



Doing Aesthetics with Arendt: How to See Things (Columbia Themes in Philosophy, Social Criticism, and the Arts)

By Cecilia Sjöholm

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Cecilia Sjöholm reads Hannah Arendt as a philosopher of the senses, grappling with questions of vision, hearing, and touch even in her political work. Constructing an Arendtian theory of aesthetics from the philosopher's fragmentary writings on art and perception, Sjöholm begins a vibrant new chapter in Arendt scholarship that expands her relevance for contemporary philosophers.

Arendt wrote thoughtfully about the role of sensibility and aesthetic judgment in political life and on the power of art to enrich human experience. Sjöholm draws a clear line from Arendt's consideration of these subjects to her reflections on aesthetic encounters and works of art mentioned in her published writings and stored among her memorabilia. This delicate effort allows Sjöholm to revisit Arendt's political concepts of freedom, plurality, and judgment from an aesthetic point of view and incorporate Arendt's insight into current discussions of literature, music, theater, and visual art. Though Arendt did not explicitly outline an aesthetics, Sjöholm's work substantively incorporates her perspective into contemporary reckonings with radical politics and their relationship to art.

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Editorial Review

Review

Cecilia Sjöholm provides an original and provocative reinterpretation of the difficult and controversial philosophical issues in Hannah Arendt's studies, such as embodiment, realness, appearance, judgment, and the role of sense experience. *Doing Aesthetics with Arendt* is written with admirable clarity, elegance, and a sense of its own unique voice. (Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, author of *Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism*)

In addition to filling a significant hole in existing scholarship, *Doing Aesthetics with Arendt* performs a powerful double gesture with far-reaching consequences. The double entendre of the title means both cultivating an account of aesthetics in which there appeared to be none and, perhaps more fundamentally, transforming the aesthetic apertures that pre-conceptually determine how a body of work appears. Cecilia Sjöholm has truly done what appeared impossible by *doing aesthetics* with Arendt. (Gabriel Rockhill, author of *Radical History and the Politics of Art*)

With its insistent references to the spaces of appearances and new beginnings, to judgment and narrative, and to perspectives and plurality, Hannah Arendt's philosophy is thoroughly and emphatically structured by aesthetic categories, which no reader could have failed to notice. Bringing these categories—and some new ones: the sense of 'realness' and the 'sounding' of the language of love—into orderly, pointed, and illuminating focus, Cecilia Sjöholm has compellingly and beautifully constructed for us Arendt's unwritten aesthetics. By allowing Arendt's aesthetic doctrine to so perspicuously come into view, Sjöholm has placed us all in her debt. (J. M. Bernstein, New School for Social Research)

About the Author

Cecilia Sjöholm is professor of aesthetics at Södertörn University. Her research focuses on issues in phenomenology and aesthetics, with a particular emphasis on the history of aesthetics and its relation to politics. Her books include *Regionality/Mondiality: Perspectives on Art, Aesthetics, and Globalization* (with Charlotte Bydler); *Kristeva and the Political*; and *The Antigone Complex: Ethics and the Invention of Feminine Desire*.

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