

## **To ask, when empty; To pour, when full**

*On the Aestheticization of Politics*

Raqs Media Collective

The designs that impose impressive, spectacular and heart-stopping phalanges of order on the unruly surfaces and structures of life lie at the foundations of the aestheticization of every polis. These are the images and structures of feeling that tell us what to feel, when to be loyal, and how to act.

Rather than staying with these certainties, it always remains possible to embody a different set of imperatives, that mark both practical, as well as normative, departures from an aestheticized politics — the decor and ornament of the way things are.

Simply put, rather than to be content with the available answers,  
It is to ask when empty, and to pour when full.  
It is to disobey when told, and to doubt when asked.  
To eat when hungry, and to feed when asked.  
To praise when needed and to play when asked.

In this way, we can imagine making and mending the world along a different axis. Thought in this way, the place that art makes in the world does not have to be a palace, a prison or a promenade. It can be a culvert, a conduit, a detour off the highway. Off the highway where speed reigns, where the grand procession marches on the spot, very fast, forever, not really going anywhere. It can be that vestibule, that short-cut, or secret passage, that turn in the labyrinth that gets us from here, wherever 'here' is, to 'there' - that tantalizing, lighthouse on the horizon.

The place that art makes in the world can take us to the future as easily as it can take us to the past, or sideways into other worlds, concurrent, here, now, inside or outside, but unknown to our own.

The place that art makes in the world will then be found by a shift to an altitude where close companions can become welcome strangers, where strangers can become familiar. It is a mountain peak on the range called uncertainty. The place that art makes in the world is the natural habitat of the third man. That strange, delightful companion, the one you find when you hallucinate on a long, hard climb. Not you, not me, but someone else who make it unnecessary to ask whether it is you, or me.

The place that art makes in the world will then have the taste of solitude and the texture of solidarity. It has, then, the porosity of intimacy, and can live and breathe like a crowd. That place that art makes in the world is not a destination, not a way-station, not a terminus, not a junction, not a spot on a time-table. No trams, trains, airplanes or motor boats can get you there. You walk to get there, not on your feet, but on the limbs of your questions and desires. It is not far. It is not close at hand.