

Aesthetic Precariousness in Ch. Menke's Art Philosophy

Sección temática: Estética y teoría de las artes

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Abstract:

Precariousness is a defining category of our culture, the modernity where all that is solid melts into air. Baudelaire already defined aesthetic modernity in terms of a precarious search “of the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent”. But in the last fifty years precariousness (and precarity) have been intensifying its presence in our modern, capitalist societies. Thus, precariousness has become a central feature distinctive of most of contemporary artworks and art practices from the point of view of its ontology and its reception. Obviously, precariousness is not a new characteristic of art in general. Time destroys even pyramids and takes away meanings and values of the surviving works. Performative arts were always perfectly ephemeral before the invention of recording technologies of sound and image. But even now a record is a mere documentation, not the work itself. Being all that truth, the precarious condition of contemporary art is a specific property of our times and culture not generalizable to previous times and other cultures. For these we should prefer concepts as fragility or vulnerability, more connected with notions such as contingency, transience and brittleness distinguishing in general not only cultural artifacts but even life. “Precariousness” is a specific condition of contemporary art and aesthetics in late capitalist culture, a condition that has been deploying since more than a century, but exacerbated after the end of avant-gardes and intensified in our post-global culture. Trying to be descriptive, it is important to make clear that precariousness is not necessarily a disorder in the sense of an illness. It is a disorder that creates a new order for art works and practices, for publics and audiences, and for aesthetic judgment and art criticism. This new aesthetic order distinguished by precariousness is ambivalent, as some important thinkers as Adorno or Lyotard have argued in the second half of the last century. More recently, some contemporary philosophers as Jacques Rancière or Christoph Menke have been rethinking and reconceptualising that precarious condition that distinguishes contemporary aesthetic and art. In this sense, precariousness is an essential trait of Rancière’s “aesthetic regime” and of Menke’s aesthetic theory of art built on the category of “force”. Following this interpretation of the contemporary, historical condition of art in recent texts by Christoph Menke such *Kraft* (2008) and *Die Kraft der Kunst* (2013), a tension appears with his claim about the nature of aesthetics as negativity. Aesthetics precariousness is then presented simultaneously as historical and essential, reproducing a well-known philosophical problem in great philosophers as Hegel and Danto, a problem that forces to consider a solution of Kantian sort or a consequent relativism renouncing to a definition of the aesthetic.