed by his break with the hierarchy of cognitive powers. Kant and Schiller's views of aesthetics serve a predetermined purpose or end goal. However, Rancière's approach is characterized by its lack of a teleological perspective as he writes: "what I tried to do is to substitute teleological concepts and historical necessity, by categories that help us to understand the entanglement of different logics" (Rancière in Dasgupta 2008: 73).¹ As a way of thinking about the world, aesthetics is necessarily linked to politics. It presupposes a displacement in how bodies fit their presupposed functions. Rancière reads:

It is a multiplication of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world they live in and the way in which they are 'equipped' to adapt to it. It is a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible (2009a: 72–73).

Hence, both aesthetic experience and politics establish an order based on perception. Aesthetics is neither the theory of art nor is it about theory or the observation of beauty. It is a mode of experiencing a sensory state that has abandoned the hierarchies between a receiving sensibility, an organizing mind, a determining intelligence, and obeying hands, which regulate political and social forms altogether (Rancière and Engelmann 2019: 32–33). It is in this way that aesthetics has a fundamental connection to politics, and politics is fundamentally aesthetic; they are both concerned with perceptions of social reality. Following this, aesthetics can enable "new modes of political construction of common objects and new possibilities of collective enunciation" (Rancière 2009a: 73). Rendered by Rancière, aesthetics can perform these via a disruption or disconnection of the dominant order, i.e., ordinary relations of cause and effect. For the purposes of this study, the attraction of Kant and Schiller's aesthetic experience lies in this highlighted disconnection or disruption, which suggests that aesthetic experience, inherently ambivalent, conveys something that transcends ordinary sensory experience. This thought has been critical for Rancière because it is the very core of the concept of emancipation,

¹ The discussion of arts in particular is outside the scope of this paper but let us note here that a non-teleological aesthetic theory is inherently open-ended and it invites a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between art, politics, and the spectator's engagement. As Dunlap notes, in Rancière's rendition, art is liberated from ethical or religious imperatives, including the objectives of educating the audience or eliciting a cathartic response through meticulously defined principles of imitation (2015: 346), as in Aristotle. Such a framework challenges conventional interpretations and underscores the importance of individual perception in constructing meaning within artistic practices.

which implies reframing the sensible world to reconstruct power relations. To explore the emancipatory potential of the aesthetic experience in Kant and Schiller, I will revisit Rancière's perspectives on Kant's and Schiller's approaches to aesthetics and the versions of freedom they promise.

Hierarchy and Authority: On Kant's Notion of the Aesthetic Judgment

Rancière brings up Kant's philosophical approach in many of his voluminous works: While discussing the philosopher's original contribution to 18th-century aesthetics, in the discussion of arts when he references Kant's aesthetic ideas, in the discussions of the notion of *dissensus* when he appeals to the Kantian notion of imagination (Tanke 2011). Also, in explaining the notion of the distribution of the sensible with an analogy to Kant's idea of *a priori* conditions of experience, Rancière appeals to Kant, whom he calls "the biggest homebody" among all the philosophers, and selectively adapts the Kantian legacy while resisting its consensus-oriented tendencies.

In discussions about aesthetics, Rancière argues that Kant's *Critique of Judgment*² does not present aesthetics as a theory. Instead, the term 'aesthetic' is used only as an adjective, referring to a type of judgment rather than a specific category of objects. The philosopher is right because the famous title of Kant's writings on aesthetics in *CJ* is: "The judgment of taste is aesthetic". The title firstly suggests that the expression 'the judgment of taste' contends that what should be called aesthetic is the judgment, and not its object. Secondly, the term 'aesthetic' implies that the judgment of taste is genealogically not cognitive but aesthetic. The unique status of aesthetic judgment is apparent when Kant writes that, through the represented *form* of the given object, the powers of cognition indulge themselves in a *free play* (*CJ* §20). In particular, in the aesthetic experience that results in the judgment of beautiful, the faculty of imagination, which is in charge of structuring the manifold of intuitions in cognition, and the faculty of understanding, which is responsible for "the unity of the concept that unifies the representations" (*CJ* §20), accords with each other in a *free play*.

Kant's transcendental philosophy is based on a strict hierarchical relationship among the faculties of the mind (imagination, understanding, and reason) thus, the experience of *free play* has some allure regarding discussions of freedom. However, Rancière accurately detects that Kant's philosophy is such a closed system that even the free play serves to this strict hierarchical order. Although this play is meant to be *free*, Kant writes that its effect operates like common sense: "...only under the presupposition that there is a common sense (...the effect of the free play of our cognitive powers)... I say, can the judgment of taste be made" (*CJ* §20, 122). This notion of common sense results from Kant's belief in the unity of his transcendental system, supported by the *subjective purposiveness*. In the

² Hereafter abbreviated as '*CJ*', followed by the symbol '§' for the section number and the corresponding page numbers. The page numbers indicate quotations from Kant, referencing the English translation by Guyer and Wood (2000).

aesthetic judgment, then, imagination “in its freedom is in harmony with the latter [Understanding] in its lawfulness” (*CJ* §35, 167), and a subjective purposiveness is felt in the free play of the two faculties. In other words, Kant’s notion of the free play supports the overall goal of the Understanding a which is “to find unity in all of our experience”, and thus, the pleasure results from this attainment, and it is “enduring because the satisfaction of our general cognitive aim in these circumstances seems contingent and is not taken for granted by us” (Guyer 2000: xxvi). It then seems that, as a particular kind of appreciation of cognitive powers, the experience of free play is more akin to an ontological proof that our faculties can relate to each other in a non-cognitive manner. In the experience of harmony, the faculties are regarded as free necessarily under the law of aesthetics.

Another point worth mentioning is the notion of disinterestedness of judgments of beauty. For Kant, one of the four features (he calls them *moments*) of judgments of beauty is that they are *disinterested*. In this sense, they are free from desire and distinct from judgments related to *agreeable* (sensations) or *good* (concepts). Rancière sees an efficiency of an aesthetic kind in the definition of the beautiful, particularly in the phrase “an object of universal delight apart from any concept”. This phrase implies a neat break from the cause-effect relations of the representational logic. However, Kant dismisses this potential radical break by emphasizing the harmony and common sense that produces consensus (Rancière 2009a: 64). In other words, in its possibly democratic appearance, the aesthetic judgment addresses a mode of perception of sensible experience in which everyone has a *de jure* share because it is indifferent to the process what makes a sensible form something useful for a purpose or belonging to a property owner. However, Kant passes to advance this point even if Rancière believes that both Kant’s and Schiller’s are the theoretical revolution before communism as the humanization of the human senses (2021: 46). To remember, in the second moment, Kant declares that aesthetic judgments also demand universality, which means that they demand agreement from others. Again, common sense (*sensus communis aestheticus*) demands universal communicability due to the *exemplary* necessity of aesthetic judgment, which results from the harmony of the faculties.³ Although the notion of disinterestedness is relevant to Rancière’s understanding of the disinterested gaze of the viewer, the function of Kant’s aesthetic common sense is obviously the opposite of what Rancière meant by common sense. For he writes: “A common sense does not mean a consensus but, on the contrary, a polemical place, a confrontation between opposite common senses or opposite ways of framing what is common” (Rancière 2009c: 276). His rejection of common sense as consensus results from his denunciation of any hierarchy between cognitive faculties. Moreover, as Panagia writes, Rancière is also against any judgment’s authority that “demand[s] our signing on to a prepolitical commitment to understanding that betrays a specific way of orienting oneself to the world, a partition [distribution] of the sensible” (2018: ix). Hence, by addressing the hidden hierarchy between the faculties of imagination and understanding

³ Indeed, Kant addresses common sense as the primal foundation of all four moments depending on the harmony of the faculties, see *CJ* §22.

implied in aesthetic judgments, Rancière disregards aesthetic judgment and selectively adapts Kantian notions by renouncing their consensus-oriented tendencies.

Still, it is essential to note that his notion of aesthetics can be understood in analogy with Kant's "a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience" (Rancière 2004: 13). This means that the nature of the relationship between aesthetic and politics can be thought similar to what Kant displayed in the *Critique of Pure Reason: a priori conditions of our experience*. This task is of the cognitive, thus, of the theoretical reason in Kant. Rancière transfers this notion into a social understanding of the setup of our world, which is predetermined by specific social conditions that are governed and presented by dominant discourse as *a priori* conditions of the natural order. In other words, socially, we are given our roles as an *a priori* determination of our existence. This means that we are given the boundaries of what is sensible and intelligible for us, and we are expected to obey this predetermined order. In such an analogy, Rancière appeals to Kant.

Suspension of all Hierarchies: On Schiller's Aesthetic Condition

It is certain that no mortal has spoken a greater word than this Kantian word...
Determine yourself from within yourself.
 (Schiller 2003: 153)

Schiller wrote this line in 1793, in a letter to his friend, Christian Gottfried Körner. He seems enthusiastic about Kant's transcendental approach to the freedom of thought. In his famous letters entitled *On the Aesthetic Education of Man (Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen, 1795)*,⁴ he sincerely states that while pursuing the challenge of establishing the autonomous character of art, his claims are grounded on Kant's principles (Schiller 2004: I). However, he is also dissatisfied with Kant's handling of the presentation of moral law and the aesthetic experience of beauty. Kantian moral law appears autocratic when he states that respect for the moral law is the sole criterion of moral action. According to Schiller, this culminates in the enslavement of sensibility to reason. Instead, Schiller treats aesthetic freedom as "the autonomous development of all our human powers, sensibility as well as reason" (Beiser 2005: 213). The aesthetic conception of freedom and the autonomy of art, he believes, can enable a moral elevation of individuals and society that would culminate in a refreshment or, rather, regeneration of both. In this sense, aesthetics leads the way to solving political problems because, for Schiller, we arrive at freedom by means of beauty (2004: II). Therefore, his aesthetic program focuses on the challenge of reconciling political emancipation with positive law, deontological and natural values, as well as aesthetic judgments of beauty (Leontiev 2023: 554). For the terror of his age, he claims that humanity's lack of consciousness is blameworthy. Hence, he values consciousness-raising moral and aesthetic education: "Training of the sensibility is

⁴ Hereafter referred to as "*Letters*". The references are to the 2004 English translation by Dover, with the letter number following the year.

then the more pressing need of our age, not merely because it will be a means of making the improved understanding effective for living, but for the very reason that it awakens this improvement” (Schiller 2004: VIII). The presently mentioned improvement is the realization of freedom, a “latent possibility in humanity”, through aesthetic experience in beauty and thus, “only the aesthetic mode of communication unites society because it relates to that which is common to all” (Schiller 2004: XXVII). It appears that the philosopher prioritizes beauty over freedom and aesthetics over politics. Following this, his unique contribution to politics, especially the republican tradition, was his insistence on the importance of education, and aesthetic education in particular (Beiser 2005: 126).⁵

It is in this sense Rancière would think that Schiller’s rigorous work *Letters* (1975) “put the whole of Kantian aesthetics into a kind of political perspective” by emphasizing “the egalitarian dimension of aesthetic experience, on the idea of creating a new form of humanity based on a kind of revolution of the senses” (Rancière and Engelmann 2019: 32). In an interview about aesthetics, Rancière expresses his interest in Schiller with the following words:

I incidentally came upon Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* in a bookshop ... And I was struck by this kind of strong relation, what was theorized by Schiller after Kant under the issue of free play—a way of the hierarchical distribution of the sensible—and the lived experience of the search of emancipation (2014: 28).

This enthusiastic finding by Rancière gradually turns into an interpretation of Schiller’s notion of play drive (*ludic drive*) in relation to the arts and politics. Specifically, in Letter XV, Schiller proposes a new sensual ability entitled ‘the play drive’ [*Spieltrieb*]. This is a synthesis of the two fundamental drives: form drive and sense drive. The sense drive, whose object is life, establishes the essential constraints of our physical needs. In contrast, with its object being formed, the form drive enforces the imperative of reason, guiding us to act in alignment with moral principles (Schiller 2004: XII).

Schiller’s concept of play implies a synthesis that is neither externally nor internally constrained. The synthesis, a form of a play in which restrictions no longer bind us, presents us with beauty, which is the synthesis of these drives in living form. From a transcendental perspective, reason dictates the existence of a play drive, as it demands collaboration between the formal and sensory impulses. Only by combining reality with form, accident with necessity, and passivity with freedom can we truly appreciate the concept of humanity (*ibid.*). And so with this kind of synthesis, sensibility no longer constrains us when morality demands our attention. Morality does not impose itself on us when our sense of fulfilment comes from embracing our duties (Beiser 2005: 141). In such a perspective, Schiller writes, “Man plays only when he is in the full sense of the word a man, and he is only wholly Man when he is playing.” Although he admits that

⁵ For a detailed account of Schiller’s political approach, see Fredrick Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution & Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 85–98.

the proposition seems paradoxical, he also promises his readers that it will support “the whole fabric of aesthetic art, and the still more difficult art of living” (Schiller 2004: XV).

Rancière interprets the notion of play drive as “a specific sensory experience—the aesthetic—that holds the promise of both a new world of Art and a new life for individuals and the community” (2002: 133). According to Rancière’s reading, Schiller, although he writes on aesthetics, dares to cancel social hierarchy with his notion of the play drive. For the distinctions between intelligence and sensuality, as well as between form and matter, can be seen as representations of a broader societal hierarchy. This hierarchy suggests a division between individuals who deeply engage with culture and those who connect more closely with nature, illustrating a spectrum that encompasses those who prioritize reason alongside those who emphasize emotional understanding (Rancière and Engelmann 2019: 33). Thus, Rancière translates Schiller’s discussion of freedom of play into that of hierarchy cancelling equality, which paves the way for a new or unprecedented distribution of the sensible.

In case of Schiller’s aesthetic experience, he thinks that it holds “the edifice of the art of the beautiful *and* the art of living”, and its value for Rancière lies in their duet: “the aesthetic experience is effective inasmuch as it is the experience of that *and*. It grounds the autonomy of art, to the extent that it connects it to the hope of *changing life*” (2002: 134). In the experience of ‘and’ lies the political potential of what he named an aesthetic regime⁶ of art, which is the third and the latest kind of regime that identified art historically. Since *a specific sensorium* of an artwork that is politically effective implies autonomy, Rancière turns to Schiller’s views on the art work to trace notions of autonomy and heteronomy. Contemplating on Schiller, Rancière concludes: a) the autonomy presented by the aesthetic realm of art pertains not to the artwork itself, but to a particular mode of experiencing it; b) the ‘aesthetic experience’ is an experience of heterogeneity, and it leads to the individual’s relinquishing of his/her autonomy; and c) the focus of that experience is deemed ‘aesthetic’ insofar as it goes beyond being merely – or exclusively – about art (2002: 135). As a proper example of specific sensorium, Rancière turns to Schiller’s anecdote of the colossal Parisian marble head of the statue of Juno Ludovisi. To remember, Schiller, at the end of Letter XV, reads:

It is neither charm nor dignity that speaks to us from the superb countenance of a Juno Ludovici; it is neither of them, because it is both at once. While the womanly god demands our veneration, the godlike woman kindles our love. Still, while we allow ourselves to melt in the celestial loveliness, the celestial self-sufficiency holds us back in awe. The whole form reposes and dwells within itself, a completely closed creation, and—as though it were beyond space—without yielding, without resistance; there is no force to contend with force, no unprotected part where temporality might break in. Irresistibly seized and attracted by the one quality, and

⁶ In the politics of aesthetic regime, artworks belong to “a specific sensorium that stands out as an exception from the normal regime of the sensible, which presents us with an immediate adequation of thought and sensible materiality” (*ibid.*: 135). Rancière’s concept of the aesthetic regime merits a more in-depth discussion rather than the discussion I could present here. For more details, please see Rancière, J. (2004). *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*.

held at a distance by the other, we find ourselves at the same time in the condition of utter rest and extreme movement, and the result is that wonderful emotion for which reason has no conception and language no name (2004, XV).

Rancière sees two critical innovations in terms of political potential in this interesting sensorium, which entails both harmony and disharmony. First, Schiller's approach, displayed in the example of the Juno Ludovisi statue, proposes a 'new universality' instead of Kantian common sense. To evaluate this claim, it is helpful to reconsider Kant's perspective on the matter.

Kant claims that judgments of taste depend on a "subjective principle that relies on feeling and carries universal validity", and this principle can be called common sense (*sensus communis aestheticus*). It differs from the common sense of understanding by relying on feelings rather than concepts of determinate judgments (*CJ* § 20, 122). Thus, taste is "the faculty for judging which makes our feeling in a given representation universally communicable without the mediation of a concept" (*CJ* § 40, 173). This communicability, depending on common sense and an expectation of a common shared feeling, implies a non-conceptual but feeling-based consensus in judgment of the beautiful in Kant. Once again, this means that aesthetic matters are not matters of thought or morality, and thus they do not have a correspondence or right to have a say in politics.

At this point, for Rancière, contrary to Kant, Schiller's aesthetic common sense is a *dissensual* kind of common sense (Rancière 2009b: 98–99).⁷ This concept redefines Schiller's *sensus communis* as a field of disagreement rather than shared harmony. It does not aim to bring different social classes together on a common platform via the sensible form of aesthetics like in Kant or Hume. Instead, it challenges the existing distribution of the sensible, which creates social distance in the first place. It suggests that aesthetic experience functions politically by unsettling given perceptual orders and claiming equality through discord. Thus, it suspends all hierarchies between faculties and neutralizes the domination in such a way that a rupture emerges as *dissensus* between thought and the sensible. In this regard, Schiller's aesthetic state offers a new, rebellious way of seeing the world, rather than following Kant's promised social mediation through feeling-based common sense.

The second innovation that Rancière identifies in Schiller's interpretation of the face of Juno Ludovisi is the unprecedented mode of experience, particularly its implications for the sense of equality. It bears a new form of sensible equality, "a true sensory equality instead of a mere legal one" (Rancière 2009c: 279). The idle, not working, not obeying goddess promises to its spectator a freedom that can lead to political freedom that Rancière implies in aesthetic revolution. The aesthetic experience, as suggested by Schiller, proposes a revolution in the forms of the lived sensible world and becomes the

⁷ Consensus is an agreement between sense and sense, i.e., between a mode of sensory presentation and a regime of meaning (Rancière 2010a: 143–144). However, politics essentially follows from *dissensus*, a disruption of this accord, and it implies the creation of "a new form, as it were, of dissensual 'commonsense'" (Rancière 2010a: 139). For example, both art and politics share "a form of dissensus, a dissensual re-configuration of the common experience of the sensible" (Rancière 2010a: 140).

principle of a politics – or rather, a *metapolitics* – that opposes the upheaval of state forms. The standpoint of the *Juno Ludovisi*, which does not surrender itself to either command or obedience, politically excludes all positions, and proposes an equality derived from disharmony, and a new community as “undifferentiated collective life forms” (Rancière 2004b:14). In other words, Schiller channels the negotiations of freedom into those of equality through aesthetic contemplation that serves as a practice that assumes and confirms the equality of individuals.

As Rancière observes, Schiller’s aesthetic state is an experience that suspends the power relations that have authority in the subject’s experience of knowing (cognition) or desiring (morality). The free play between the faculties, triggered by the mere form of the object in Kant, begins as a fundamental incompatibility rather than harmony. In other words, aesthetic experience is not the resolution of the conflict between sensibility and understanding but the suspension of their opposition. Schiller’s *Juno Ludovisi*, poised between attraction and repulsion, harmony and disharmony, embodies this suspension. The judgment of the beautiful becomes an experience of double bind in which the autonomy of the faculties is affirmed only through their temporary disempowerment. The harmony here, paradoxically, names a disharmony that rejects the authority of any single cognitive power. This is precisely what allows Rancière to preserve the political potential of aesthetic experience: its refusal of subordination, its staging of equality through perceptual ambiguity. The potential relationship we are curious about between freedom, equality, and emancipation lies in Rancière’s argument that inequality persists only where it is believed. However, that belief can only be conveyed through an egalitarian narrative. Equality must be performed by those who actually live, feel and are conscious of inequality (Rancière 2009c: 276). Consequently, the subject of aesthetic experience is on the verge of a break if s/he can break from the determined space and time and the presupposed roles expected to be performed. If aesthetics is “a way of experiencing a sensory state”, which eliminates the hierarchies present in sensory experience, this means that the traditional distinction between sensuality, which is receptive, and the mind, which organizes, as well as the divide between intelligence, which makes decisions, and the hands, which follow instructions, is no longer upheld (Rancière and Engelmann 2019: 33).

On the Emancipatory Potential of Aesthetic Experience

Both Kant and Schiller demonstrate that the primary benefit of aesthetic experience lies in the unique form of freedom it provides to the spectator. The reserved freedom of aesthetic experience carries a claim of universality yet neither philosopher explicitly evaluates its possible relation to an egalitarian or emancipatory politics in Rancière’s sense. Rancière’s reconfiguration of Kant’s *sensus communis* and Schiller’s *Spieltrieb* leads to a fundamental displacement of the aesthetic experience from a harmonizing to a dissensual operation. This displacement is the condition of its emancipatory potential. For Kant and Schiller, emancipation remains bound to a teleology of reconciliation, that is, a movement from sensibility to reason, from appearance to moral autonomy. Rancière breaks this teleology.

What distinguishes this Rancièrian notion of emancipation from the Kantian or Schillerian paradigms is its rejection of any pedagogical or moral finality. In Rancière's sense, aesthetic emancipation emerges from *the equality of the intelligible and the sensible*, from the recognition that any sensory configuration can be a form of thought. What Kant calls the 'free play' of faculties becomes, in Rancière's reformulation, the free circulation of meanings among heterogeneous elements – the image, the word, the gesture – without subordination to a higher law of representation. Likewise, Schiller's *play drive*, which reconciles the drives of sense and form, is reinterpreted not as synthesis but as oscillation: a play that never resolves into unity, but instead sustains the coexistence of incompatible logics. The aesthetic state thus ceases to be the harmony of reason and nature; it becomes a state of *dissensus*, a paradoxical simultaneity of autonomy and heteronomy, contemplation and action, visibility and invisibility. It is precisely this suspension of hierarchies, that is, the interruption of the ordinary coordinates of sense that constitutes its political power.

Rancière thinks that the possibility of emancipation lies in the moments of performing equality. He explores the political potential of aesthetic experience in relation to workers' emancipation in the 1980s. His famous example is the nineteenth-century joiner, Gabriel Gauny, who embraced the power of writing as intellectual production for almost fifty years (1830–1880). Through Gauny, Rancière relates matters of writing to matters of equality, contending that by basically changing what is accomplished with one's hands, what is observed with one's eyes, what provides sensory pleasure, and what is regarded as an intellectual concern. Gauny reframes the 'allowed' time and space, and the labor he sweats over. Without an ideological awareness in the classical sense, just by believing he has time for writing, reading, and expressing his feelings and thoughts, he performs an act of equality. And, for Rancière, this performance of equality relying on reframing his labor force is the source of a new pleasure and the meaning of *emancipation*. It indicates a subversion of common sense, which does not imply a consensus. Instead, it serves as a *polemical space* (Rancière 2009c: 276). The *disinterested* gaze of the joiner, which can be understood in the Kantian sense, enables him to perceive the world as it truly is, free from the constraints of societal expectations. He views life in its pure form, as an equal to the homeowner. This provides him a pleasure without any concern. He looks and sees the world beyond his fixed gaze, which is predetermined by state, by his role or status. In this respect, his aesthetic experience operates as a form of emancipation because it *de-authorizes* the distribution of roles and capacities that structure the social order. It eliminates the distinction between those who act and those who are acted upon, as well as between those who speak and those who are spoken about. When perception is reorganized, politics occurs not as a set of institutions or demands, but as the emergence of a new equal common world. This is why, for Rancière, the aesthetic is not a mere supplement to politics, but rather its very condition. Both consist in making visible what was invisible, making audible who have no part or are not counted in discourse. Emancipation does not follow from the aesthetic; it is immanent to it. The aesthetic experience *is* the experience of equality, not its allegory.

Conclusion

A reconsideration of the aesthetic experience in Kant and Schiller through Rancière's perspective reveals that it is not merely a stage for disinterested judgment or moral-aesthetic cultivation but can be a critical site where perception and politics intersect. Rancière inherits both projects only to transform them. By redefining aesthetic experience as *dissensual common sense*, he converts the harmony of taste into a field of perceptual conflict where equality becomes perceptible. In aesthetic experience, the separation between art and life, reason and sensibility, contemplation and action, collapses into a shared sensorium where everyone is equally capable of thought. It is in this redistribution or politics of perception that the aesthetic finds its true emancipatory force.

Aesthetic experience, thus, represents a form of resistance that disrupts the established boundaries between art and politics, contemplation and action, as well as sense and meaning. This is why the emancipatory potential of aesthetics, as Rancière suggests, does not lie in merely representing political struggle but in revealing the very conditions under which equality can be experienced and exercised. The comparative reading of Kant, Schiller, and Rancière therefore discloses a genealogy of aesthetics that progresses from the moral education of taste to the politics of perception, from subjective harmony to shared *dissensus*. Aesthetic experience, seen this way, becomes a practice of freedom, an invitation to reimagine the sensory world as a space of equality and potential. It is important to note that this invitation does not outline a pre-planned itinerary or a future commitment. It calls for emancipation from the given distribution of the sensible, encouraging us to reimagine a new world of equality and possibility, regardless of the social order we inhabit.

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