

## *An Exchange with Jacques Rancière*

What follows is an edited transcript of a recording made during the question and answer session which followed Panel 3: Contemporary Art, Ethics and the Aesthetic Regime (16.00-18.00 Wednesday 21 June 2006) of the conference *Aesthetics and Politics: With and Around Jacques Rancière* (Universiteit van Amsterdam, 20 and 21 June 2006). The panel was chaired by Sophie Berribi and records an exchange between Stephen Wright, Jonathan Dronsfield and Jacques Rancière.

**Sophie Berribi:** I thought that your papers were having an interesting discussion with each other. Stephen, you have a very radical position suggesting a naïvity in a certain part of the art world in exploring the relations between aesthetics and politics.

**Stephen Wright:** Well, overall in listening to the presentations with all their wealth of speculative depth, what I don't get is what kind of art you must have been seeing [Laughter]. I mean I try to see as much as I can but this sort of ecstatic experience of art leaves me dumbfounded.... When I meet art lovers, and philosophers are invariably art lovers, or at least extraordinarily indulgent toward it, I often encounter these overblown claims about art, which moreover generally go unchallenged. About a month ago I went to see the Whitney Biennial. It was comprised of some 80 installations, none of which had, in my opinion, any art-historical interest whatsoever; the only thing I saw which *was* interesting was peripheral to the entire exhibition and was not an installation but merely a kind of documentary video presentation about a group called *Deep Dish TV*, which attempted to draw attention, in an extremely hostile context, to image-making around the latest imperial adventure in Iraq: who makes images? How are they distributed? How are they *policed*?

And I find it extraordinary, for example in Jonathan's paper, that such an ecstatic or even epiphanic understanding of art is possible without mentioning *any* specific artworks - the word 'Art' is like some guy's name whom we're all supposed to know. I have a hard time with that kind of an approach. It's not that I attempt to maintain axiological neutrality towards artistic production while analysing it but I think that it does behove us to try and have some sort of informed distance, not to fall into the trap - which you very nicely analyse at the beginning of your paper - of succumbing to a naïve cynicism. How is this 'profane epiphany', as you nicely put it, to come about if the symbolic economy of the art world is merely mimetic of the symbolic economy outside of it? By and large art does not produce the heterogeneity you ascribe to it; it produces extreme homogeneity. Art exists within a very policed world as I tried to say, though there's no reason to believe that many artists haven't noticed that; indeed many are attempting to break out and get behind those police lines - with the sacrifice of their artistic visibility, and, of course, thereby of their index in the reputational economy - in an attempt to defy this construction of power around which Jacques Rancière has united us.

**Jonathan Dronsfeld:** Your point about my not using examples is well taken, but I think it touches on something I was trying to get at. One of the things I think we can be thankful for with respect to Rancière's work is the way in which he questions the classical order of dependence between theory and practice, and shows how theories emerge from practice. And part of what practice is is as much its institutionalization and the establishing of a space for the aesthetic experience of artworks as it is a practice of making art objects. But having done that and then to speak of the 'task' of art, for me falls back into the very trap or problem from which you [JR] lead us out. It's preposterous to tell artists what to do. And this way of speaking is something I think that you Stephen also fall into.

I think you rightly pinpoint something in Rancière about this question of visibility and invisibility. But then to draw from that the conclusion that art *must* become invisible, if we start telling artists again what to do, having drawn out the question of the relation of the order of dependency between art practice and theory, philosophy and art, having done that and then from that point of departure to tell artists what to do, I think is just to step backwards into the very area Rancière has taken us from.

Now why that touches on your question as to why I didn't use examples is because I think philosophy of art does two things. It emerges from art practice, including art's practice of setting up and institutionalising spaces where something can be experienced as art or where the distinction between art and life can be called into question - these are no less institutional spaces as far as I'm concerned. It can do that but only by at the same time taking a necessary distance from those artworks precisely in speaking about them; the struggle for its own legitimacy and recognition can lead philosophy into theorising about art by departing from using examples, and it can be seen as a necessary departure. But this is not the same thing as a theory which denies or does not recognise whence it emerges, or claims for itself an autonomy from art practice or an authority or meta status over it. This distinction is something that can be performed in the writing itself, which in my view my paper tries to do, even though it doesn't give examples of art, or not explicitly. I think that's allowable. And there is one more important consideration: artworks are sometimes theory, where the only 'example' of the work or practice being theorised about is itself: to this extent art too can theorise without examples. And theory can theorise about itself as art practice.

**SW:** I would admit that there is a sympathy in my work for these stealth-art practices, as well as a theory-driven desire to accompany them, but I think my reflection is largely descriptive in fact...

**JD:** 'Art must accept to no longer appear as such'.... Where does this *must* come from? [Laughter] And equally, forgive me, Jacques, if I may call you Jacques, you speak of the *task* of art, there is that moment when you start speaking of 'the must', the task of art, that's where this so called 'readable political signification' comes in: 'If art is to be political, if it is to maintain its tension between the autonomy and the heteronomy of art which is constitutive of all art and always has been in the aesthetic regime, it must give us some readable political signification.' Where does this *must* come from? What is it that leads a philosopher who questions the order of dependency between philosophy and art then to invoke a 'must' where artists are told that if their art is to be political it *must* bring out or give us a 'readable political signification'?

**Jacques Rancière:** Well, as I am interpellated, maybe I can give an answer. Where does that *must* come from? I think in my text it is very clear, you know. It is not from my idea of art. Where does that *must* come? It comes from the presuppositions of the strategy of art I am

undermining. It comes from the pre-suppositions of the strategic view of art.... It is not my commandment. I never say 'art must do this'. I mean in this context, in the context of, precisely what you point out, the separation between the law of aesthetic experience and the law of artistic production, in that context, if art wants precisely to build strategies for plugging the gap, it *has* to do, it *must* do this. It is an hypothetical and not a categorical imperative.

**JD:** But that implies there is something to which the 'must' addresses itself which pre-exists the event of the artwork, and this is where it touches upon Stephen's question to me. Whereas I think art throws into question those things it addresses itself to. So take for example 'the social world'. It's not as if the 'social world' is a given, it's not as if we know or agree what 'the social world' is prior to the way in which art can show us something otherwise not seen about the social world, the invisible of the social world, and this might make us hesitate to speak of the social world prior to the event of the artwork which nonetheless seeks to address itself to the social world. A 'political signification' might be given by a work which is not yet readable, for whom those who can see it politically, including philosophers, are yet to come.

**JR:** Well but, once more, in both texts I was examining strategies of political art - strategy that is immanent, and immanence is a practice itself - that anticipate a certain idea of how art addresses a social world. Once more, it is not my imperative. When you quote about the 'ideal effect', the ideal effect in my text was an ironic term. In this view of the aims and means of art, this is the ideal effect, but what I try to show is that that ideal effect is a conjunction of effects which precisely cannot stick together: an effect of estrangement, an effect of knowledge and an effect of mobilization; I tried yesterday to make the same point, maybe it was not clear in the book, I hope it was clearer in my presentation, maybe I'm wrong, you know, but basically I'm not a person who likes to say what has to be done. Not at all. This would be my answer on this point. And what you say precisely about negotiating separateness and unseparateness, in my view, gives an answer to Stephen's way of building the opposition... Once more, you Stephen, say I'm in a certain way endorsing the official view of art as subversive, and you know, giving the kind of credibility to what you call the glory of art. But I don't think that anywhere I said that art was subversive. I never thought that art as such is subversive. For the first reason that I don't know what art as such means. I always think that art is perceived in specific configurations, specific regimes of identification, that allow for certain social functions or certain political possibilities, etc. So what I stressed yesterday too is that precisely the possible subversive effect is the effect of aesthetic experience and not the effect of artistic strategies. Which does not mean that precisely art is not subversive, art can contribute to produce new changes in the configuration of the sensible, in the cartography of the visible and the sensible, but it cannot anticipate and calculate its own effect.

This is why I think that your view is much more connected in fact to a traditional view of art than mine - I'm speaking to Stephen - because what you define is precisely a kind of well-calculated effect of art. In your view, if art wants to speak, if it wants to do something, to be political, it has to make itself disappear. I would say that this is too easy a solution, precisely the problem is that it does not disappear. It makes itself visible as pure decision. I'm more modest than you about the possibilities of art. Art may have some possibilities of creating displacements in the configuration of the sensible precisely to the extent that it accepts not to control the effect of its practice. Not to become invisible, precisely, there are those things with the strange status between separateness and unseparateness, and it is in the negotiation of that relation that people - and I don't like the idea of the consumer of art, this idea of the passive spectator - no, there are people negotiating in their way what is proposed

to them as art or as beauty, or what the image invents, etc. I think that this is important, at the same time less dramatic, but maybe more important, than the idea of artistic strategies that would make art really efficient even at the cost of its own disappearance. I think that there is something very authoritarian, something much more fitting the traditional concept of art in your view of art making itself disappear to provoke some forms of political mobilization. There may be some connection between them, but I would say that the emphatic idea of the power of art and in some sense the character of the example that you showed, because obviously I don't think that there is something politically wonderful in that practice of making maps of Buenos Aires and saying 'the perpetrators are here, here and here'. You say it contributes to a kind of collective memory. Well I would say, that if you take another example, I think of Ritty Pahn's film on the camps in Kampuchea, when he makes this film, a film which is presented in art festivals, with this confrontation between the perpetrator and the victim, I think that in the very ambiguity of the relation between artwork and some kind of common political catharsis, there is something that contributes much more to constituting a memory than the map of the perpetrators in Buenos Aires. That is my point of view.

**SB:** Do you have a response?

**SW:** I would respond to both. I would say that in listening to the type of vocabulary that you use to describe art it seems to me that there are a number of presuppositions, which, when used to constitute a system, also take on a prescriptive hue. For instance, you talk about *artwork* as if it were the natural form of appearance of art in the world, which I contest; this you link to single *authorship* and to the meta institution of *spectatorship*. I think that Holy Trinity, which goes uncontested by and large, amounts to a latent and implicit form of normativity and even prescriptivity that is found in many types of philosophy of art. So if you find some 'musts' in my text, in a certain way I find the *must* has somehow sublimated itself in any art theory that doesn't explicitly seek to re-examine the conditions of possibility for art's emergence in the world. And that is why I suggested that art need not emerge exclusively in the form of a performative, but may actually be existent in the latent form of competence.

**JD:** But I think that is *all* I did, I wanted to question such 'conditions of possibility', on the one hand those which, as argued by Lyotard for example, allow for the pure presence of materiality, and this is where I am in agreement with Rancière, and on the other those which would allow for political artworks being political because of the presence of a purported 'readable political signification', and here I am in disagreement with Rancière. You can't hold someone to account for invoking the term 'artwork' simply because it carries with it presuppositions...

**SW:** Artwork as a position is a value-laden term. It is absolutely evaluative. It is not value neutral at all.

**JD:** I agree. Any mention of art is theory-laden, perhaps a better way of putting it than value-laden. But that doesn't mean that we can escape the difficulties of theory-ladenness or value-ladenness simply by calling a practice non-art rather than art. We can't just by decree assert the fact that we are not operating these presuppositions, just as an artist cannot avoid or negate troubling presuppositions by 'invisibilizing' his work. And nor can he claim for his work a determined effect through his explicitly disavowing those presuppositions or avowing

others. Just as there is no visible without the sayable there is no invisible without the sayable either.

**SW:** But I think very largely contemporary art, or artist working today are explicitly contesting that art should be an existent form of artwork, at least in foregrounding process that is no longer being subordinated to an extrinsic carnality which is the artwork. And I think that is an extremely important shift in artistic production.

**JD:** I agree, but you can't do this without institutions of art. Moreover, and using your example – but that's the problem of using examples, they can undo one's argument - your example of so-called invisible art was precisely the opposite, it was visible, it was maps, it was signs.

**At this point there is a short break followed by an impromptu presentation of images by Stephen Wright**

**SW:** I don't want to bore you with examples, but here for instance is an image of one of the maps that I referred to, and which was put up around Buenos Aires. Here for example are some of the street signs produced by the GAC. This was an instance of an *escrache* of Luis Juan Donoicik, who started his career in Poland – which is why he's known as *el polaco chico* – as a concentration camp guard and later went to Argentina where he became a prominent member of the military and now is the president of a prosperous private security company. He oversaw and perpetrated terrible human rights abuses during the dictatorship. And so members of the *escrache* movement put up signs of this sort to draw attention to his impunity and presence in residential neighbourhoods of the capital. But what is more interesting, and I think very artistically compelling – which is why I referred to it in my last argument – is to observe how the tautological imperative, which is the hallmark of conceptual art practice, somehow breaks free of the artworld framework where it is all too often held captive to some extent, and is unleashed on the world. These signs here were put up in public space; of course, they refer to what are known as 'flights of death,' when those people who were tortured and killed or merely drugged and taken by military aircraft out over the South Atlantic and dumped from the airplane into the ocean. What's interesting about these images, from an art-critical perspective, is that they strike an adequation in terms of form and content with the problem in Argentine society which the *escrache* movement is trying to address. For it is not that there are 30,000 people missing, it is that their absence is so devastatingly present. And you see that within the airplane we have this representation of absence. It's not merely just black against the background, that absent background is itself inscribed right into the centre. I would contrast that to the example that was given in Rancièrè's talk last night, *Urban Encampment*, where we see 'people of colour' wearing black tee-shirts with white writing; these people are anonymous and the writing is white. For me that is exactly the opposite of a successful artistic solution to the dialectic of visibility and invisibility, of absence and presence. Whereas the street signs produced by the GAC do provide an artistically satisfying solution to the problem, which is precisely why I chose this example over countless others. Devices of the kind produced by *Urban Encampment*, however, at least on a symbolic level, are not about drawing attention merely to a problem, which, in any case, is widely known. It is the opposite of making those bodies emerge. Think of the riots in the Paris suburbs last November. Those bodies that had always been there, all of a sudden became visible to us – visible, intelligible. And that can be easily understood in a Rancièrian paradigm. In the case

of a genocide, such as what occurred in Argentina, we are up against the inverse and ethically more devastating problem, which art alone is perhaps symbolically equipped to deal with.

**JD:** But in what way is this invisible? I mean everything you have said points to visibility. If you use terms such as ‘representation’, ‘reference’, ‘image’, ‘form and content’, ‘signs’, these are all classical ways of talking about visual art.

**SW:** This is not art.

**JD:** But you said ‘artistically satisfying’! You can’t just assert it is not art. You can’t just point and say, ‘it’s not art’.

**SW:** It was perceived by no-one as such. It is being repatriated as art by what I am saying today. And it quite obvious that many things – any number of symbolic configurations and activities – can satisfy our expectations with respect to art, without being art in terms of their self-understanding. And can often do so better than self-conscious artworks themselves.

**JD:** At the beginning of your talk you were quite right I think to speak about the hubris of the art world in believing itself to be politically effective, you were right to draw attention to that. But I think yours is just another example of what you pointed to. Yours is no less an institutionalisation of art. This event today, in which you are taking part, in which you are using the video projector and pointing to pictures of practices, processes, whatever you want to call them, is no less an institutionalisation of art and the securing for yourself a space in which you can talk about these things, as is a museum or a traditional way of showing art, these are all ways of institutionalising art, which is what I think Rancière’s getting at when he talks about how the very idea of the aesthetic is absolutely institutionalised and heteronomous. We need a space which is common to be able to have an experience we call aesthetic. You’re not escaping any of that. It doesn’t mean that the artwork or process isn’t valuable or interesting in other ways which you would want it to be. But it’s not tending towards invisibility as art, or attaining a ‘freedom’ or ‘escape’ from the art world, on the contrary.

**SW:** But its visibility, let’s say, is at any rate deferred.

**JD:** In all art visibility is deferred in some way, and the new ways of speaking about artworks that artworks themselves make possible in turn make things visible for the first time not just in other works but in those works too.

**SW:** Well in this case, if it had been initially presented in an art-specific time and space, like a museum or gallery, the time of deferral would of course be drastically reduced, because it would not require the performative gesture accomplished by my presence here, as you described it. Nor would it require any of the performative documents which bring into the fold of art something which was not initially perceived as such. And there is for me a very decisive difference between perceiving something inside or outside the performative framework of the art world; between perceiving it as a sign but not an art-specific sign. A very different type of perception is engaged in each case. And particularly for those people whose symbolic capital in fact excludes them from spaces of art – and these are the people we are talking about in the public sphere, outside of the museums, people who if they knew it were art might, instead of engaging with it, simply write it off, saying, ‘it’s just art’.

Ultimately, this deferred visibility does become visible. There is a huge difference between something that is *performed as* art and something which is merely *informed by* art. And I think the respective timeframes of those two instances make for a qualitative difference.

**JR:** What is disturbing for me is your idea those signs are *not* perceived as art. How can you anticipate the way they are perceived? What is to me the heart of the problem is when you say that art *has to* disappear in order to act politically. It is a mechanistic logic: art has to disappear in order to make something for people who have no access to art. It is always the same presupposition. There are people who have no access to art, so art has to act so as to disappear, to make something which is only matter of fact. But those signs are not ‘matter of fact’ documentation. There is the choice of a certain design, of a kind of symbolism which appeals to some sense of art. What disturbs me, is the setting of this equivalence: if the artist disappears as an artist, he can address people who don’t know what art is and who don’t care for art.

**SB:** It’s Dubuffet...

**SW:** What would be your hypothesis, then, about why more and more artists are engaging in stealth practices?

**JR:** It’s not ‘more and more’. It’s always the same artists whose examples are invoked in all congresses on art and engagement. You say there are ‘more and more’ just because you think it is a good thing to do so. But the kind of thing that you showed us is in the tradition of political posters. Artists have made political posters for many, many years and it was not considered art denying itself or art disappearing. They were artists, which means they had a certain competence. And they used that competence to build images with or without words, conveying a certain political signification. I would say it is the same thing. Why claim a new radical break in art? That is my question.

**SB:** Because it is very tempting to do so. That’s the problem. But would you say that a more convincing form, I’m being a bit perverse here, would it be a more successful form of invisibility to simply displace an object, like a Rhitty Pahn film, and bring it in to the art world, something that is definitely not an art object, at least as a documentary film, does that constitute a form of successful invisibility?

**JR:** There is no invisibility in this case. This film was presented as a film and not as a militant documentary. It was presented as a work of art trying to restage something which apparently dismisses art, I mean a genocide. It is an art practice which tries to restage the way in which a historical process can be made visible, can be looked at and read. All this is visible. And it can be seen either as art or as non-art. The point is not about visibility or invisibility. It is that you cannot anticipate that one person will look at it as art and another person will not look at it as art.

**SW:** I would maintain that it is, nevertheless, an empirical error to say that this sort of practice has had a sort of stability throughout history. In our economy which is increasingly based on the harnessing of what used to be art-specific competence – in other words, autonomy, creativity, inventiveness, which is exactly how post-Fordist capitalism functions – there is an increasing response from art and art-related practitioners who feel that they don’t want art just to be completely ripped off, to attempt to re-inject their competence elsewhere in

a substantively different way. And in purely quantitative terms there are more and more professionally trained artists who have decided to forego producing art, and who are doing something else instead which, whatever it may be, doesn't initially appear as art; yet without art and a historical understanding of what art has become, would be nevertheless historically impossible. Something that is not art but whose historical condition of possibility lies in art. For me, that is a fascinating development in society and one which really does deserve more inquiry and reflection than merely writing it off by saying, 'well, artists have always done posters'. There are a growing number of social movements which really cannot be adequately described as either political or artistic. It is some sort of new configuration which is emerging.

**SB:** Are there any artist in the audiences who would like to respond to this?

[No response.]

**SB:** Or other people from the audience...

**JR:** Non artists...

**SB:** You can say something and not say which you are...

**JD:** I would like to ask a question of you [JR] if I may, and it goes back to your saying that the invocation of the ideal effect was ironic on your part. Do you think it is possible for an artwork to present itself without any ostensible political content and still be political? An art work which makes no appeal of the sort that is being made by this art, for example, to any political event, to any state of affairs, any desired outcome, any change that it wants to bring to bear upon the world, and which perhaps could just be sheer materiality, in a certain descriptive sense, would you allow for the possibility that that art work could be political, a political artwork, despite its not having any, as you put it, 'readable political signification'?

Interjection from the floor: A Robert Ryman painting, for example.

**JD:** ... Or a Barnett Newman, to give the example of Lyotard.

**JR:** No work comes out of the blue. In the case of Barnett Newman, of course, there is an intention, and after there is a kind of superimposition of readings. The point is: can you define an artwork only as an artwork? We know a lot of people, who paint, do sculpture, a lot of things, they just work for their own pleasure, okay, the problem begins where there is some connection of what has been done with a certain concept of art, institution of art, place of art. And when we are in that context there are a lot of possible readings, of possible significations attributed to the work. Well I'll tell you, from my point of view, it is entirely possible to look at the work of Robert Ryman or Barnett Newman with a pure contemplative gaze, giving it absolutely no signification. But the fact is that in the beginning there is a strong need to give it a signification, and that strong need is itself linked to a certain idea of art, as being political out of its very refusal to convey a meaning.

**JD:** Do I take that as a yes? [Laughter] Are you saying yes?

**JR:** In itself, no. You ask me to consider it just in itself but the point for me is: what does it mean an artwork 'in itself'.

**SB:** What I don't understand, and maybe I'm missing something, to answer your question couldn't one just say 'Adorno' and Adorno's position of the autonomy which is a sign of its resistance?

**JD:** No.

**JR:** No.

**JD:** That's why I'm addressing the question to you, because for me you rightly show how there is heteronomy at the heart of autonomy. That there is no such thing as an autonomous art work. At least I imagine this is something with which you would concur. There is no such thing as an autonomous art work: heteronomy is there at the moment of autonomy, as much at the heart of autonomy as is the notion of autonomy itself. And there would not be this notion of autonomy without that co-emergence of heteronomy at the heart of the autonomous. Now I think partly what so-called abstract art works do is bring into question what we understand by material. That's one way in which precisely they are *not* autonomous, contrary to what the artists themselves – Newman and the other Abstract Expressionists from the 50s and 60s – think, and their theorists, Adorno, Greenberg, Lyotard, all of whom in their own way presuppose what matter is, as if it is given in advance of the art work. That questioning of matter is partly what I think they reject and that's what you hold them to account for and I think you are right to do that. But it is one thing to say that and it is another thing on the basis of that to say that if an art is to be political it has somehow to draw out and make explicit the struggle between autonomy and heteronomy and the only way it can do that is to introduce a readable political signification. I don't think you are using the term 'ideal effect' ironically.

**JR:** It is not in terms of readable political signification...

**JD:** Right, but why?

**JR:** Well I would say, what does it mean, political in its signification? In the case of Greenberg, can you term that explicit political signification? I don't think so. There is this idea that the commitment of the artwork to its own material conditions includes the artwork in a general movement of emancipation, viewed as the conquest of autonomy. In this case art can be said to belong to a certain political configuration. Once more, it is not my position, I just try to give a case where art is included in a kind of political plot without being given an explicitly political signification. I think it is very easy to do it, precisely as you can include a piece of art either from the point of view of its autonomy or from the point of view of its heteronomy. You can always argue both positions.

**JD:** A moment ago you invoked the possibility of art being political 'out of its very refusal to convey a meaning'. So, abstract works, if they are political, if they are, are political for not 'showing' an ostensible political meaning. But this is something we understand as much from the discourses and institutions of art as we do from the putative material object itself, discourses and institutions which are as constitutive of the object as is the object 'itself'. And we can see such discourses when we see art, or these discourses are enabled by such works. The two co-emerge, and continually cover over each other. In this way can a Barnett Newman or a Robert Ryman be seen to be political. But it does not follow that if art is to be political then it *must* bear a readable political signification; rather, whatever signification it bears is not

‘in itself’, its signification is not its alone and the work is not readable ‘in itself’; and yet that artwork, that particular artwork, is the event of that signification.

**SB:** Stephen, you have been quiet for about five minutes.

**SW:** If I were an artist working with invisible practices, how would I know when I met the art police? How would I know except to encounter the sort of steadfast refusal that I seem to hear from you when I mention the possibility of art invisibilizing itself in this way. It seems very much like a new body has emerged, or more precisely has *withdrawn*, in a way that is unacceptable to the art world. I’m very attentive to your remarks, but at the same time, there seems to be a steadfast refusal to admit that this type of art practice could find a place for its occupation. And that sounds very much like an operation of the art police.

**JR:** I don’t say that it cannot have a place. I say that there are two ways of thinking of this kind of practice. You can consider it as a political practice and you can think that it is one form of political practice. And there are forms of political practice which look like this. So the question is: why don’t you say they are artists in the sense that they have competence and they put that competence to the service of a certain political project? You can say it. At the same time you say something more. You say this political practice is itself a self-suppression of art or a self-denial of art. But, if you say so, you are still including those practices in the realm of art. It looks like a double game: ‘we are artists doing this kind of art which is the self-suppression of art’. We also know that it is possible that in twenty years, those signs will be sold and will be very expensive in an art auction.

**JD:** Stephen, the more you assert the *place* of an art work or a ‘non-art’ work, whether that place be inside or outside ‘the art world’ (which nonetheless still appears somehow to be given), for example ‘this’ work and its ‘invisibility’, the more you insist on your ability to ‘repatriate’ art which was otherwise ‘perceived by no-one as such’, the more you claim that a sign must or can only be read in a certain political way, the more you speak as if political efficacy were a given determinate effect of a specific ‘political strategy’, then the more you fix art, and the more you become the police you would otherwise want to resist.

**Question from the floor:** I just wanted to make one comment. I remember one comment you made that ‘I am not interested in making a judgement of what is good art and bad art any more.’ My question is you [SW] bring artwork into philosophical or aesthetical question but you [JR] would judge what is good art and what is bad art.

**JR:** I don’t think I judge what is good art and bad art. This is not my point. My point is precisely about the relation between art and non art. As with everybody, there are things in contemporary art that I find uninteresting and things which I feel are interesting, things which I think are beautiful and things which I find ugly. There are also discourses that seem to me interesting or not. I said yesterday that the forms of critique of the spectacle, the critique of a kind of illusion which is no longer an illusion for anybody, from my point of view is not interesting. I don’t say: you must not do it, art must do something else. I tried to point to some manifestations which seemed to me to be interesting, interesting either from the point of view of the problem that they raise, or from the point of view of the solutions that they propose. Anyway, what I have insisted on is the very break between an artistic proposition and the effect that we can expect from this proposition. So in my response to Stephen, the point was not to say: it is not interesting at all. In fact I made two points: first, how does this form of art

serve or help construct some form of political movement and how do we judge this political movement? For in the case of this Argentinean movement, I am not sure that it is very interesting in itself. And second, you say something more which cannot really be sustained, when you say this kind of manifestation is political *because* art becomes invisible in it. The 'disappearance' of art has no political value in itself and, anyway, I am not sure that it disappears in this case. Once more my question is about the interpretation of a practice. My point of view is trying to focus on the way in which artistic practices negotiate between different possibilities. And the point of my disagreement with Stephen is when he says: *this is* now the new way of political art, many artists no more belong to art. We know that 'not belonging to art' can change in thirty years. 'Now I don't belong to art', that was a sentence from Marcel Broodthaers: 'Now I am out of the market'. Five years ago there was a big exhibition of Broodthaers in Brussels. I wrote an essay for the catalogue, but the catalogue could not come out because of the pretensions of the inheritors. He did 'no more' belong to art but apparently his work belonged more than ever to the art market. So it is a problem to say 'Now I am out'.