

# EXPANDED SUMMARY

*Aesthetic Commitment and Cultural Citizenship: What  
Challenges Do We Face Today?*

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## Introduction

This text aims to analyze the contemporary conditions of aesthetic engagement in relation to the construction of cultural citizenship within a social context marked by the acceleration of time and the increasing complexity of artistic practices. It questions individuals' capacity to make themselves available for meaningful encounters with art and explores how this temporal availability becomes a central issue for personal emancipation and social cohesion.

The reflection is framed within a critical perspective on contemporary transformations affecting our relationship with time, culture, and aesthetic experience. Building on Fertier (2023), it recalls that cultural citizenship is a fundamental condition for guaranteeing individuals' cultural rights, which are themselves essential for social peace. This framework requires rethinking the boundaries between art and society, as well as the conditions of accessibility, participation, and public involvement. In this light, aesthetic engagement emerges as both a tool for cultural democratization and a form of profound subjective experience.

## Development

In its first part, the text defines the concept of aesthetic engagement, highlighting its immersive, participatory, and critical dimensions. As a contrast to the Kantian tradition where aesthetic experience was conceived as disinterested contemplation, several contemporary authors propose seeing it as a dynamic interaction between artwork and viewer. Arnold Berleant (2022), a pioneer of this approach, defines aesthetic engagement as an affective, bodily, and intellectual co-creation that transforms perception into a transformative experience. This model aligns with Nicolas Bourriaud's "relational aesthetics" (2001), which sees meaning in art as

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emerging from the social relationships it generates, as well as with Rose (2022), who emphasizes the critical and sensitive stance of the viewer in constructing meaning.

Historically, conceptions of artistic appreciation have evolved. Formalist approaches, championed by Clive Bell or Roger Fry, focused on the internal qualities of artworks (lines, colors, composition), without regard for historical context or viewer subjectivity. Panofsky, through his development of iconographic and iconological analysis, introduced a three-tiered reading—pre-iconographic, iconographic, and iconological—designed to culturally and philosophically contextualize the artwork. These approaches paved the way for more integrative readings, such as those by Rose or Anderson and Milbrandt, which combine the sensitive and the rational. Lemonchois (2017), for her part, proposes a "dual approach" blending sensitivity and rationality for a deeper understanding of the issues raised by contemporary art.

In the second part, the text highlights the tensions between aesthetic engagement and the phenomenon of social acceleration, a central concept in Hartmut Rosa's thought. The multiplication of stimuli, information flows, and life rhythms reduces individuals' availability for demanding aesthetic experiences. Contemporary art, often perceived as complex or unsettling, requires "psychic investment" and "long time spans," which clash with the logics of efficiency, profitability, and immediacy characteristic of our societies. This tension is illustrated by empirical data, notably a Luxembourgish survey (Borsenberger & Lorentz, 2022) revealing that nearly half of respondents had not visited an art museum due to lack of time.

In response, artists and movements have attempted to resist temporal pressure. Artistic experiences stemming from slow art, street art, or performance art reclaim time. The Street Works movement (1970s), for example, valued useless and anti-productive actions as a way of "reclaiming time" (Lapalu, 2020). Similarly, immersive or participatory works like Marina Abramović's *The Artist Is Present* or Niki de Saint Phalle's *Elle* actively solicit audience presence and engagement, reversing traditional reception patterns.

In this context, the article introduces in its third part the distinction between free time and liberated time. The former refers to residual time, often filled with

constrained tasks or passive leisure, while the latter is time intentionally chosen for fulfilling and enriching experiences. Adrianssens and Montjotin (2024) define “liberated time” as a condition for individual emancipation, enabling the subjective reconfiguration of social time. Aesthetic engagement, in this sense, offers a unique space-time favorable to reconstructing one's relationship to self, others, and the world.

In the fourth part, the article broadens the perspective by placing aesthetic engagement at the heart of the concept of cultural citizenship. This refers to the ability of everyone to access culture, express themselves through it, participate in it, and contribute to the formation of a shared identity. It is a cultural right enshrined in UNESCO's foundational texts (2001, 2005), and recognized as a driver of social justice, cohesion, and diversity. Cultural citizenship thus transcends mere consumption of symbolic goods to become a form of civic action, expression, and social transformation. By fostering audience involvement, aesthetic engagement becomes a privileged tool of this participation.

From this angle, cultural citizenship is not limited to traditional forms of cultural attendance. It can also manifest through discussions, collective projects, or shared creations. Art, far from being a separate domain, contributes to shaping the "common sensorium" (Rancière, 2000), that is, to creating a shared experience of the world. By redefining the role of the viewer—not merely as a passive recipient but as a committed subject—contemporary art contributes to an active and inclusive form of citizenship.

Finally, the last section focuses on the educational stakes of this transformation. As a formative institution, the school is responsible for preparing individuals to become cultural citizens. This implies rethinking arts education, opening it to a broader cultural approach that integrates a diversity of practices, temporalities, and sensibilities. The goal is to foster in students a reflective, sensitive, and critical posture capable of responding to contemporary social challenges. Education should enable the lifelong construction of a personal culture connected to the issues of time, participation, and collective well-being.

## Conclusion

Several paths are suggested: incorporating the notion of “liberated time” into curricula, promoting an expanded view of culture as a way of life, balancing acceleration and deceleration logics, and envisioning cultural citizenship as a vector of both personal and collective development. In a society saturated with information and dominated by speed, it seems urgent to rehabilitate the time of art as a space for pleasure, reflection, and transformation.

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