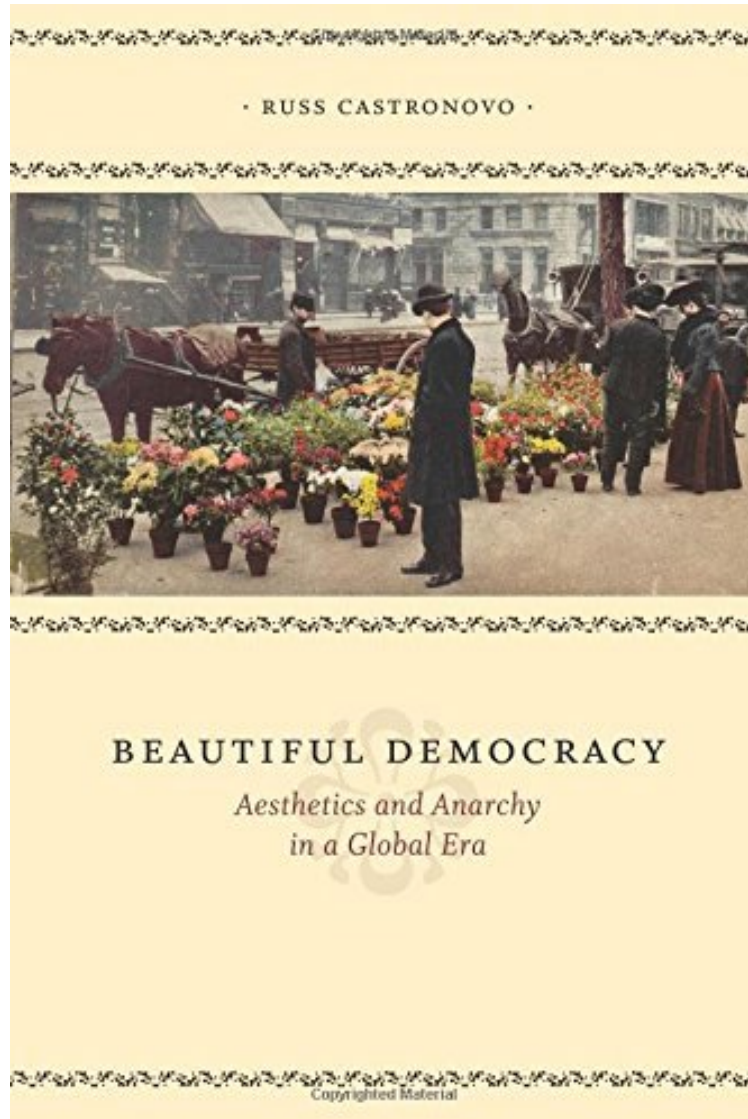


Beautiful Democracy: Aesthetics and Anarchy in a Global Era

Russ Castronovo

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Russ Castronovo : Beautiful Democracy: Aesthetics and Anarchy in a Global Era before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Beautiful Democracy: Aesthetics and Anarchy in a Global Era:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Sweetness and Light by the fire of destructionBy S. FrankCastronovo argues that late 19th and early 20th century American "aesthetic" events were often generative of violence or that violent demonstrations were generative of aesthetic moments. Art shows, exhibits, early films, etc., resulted in mayhem yet representations of violence or chaos conformed to aesthetic norms. This dialectical tension resulted in a kind of national manifestation of Matthew Arnold's Culture and Anarchy. Think: sweetness and light by

the fire of destruction. Castronovo obfuscates the distinction between theoretical Marxism and historical anarchism but otherwise it's a solid book. 8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. well researched By Seaboard Lit Prof The author collects a striking range of materials for this examination of ideas about art and aesthetics at the turn of the 20th century, from university dissertations to Charlie Chaplain and all kinds of texts and objects in between. It is refreshing to see a work of cultural studies scholarship that acknowledges and explores the progressive possibilities of aesthetics. On the other hand, the range of materials explored sometimes makes the arguments indistinct; there is a risk of defaulting to a "both/and" position that loses critical purchase. Did people believe aesthetic objects and experience could foster middle-class order (and tamp down working-class dissent), or did they fear/hope it could incite violence and open new solidarities? Well, both--but that answer is to be expected when "aesthetics" means flowers, sculpture, lynching, novels, bodily sensation, and esperanto. Nevertheless, there are sharp sub-arguments in this book and many fascinating discussions that offer a textured look at the period of about 1880-1930.

The photographer and reformer Jacob Riis once wrote, "I have seen an armful of daisies keep the peace of a block better than a policeman and his club." Riis was not alone in his belief that beauty could tame urban chaos, but are aesthetic experiences always a social good? Could aesthetics also inspire violent crime, working-class unrest, and racial murder? To answer these questions, Russ Castronovo turns to those who debated claims that art could democratize culture--civic reformers, anarchists, novelists, civil rights activists, and college professors--to reveal that beauty provides unexpected occasions for radical, even revolutionary, political thinking.

"Beautiful Democracy is an important book, reestablishing aesthetics as a vital issue both within the immediate field of American literature and far beyond it. It engages a long and complexly developed conversation on the politics of form, using rich archival material, ranging from college curricula, black print culture, and the history of film." - Wai Chee Dimock, Yale University

About the Author Russ Castronovo is the Jean Wall Bennett Professor of English and American Studies at the University of Wisconsin--Madison.