



**RANCIÈRE'S**

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**SENTIMENTS**

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DAVIDE PANAGIA

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DAVIDE PANAGIA

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## PREFACE

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THE MOTIVATIONS that bring one's attention to an author's modes of handling words, vistas, and dispositions are many. Literary and theoretical interests are hardly specifiable topics but rather a spectrum of sensibilities and affinities. In the case of reading Jacques Rancière's oeuvre, the matter of literary and theoretical interest is even more complicated. I encountered Rancière's work for the first time in 1993, as I was completing a master's thesis on theories of ideology, and as I proceeded to develop my interest in his writings I felt the need to cultivate a series of strategies and repositionings of my readerly expectations so as to deal with what I felt were persistent displacements. Simply put, I never felt that Rancière's corpus offered a theory of judgment, and at the time I believed a theoretical interest demanded the elaboration of criteria of judgment so that I could assess the nature of political and aesthetic value. How does Rancière judge the works he engages? Why does he judge them in that way? And how does he articulate the priority of judgment for politics? Not only did his writings not provide me with a theory of judgment, but they didn't even provide me with a reason as to why judgment matters. And that seemed incredibly disorienting: How is it that an author so committed to thinking the relation of aesthetics and politics doesn't divine a method of judgment, or even celebrate judgment as a political faculty?

The most controversial aspect of this book on Rancière's aesthetics and politics is my claim that Rancière is not a theorist of political judgment, that he does not defend a theory of judgment as crucial to political life, and that his intellectual ambitions are not committed to elaborating interpretive methods for understanding the meaning of aesthetic works or a hermeneutic system for the political interpretation of artistic objects. This isn't to say that he makes no judgments of his own, nor that he doesn't provide assessments for things like works of art or political events. But Rancière has no interest in articulating political practices as somehow enabled or emboldened by capacities for making judgments—reflective, determinative, or otherwise.

Instead his project is to articulate new forms of criticism that look to the workings of things. "The critic," he says, "is no longer a person who compares a work to a norm and says if it's well done or not. . . . The critic is the person who identifies what's happening."<sup>1</sup> And this, for him, means "constructing the sensible world to which the artwork belongs or which a political act makes possible."<sup>2</sup> This ambition for criticism puts him at odds with a substantial strain of Anglo-American political theory devoted to the celebration of judgment's freedom potential, whether that strain is identified with a defense of Kantian reflective judgment, as is evident with the Arendtian tradition of theorizing judgment, or is the parallel tradition that situates the power of the imagination as the source and site of continuity and innovation for the development of political ideas in the North Atlantic and Mediterranean territories, as is exemplified in the work of Sheldon Wolin.<sup>3</sup> And, finally, this puts him decidedly at variance with those normative theories of political judgment committed to the application of a concept, a norm, or a criterion for the assessment of the success or failure of an action.

This is not the same as saying that Rancière's political and aesthetic ambitions are to take the possibility of making judgments away from individual or collective actors. On the contrary, for Rancière politics comes with no qualifications—even the qualifying condition that individuals and collectivities ought to be capable of making judgments. It is to say, then, that for Rancière the elaboration or assertion of theories of judgments is not where politics happens. This is because the pronouncement of a judgment already presumes a system of criteria for participation in the scene of judgment's locution that, in the end, always appeals to the faculty of under-

standing. Simply put, an appeal to the politics of judgment is an appeal to comprehension, to a specific form of intelligence, that some may have and others won't: it is an appeal to self-reflexivity as an account of knowing and perceiving the world, an appeal that stands as a qualification for political participation. And for Rancière, such an intellectual qualification breeds inequality. This is no doubt aided by the fact that in French the expression *le bon sens* is used to designate the good sense, the agreeable sense, and common sense all at the same time. The linguistic conflation here projects the point that the pronouncement of a judgment will, in the end, always be regulative in some way.

Hence the centrality of scenes of “disagreement” in Rancière’s work, which, as I elaborate in the pages of this book, do not stage a dispute between competing understandings but rather stage *mis*understandings — or better, they are scenes of *missed* understandings: a talking at crossed purposes, if you will, where there is no sense that interlocutory coordination is a goal or even an ambition. One might say, in this regard, that Rancière is a thinker of incommensurability in the dictionary definition of the term (“having no common standard of measurement; not comparable in respect of magnitude or value”)<sup>4</sup> and that for him any and all forms of judgment are normative precisely because they demand our signing on to a prepolitical commitment to understanding that betrays a specific way of orienting one’s self to the world, a partition of the sensible.

Though this articulation of Rancière’s stance on judgment may seem surprising given that we are dealing with a thinker who has opened up an entire field for the study of aesthetics and politics, it shouldn’t be. Rancière’s intellectual and political career is punctuated by repeated instances of standing up to judgment’s authority — not just, that is, to the authority of judgments but to the normative stature of the concept of judgment in political life. We see this in Rancière’s published critiques of Althusser’s scientism, but we also see it in his own life as an activist and autodidact, where experiences have shaped his commitment to what he will call the ignorant method.<sup>5</sup> Biography and individual experience here matter because, as we know, Rancière’s intellectual work emerges from and is entangled with his personal history of political activism, his experiences studying in a highly segmented university system, his autodidacticism, and his having participated in a series of political movements ultimately judged unsuccessful.<sup>6</sup> Many of the ambitions that motivated an entire generation of students and



scholars of the 1960s and 1970s were thwarted despite furtive engagement and political activity, not to mention literary and intellectual productivity. The result was a subsequent series of denouncements that judged those political activities as unadulterated failures. What to do, then, with the fact that the task of judgment (regardless of its genre and mode of elaboration) is to identify and denounce political failures? What to do with the accusation of political failure and the subsequent dismissal and denunciation of one's political ideals? Rancière's answer is to treat the scene of critical judgment as radically insufficient and inegalitarian.

Rancière thus privileges the activity of partaking (i.e., *partager*) over the activity of judging. Partaking is his site for the exploration of an ecology of dispositions, sensibilities, and forms of participation by individuals, groups, objects, and histories who have been repeatedly judged as unentitled to participate because their assigned mode of acting in the world does not include the specific activity in question—whether that might be writing, filmmaking, political theorizing, or grassroots organizing. Given this, no amount of discussion, justification, elaboration, or validation will suffice to legitimate those agents in their forms of participation. This is because whatever reasons they might give, the simple fact of their doing what they are doing—the simple fact of their participation in an activity—is improper. This, at its core, is the formal scene repeatedly staged in Rancière's writings, and it is a scene that can't be addressed or resolved by an appeal to theories of political and aesthetic judgment.

In short, what distances Rancière from judgment-oriented political theory is his view that the game of validation is actually a retroactive description of a multitude of happenings occurring at one time and that it is unwarranted—from his perspective—to consider the plethora of activities in any space and time as either reducible or beholden to the expectations of responsiveness, as if politics happens because something like persuasion or reason-giving or acknowledgment is available to action. Rancière's actors don't have that sense of responsibility to responsiveness. They are part-takers. They act by taking part in an activity that doesn't belong to them and that they have not been tasked to do.<sup>7</sup> And they don't spend their time making or justifying arguments to one another, or to others, because their doings are improper and any reason they may give for their actions is *de facto* illegitimate.

I am reminded at this point of a passage from Linda Zerilli's *Feminism*

*and the Abyss of Freedom*, where she offers one of the most astute and compelling accounts of the politics of judgment. Placing Rancière alongside Cavell and Arendt, she affirms, “Aesthetic and political judgments, in which there is no concept to be applied, raise the question of criteria in an acute way, for saying what counts involves something other than the activity of subsumption. Unique to such judgments is that the subject does not recall the grounds upon which things can be rightly judged, but is called upon to elicit, in relation to specific interlocutors, the criteria appropriate to the particular at hand.”<sup>8</sup> Like Arendt (via Cavell), Zerilli wants to extend Kant’s claim (articulated in the *Critique of Judgment*) that aesthetic experience solicits a sense of freedom and that that sense of freedom arises from the experience of ungroundedness that emerges from one’s encounter with an object of taste. The absence of a concept that might be applied to that particular moment of experience with an object raises the possibility of a criteria-less condition of coexistence between individuals.<sup>9</sup> The result for Zerilli is a calling upon the subject of experience to be responsive to the experience by eliciting criteria that acknowledge the moment of ungroundedness. And this “being called upon to elicit criteria” is an important dimension of politics and—especially—of freedom.

No scenario could be further from Rancière’s orbit of thinking about aesthetics and politics. This, for several reasons. The first is that for Rancière, politics isn’t about being called upon to elicit criteria for counting; it is about the *making* count, regardless of whether or not that activity is persuasive to others. The condition of inequality—which is his basic starting point—is such that the giving of an account is pointless. Try as you might, if your voice is deemed noise, then any account you can give simply won’t count. In other words, Rancière is especially diffident of the dynamic whereby we are called upon to account for our experiences, our criteria, ourselves. This is because the language game in that scene of hailing already presupposes a set of conditions that individuals might have in common—most notably the fact that sounds coming out of my mouth are words rather than blabber, that providing criteria is a relevant fact about political behavior, that it is decorous to give reasons to others, that we must be responsive to one another in that way, and that we are capable of hearing the call of responsiveness and accountability. Second, Rancière’s political actor is not a subject (of language, of judgment, of experience, etc.). Participation in activities produces the possibility of the emergence of a par-

ticular coordination of subjectivity. But there is no subject that exists prior to participation in an activity.

Further to this, the hailing scenario implies a schema of power that assumes a specific form of intelligence as a qualification for participation. It doesn't matter, then, whether you think of judgment as the application of a concept that proves one's argument or whether you describe it as an activity of being "able to say how one came to an opinion, and for what reasons one formed it."<sup>10</sup> In either instance, what is being proscribed or required is a qualification of intelligibility of and for the world. On the judgment model, what precedes politics is an already agreed-upon commitment to the authority of responsiveness that compels one to have to provide reasons about one's forms of perceptibility and sensibility. In short, the problem for Rancière is pedagogical: theories of judgment presuppose a prepolitical authority that qualifies the dividing line of political participation. This goes directly counter to his "method of the ignorant" that he describes as "the opposite of the method that first provides a set of general determinations that function as causes and then illustrates the effects of these causes through a certain number of concrete cases. In the scene, the conditions are immanent to their being executed. This also means that the scene . . . is fundamentally anti-hierarchical. It's the 'object' that teaches us how to talk about it, how to deal with it."<sup>11</sup> The challenge of Rancière's writings is to engage a scenographic critical disposition committed to the arrangement and rearrangement of participatory forms instead of, or in the place of, a critical method that elaborates reasons for judgment and the conditions for their implementation.<sup>12</sup> His is a sensibility that attends to the specific arrangements of a situation and their reconfigurations so as to surmise not so much a radical political program that might be followed as the absolute limits of an occurrence such that politics is incipient.<sup>13</sup>

To appreciate this sentiment is to begin to see how compelling and unsettling an aesthetics of politics can be for political thinking. The ambition of this book is to tease out the distensions of such unmoorings.

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I HAVE BEEN STUDYING the writings of Jacques Rancière since graduate school. As a result I have accrued more occasions of acknowledgment than I care to (or even can) remember—acknowledgment of interlocutors, of critics, of those who dismissed the ideas and those who embraced them; acknowledgments of learning institutions, publications, and other spaces that have accommodated my interventions; and acknowledgments of texts, writings, resources, and works that have inspired or thwarted my own ideas. These are the acknowledgments of a life of learning wherein any gesture of responsiveness will inevitably seem like a contrivance. I have, where possible, tried to detail those debts in the text itself.

Some specific individuals come to mind. As I was completing my PhD, Bruno Bosteels invited me to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to meet Rancière, who was visiting his department at the time. A belated thank you to Bruno! Out of that first meeting many other events emerged, including co-publications with Rancière, conferences, and the like. But really, a friendship. And so, of course, I must thank Rancière for the times we have been able to share in various cities, from Cambridge to Baltimore, Milan, Paris, Peterborough, and LA. And I must also thank Danielle Rancière for the hospitality she shows me when I visit them in Paris.

As the reader will note, the work of Frances Ferguson creeps in throughout this book. Her work is central to my thinking about aesthetics, formalism, and politics, and I have benefited from an intellectual camaraderie with Frances for many years. For this I am truly grateful.

I wish to acknowledge all the students who have taken classes with me and have engaged my willingness to consider aesthetics and politics as conceivable together, who have worked through the syllabi I cobbled together, and who have pushed me in their own writings to consider other possible arrangements. Thank you, then, to Katharine Wolfe, Jo Anne Colson, Adrienne Richard, Liam Cole Young, Troy Bordun, Duane Rousselle, Matthew Hamilton, Summer Renault-Steele, Dilyana Mincheva, Duncan Stuart, Cody Trojan, Alex Diones, Anna Scheidt, John Branstetter, and Jared Loggins. I owe a debt to the institutional spaces where I have taught and that have given me more or less free rein to teach what I thought best. In this the Cultural Studies Department, the Center for the Study of Theory, Culture, and Politics, and the Politics Department at Trent University and the Department of Political Science at UCLA are exemplary.

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At a late point in the revision process one of the Duke reviewers revealed themselves to me. That person is Lori Marso, with whom I've been in conversation and critical exchange for many years. Lori pressed me in her inimitable way to make explicit what I thought obvious in the manuscript, and she invested much time and effort (beyond the traditional labors of a reviewer) in encouraging me to write the best work I could write. But more than this, even before this project ever began, Lori took me to task about my formalism, pressing my ideas and formulations, my commitments and sensibilities. In short, she made me appreciate the possibility of articulating a formalist aesthetics vis-à-vis a radical democratic political imaginary. And for that I am forever in her debt.

I dedicate this book to my mother, Maria Luisa Vercellotti, whose courageous choices in life taught me of the risks that came with traversing the dividing lines of immigration — back and forth, and back again — but also what hopes and opportunities await. She took it upon herself to provide my brother and me with a sentimental education, teaching us the value of persons, objects, places, and spaces that mesmerized. Those experiences stuck, but what really stuck was the importance of those experiences to my life.

## INTRODUCTION

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### The Manner of Impropriety

THIS BOOK is about Jacques Rancière's aesthetics and politics. It distinguishes itself from other works on or about Rancière's thought by giving emphasis to the simultaneity of aesthetics and politics in his oeuvre and to his styles of reading, writing, and thinking.<sup>1</sup> I am less committed to the application of his ideas than I am to describing the distensions and extensions of his literary operations. One of the central contentions of this book, then, is that stylistic arrangements matter to Rancière's aesthetic and political thought. I thus pay heed to his scenographic mode, which "consists in choosing a singularity whose conditions of possibility one tries to reconstitute by exploring all the networks of signification that weave around it."<sup>2</sup>

Throughout these pages I explore the networks of sensibilities that weave in and through Rancière's writings. Hence the title, *Rancière's Sentiments*. A central tenet in my recounting of Rancière's intellectual enterprise is that he is best considered a sentimental thinker and author, by which I mean he is the kind of thinker who believes that one's sensibilities and perceptibilities play a leading role in one's disposition to the world and to others, and that the work of politics is the work of arranging and adapting, if not transforming altogether, world-making sensibilities and perceptibilities. Hence the simultaneity of aesthetics and politics and his scenographic mode of reading, writing, and thinking.

The idea of scenographic arrangements and sentimental dispositions have political corollaries, namely solidarity, emancipation, equality, and participation. Rancière's aesthetics and politics address emergent collective formations that arise from the active participation of individuals and groups unauthorized to partake in those same activities that constitute their collectivity. The objects and persons he recounts in his books are all objects or persons who are not authorized to express sentiments, sensibilities, and actions but who nonetheless realign affective practices of time and space, of systems of value, and partake in the work of expressivity. The result is a transformational scenario of the conditions of participation and of how we think solidarity, emancipation, and equality. Such transformations are conceivable as akin to the ways artistic explorations of the limits of specific media imply not just a new instance of that medium but an entirely new medium. Thus with Rancière it's not just that the occupations he describes in any particular scene imply a new way of participating in solidarity or emancipation or equality; more radically such reconfigurations imply new forms of solidarity or emancipation or equality. In short, Rancière's aesthetics and politics offer us an affective pragmatics for a politics of equality and emancipation.<sup>3</sup>

The most readily familiar example of the transformative happenings of improper partakings is that of the worker-poets in nineteenth-century France whom Rancière recounts in *Proletarian Nights* and who took time at night to write rather than sleep. Such acts of literary production generated a series of disruptions to the extant regimes of sensibility, not the least of which is a realignment of the temporal regime that dictates who is and who is not entitled to leisure. Through their aesthetic activities the worker-poets "took back the time that was refused them by educating their perceptions and their thought in order to free themselves in the very exercise of everyday work, or by winning from nightly rest the time to discuss, write, compose verses, or develop philosophies."<sup>4</sup> These discrete forms of improper participation disrupted the circadian rhythms of labor's day. Through their acts of literarity, the nineteenth-century worker-poets quite literally *took time* they didn't have; theirs was an act of reappropriation of a propriety not assigned to them. They created a new medium of dayness, not simply a new instance of it. The result is a rearrangement of a series of sensibilities and perceptibilities that generate a novel mode of solidarity of persons,



places, times, and practices—a new staging, if you will, or a new partition of the sensible.

Politics for Rancière thus begins with an act of aesthetic impropriety, with a refiguring of the line that separates the sensible and the insensible. For him everything has the same potential power of sensorial appearance: anything whatsoever can appear or speak or sound. For this reason no partition between visible and invisible, audible and inaudible, is a necessary quality of the object or scene in question. Perceptibility is a condition of arrangement in the way that comprehension is a matter of composition. To be sure, lines of division do exist. But these lines are not natural objects in the world. And the work of emancipation and equality involves the aesthetic rearrangement of lines that, through discreet activities of tinkering, attests to their malleability.

Much of my exploration of Rancière's aesthetics and politics focuses on repeated moments in his writings that aim to put on display how aesthetic practices that transform perception and sensibility are also political practices of emancipation, solidarity, and participation, and vice versa. For what carries weight in these instances of aesthetic and political simultaneity is the capacity to arrange relations, and therefore worlds, anew regardless of one's assigned ways of being and doing. I consider such approaches characteristic of sensibility thinkers (from Francis Hutcheson and David Hume to Jane Austen, Laurence Sterne, and Gustave Flaubert, to William James, Walter Benjamin and Gilles Deleuze) who place less emphasis on specific accounts of the meaning of things (whether events, texts, or symbols) and focus instead on the centripetal and centrifugal forces that enable persons, places, and things to relate.<sup>5</sup> Rather than the affirmation of political concepts that require an unpacking of their propositional content, then, terms like *emancipation*, *solidarity*, and *participation* are—from a sentimental point of view—relational forms that dispose and arrange bodies and create frictions and fluidities for the transformation of existing arrangements.<sup>6</sup>

More to the point, I show the extent to which, for Rancière, these practices of transformation don't simply point us to new sources for thinking about traditional concepts of solidarity, equality, or emancipation. That is, it's not simply the case that Rancière is suggesting we can arrive at these concepts from more directions than we have hitherto imagined. It is the case that, given his own explorations of specific scenes of arrangement and

rearrangement, these ideas are markedly different: each scene of solidarity bespeaks a new experience of a ‘becoming with.’ Notably Rancière will emphasize the pragmatic dimension of these activities. Solidarity, emancipation, and equality aren’t concepts, in other words; they’re practices. And if we consider them practices, then each iteration of the practice is unique precisely because every scene manifests a specific configuration of forces and objects and persons. That is to say, the construction and reconstruction of the sensible world to which a specific activity and event of assembly-forming belongs means that we can’t speak of a general concept of solidarity or equality or emancipation. This is a fundamental point about aesthetic experience: it is born of the particular (not the general) and is resistant to the general application of a concept. Hence there are no general concepts of solidarity, emancipation, or equality. There are only scenes whose “conditions are immanent to their being executed.”<sup>7</sup>

Such formulations, and such ambitions, mark one of the reasons Rancière has frustrated many commentators (Peter Hallward is best among these) who can’t find in his oeuvre an instrumental rationality (or *praxis*) for political action,<sup>8</sup> while others attempt to devise supplements to his insights by articulating a theory of responsiveness as a complement to his provocations. In this respect Aletta Norval’s ambition to cultivate an ethos of aversive responsiveness that is neither presupposed nor predetermined in the scene, but emergent from it, is exemplary. “This includes, crucially,” she affirms, “an emphasis not only on the perspective of the articulators of a wrong, but on their addressee, those occupying privileged positions within the extant order. It requires attention to historical specificity and singularity, just as it calls for an emphasis on the politics of claim-making and the fragile collectives it brings into being.”<sup>9</sup> Now while such political ambitions are admirable extensions of Rancière’s work, and the theoretical sophistication of Norval’s position is limpid, the ambition here is still to demand some form of redemption beyond the imminence of the scene — an aspirational teleology that, as we shall see (especially in chapter 2), is denied by Rancière’s critique of the structure of authority in Aristotelian poetics. The most challenging fact about Rancière’s work is that through his mode of reading and writing — that is, the sentimental disposition evident in his arrangement of words, ideas, events, and objects on a page — the reader is compelled to have to come to terms with a radically alternate sensibility of what political thinking is. Or, better, what it is not: for Rancière, political

thinking is not in the business of producing “advice to princes” literature. His way of doing political thinking is not committed to the prescription of concepts, ideas, and norms for the purpose of a political program.

*Rancière’s Sentiments* thus enacts what I call a sentimental readerly mood in order to access the networked distributions of juxtapositions, allusions, and assertions that occupy his writings.<sup>10</sup> Allow me, then, to say something about the status of the sentimental in my approach to reading and in my descriptions of Rancière’s project. I follow James Chandler’s account of the sentimental and its proximity to the Roman rhetorical sense of *dispositio*, a term that refers to the arrangement, assembly, or indeed disposition of things—of the ordered arrangement of individual parts into a composite whole. “The sentimental revolution in literature that dates from the mid-eighteenth century is not just about new kinds and levels of feeling but also about ways of ordering works and organizing the worlds represented in them,” Chandler explains.<sup>11</sup> A sentimental mood is what Rancière invokes and deploys when affirming that politics is about the reconfiguration of the sensible fabric of an existing order.<sup>12</sup> The decorum attributed to a given way of sensing, or a common sense, would be one such arrangement. And so when Rancière names his political actant “the part of those who have no-part,”<sup>13</sup> he is naming an amorphous force that is at once immanent to but also extraneous to decorum. The no-parts are un-arranged and un-arrangeable according to existing dispositional regimes; they are not agreeable, to use a belletristic term of art. Politics for Rancière happens when the extant norms of how things fit can neither sustain nor explain the existence of discrete parts that don’t fit. Such fragments don’t account for an exclusion so much as an inability to register a relation with an established sense of ordering. Thus what is required is the articulation of a new disposition, arrangement, or networks of sensibilities. Such acts of rearticulation are what Rancière calls *partager*, and they are acts that refer to moments of radical mediation where the inequalities of qualification that enable access to politics are rendered indistinct.<sup>14</sup> Anyone can *partager* anything whatsoever, to rework Jacotot’s famous precept that “everything is in everything.”<sup>15</sup>

One of Rancière’s most compelling formulations of this aesthetic and political entanglement is when he speaks of “the measurelessness of the *mélange*” so as to register an amorphous form of solidarity devoid of any common principle that might act as a qualifying condition for participation

in the ensemble.<sup>16</sup> As we will see, he is troubled by the term *commons* and its coupling in recent democratic theory with a capacity for consensus as the necessary qualification for participation in democratic life. That is, Rancière is troubled by the tendency in recent democratic thought to reduce the commons (*le commun*) to the in-common.<sup>17</sup> The expectation of having to sign on to a common set of conditions in order to belong to and thus participate in various forms of political action is at the heart of consensus theories of democratic representation. At their most basic such accounts of political participation demand capacities like judgment and attention of their agents and presume that a capacity for judgment or a specific mode of attention (and thus a particular account of intelligence) is necessary for politics. But Rancière's formulation aims to affirm an immanent and amorphous political form that resists fitting into the available schema of accountability; it affirms that there is always more stuff in any coordination of time and space that any institutionalized form of counting can accommodate. Precisely because anything can make a sound or appear, the specification of capacities that condition what is or isn't perceptible is circumspect since such attempts limit what is and what is not a relevant appearance or sound—in the manner, say, that compression ratios for the transmission of conversations over a telephone line work in such a way as to minimize the amplitude of tone, voice, and other noises deemed unnecessary qualities of communicative experience so as to transmit a signal.<sup>18</sup>

What I have just described is the operation Rancière calls *dissensus*, which, as Frances Ferguson rightly notes, is “the basis for an abstract modeling of politics and has made politics susceptible to a schematic and spatial representation that involves minimal attention to specific political content or issues.”<sup>19</sup> Dissensus is not a term that determines either the content of a concept or the normative elements of a practice. Rather it registers the fact of indistinction as a force that troubles political ambitions of commonality: aesthetic works have no ground for legitimating their stature as works of art, and collective forms of being are devoid of final appeals to right action in and for the collectivity.<sup>20</sup> The impropriety of the discrete, unauthorized gesture—the *ignorant gestu*, if you will—marks the condition of possibility for democratic participation and equality.

To consider Rancière's sentiments is thus to consider his manners of impropriety. As I suggest throughout, Rancière is a contrarian and his oeuvre gives emphasis to ways in which propriety is undermined as a mode of

decorum or as a normative system for the assignment of persons in places and times. As I see it, Rancière's manner of impropriety is at the heart of his logic of emancipation to the extent that social and political emancipation for him occurs when the system of relations that determine concrete conditions of individual and collective existence are refigured. Hence the perpetual simultaneity of aesthetics and politics. As I noted in the preface to this book, the work of politics is first and foremost the work of dismantling the privilege of judgment as a model of social valuation and political participation. Judgments rely on criteria, and criteria are the currency of the entitled, that is, those whose pedagogical and social stature entitles them to make proclamations about the hierarchy of values. Thus the charm and attraction of a figure like Joseph Jacotot is not simply the charm and attraction of the eccentric populist.<sup>21</sup> Jacotot matters to Rancière in the same way that he mattered to the Communards of the Paris Commune: he matters because Jacotot develops an account of equality that refuses the propriety of judgment as a condition of political participation by refusing a priori common standards, including the common standard that to be an eligible participant in politics one must have a faculty of judgment.<sup>22</sup> And that refusal comes not with a declamation of social injustice but with participation in improper modes of doing and learning that show how there are no necessary ways of arranging things; that a pedagogical enlightenment can, itself, be improper; and that the coordination of a collectivity like a scholarly canon or a curriculum or any scenography of things can exist without having to adhere to accepted principles of organization. The form of propriety that privileges judgment as necessary to politics is simply that: a privilege of those who have already accepted the faculty of judgment as necessary to aesthetics and politics.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, the manner of impropriety that is at the heart of Rancière's sentiments affirms that there is no necessary order for the coordination of persons, places, and things — including an order of thinking that prioritizes reflexivity and judgment.

Consider in this context Rancière's emphasis on the "excess of words" in discussing the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century in *The Names of History* or the importance he'll give to the force of "disjunctive conjunction" in Jean-Luc Godard's montage techniques.<sup>24</sup> In both these moments (discussed extensively in chapter 3) Rancière wants to register how the disfiguration of a particular way of arranging things is enabled by pushing on the limits of accountability inherent in an existing order. In the

case of the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century the political order of rule that attached the power of speech to the inheritance of nobility was disrupted by the explosion of voices that rearranged the relation of words and things and, in doing so, made apparent that “no primeval legislator put words in harmony with things.”<sup>25</sup> Simply put, the order of authority that assigned a right of authorship (of words and deeds) was disfigured. Similarly, in the case of Godard’s montage techniques, the relation between cut and continuity that was the basis of narrative cinema is disfigured, the cut itself is put on display through the repetition of a temporal jump, and the aesthetic ambitions of Aristotelian dramaturgy are turned upside down.

I should note at this point that Aristotle’s *Poetics* is an important reference point for me in thinking about Rancière’s aesthetics and politics, and it is a reference I carried with me throughout the writing of this book. This is another point of connection between Rancière’s thought and the sentimental writers of the eighteenth century, who, for their part, did what they could to undermine an Aristotelian-Thomist notion of natural sociability.<sup>26</sup> The reason Aristotle’s *Poetics* matters to Rancière is because in that work Aristotle establishes a formal system of representation that requires the delimitation of discrete activities called “action” and their installment in their proper place along a linear plot sequence. In short, the *Poetics* is the archetype of an arrangement of perceptions and sensibilities that labors to produce an account of proper fit. And it does so by relying on a specific sense of temporal continuity grounded in the notion of narratocratic teleology. Anything that doesn’t fit within the system of arrangement of words and deeds that is Aristotelian dramaturgy simply does not count as representable.

Now it’s not simply the case that Rancière is critical of Aristotelian poetics, though that is abundantly verifiable throughout his oeuvre, as I show in chapter 2. More exactly, Aristotle’s hylomorphism, which aligns form and content, words and deeds, perceptions and sensibilities, is the ground of what Rancière will call the representative regime of the sensible, which, he claims, is also a normative regime of political access. The shift that Rancière’s work traces from the representative regime of the sensible to the aesthetic regime of the sensible coincides with the emergence of modern democracies in the West, and it is a shift that registers political emancipation as an undermining of the Aristotelian emphasis on proper

fit and right action. The part of those who have no-part, that is, the abstract political subject of Rancière's aesthetics and politics, stands as the occupational force of agency that registers improper capacities enacted by those persons and things who are not entitled to act.

This, in part, is why the category of the artisanal is ubiquitous throughout Rancière's writings. It is yet another site of his sentiment of impropriety. His writings are populated by aesthetic works made by individuals, from cobblers to parlor dancers, who blur the lines of official knowledge and skill. Or, better put, the artisanal (like the categories of the decorative, the ornamental, and the cinephile, also available throughout his oeuvre) is a category of uninitiated and autodidactic culture-making that Rancière places alongside official training in the arts (in the manner in which he places Jacotot's radical pedagogy alongside Althusser's scientism).

The artisanal is an important category not only for Rancière's own aesthetics and politics but for the historical and cultural trajectory that informs much of his thinking. As I noted, and as many others also have noted, Jacotot is an archetype for Rancière. But he was also an archetype for a nineteenth-century Parisian political imaginary that attempted to undermine the cultural imperialism of the time. As Kristin Ross shows, appeals to Jacotot were pervasive during the time of the Paris Commune, especially at its origin, when Gustave Courbet sent out a call to artists on April 6, 1871. The idea was to establish a system of total emancipation from the patronage of the Second Empire so as to liberate artists from social and political control. The initial call mentioned painters and sculptors as the artists in question (not surprisingly, given Courbet's predilections for the fine arts). But it was Eugène Pottier who took over the April 14 meeting and read out his manifesto that proclaimed a "rallying of all artistic intelligences."<sup>27</sup> This mattered because, as Adam Rifkin has shown, painting and sculpture had a privileged stature vis-à-vis censorship rights at the time.<sup>28</sup> Other arts, including the decorative and artisanal crafts, were easily susceptible to accusations of immorality in a way from which sculpture and painting were immune. Moreover sculptors and painters had a legal right to sign their names on their works; their propriety was their legal property.<sup>29</sup> But designers and drawers who participated in the production of statues by drawing up the prints for the foundries that would then produce the sculptures, for instance, didn't share that right and so could not claim economic benefit for their work. These artisanal workers did not, under

Rancière's terms, have a part in the system of artistic production. Their labor did not count; they were a part who had no-part in the recognized structures of artistic labor. The artisanal, in other words, is one of those aesthetic and political categories that, for Rancière, is an archetypal site of the inequality of practices and intelligences, of the affective pragmatics of impropriety. For what Pottier's manifesto ultimately declared was the impropriety of specialization.

Aesthetics for Rancière thus does not register a mode of inquiry that attempts to coordinate the social assignment of taste or the elaborations of qualifications and criteria for judging what is beautiful. Rather aesthetics names the affective pragmatics for the realignment of the dynamics of sensibility that render anything whatsoever or anyone whosoever sensible and thus perceptible. In short, the aesthetic regime of the sensible that Rancière traces as emergent parallel to the age of democratic revolutions of the long eighteenth century describes a force of equality for the appearance of words, deeds, sensibilities, and perceptibilities. This is why, in the end, aesthetics is always political and politics is always aesthetic: because any system of representation is a carrier of a normative set of assumptions about political inclusivity and exclusivity expressed in terms of who or what counts as worthy of perceptibility and sensibility. And given that the formal conditions of any system are such that it reaches its limit at the point when the propriety of its principles of organization fall short of establishing legitimacy of the system in perpetuity, then transformation is possible.

By determining the importance of aesthetics for politics, what Rancière traces is not the political importance of acts of judgments. A judgment is merely the representation of an experience that determines which objects are worthy of sense-making and intelligibility. His concerns lie elsewhere, in that inattentive moment that precedes judgment—a presubjective, but also preobjective, moment when the distensions of sensation have yet to assign value to specific persons, things, and events. This is the aesthetic moment of indistinction, which is also the political moment of equality, when anything whatsoever or anyone whosoever can count.<sup>30</sup> Indistinction undoes the Aristotelian aesthetico-political formula of decorum by making it so that anything and everything can make a perceptible difference because anything and everything can be a part since the extant conditions for partaking remain unassigned. Here the “measurelessness of the *mélange*”



marks an interval in judgment's urge to direct perception and attention, thereby enabling a transformation of the possible.<sup>31</sup>

In important and compelling ways, then, Rancière's aesthetics and politics are a provocation to alter contemporary critical discourse in the face of that discourse's commitment to the subject/object distinction. His critique of Althusser's theoreticism is one instant in a larger series of concerns he expresses regarding the status of criticism (literary, political, etc.) as a tool deployed to impose rather than eliminate inequalities. At its most basic, Rancière sees contemporary critical discourse, especially those scientific forms of cultural Marxist analysis that rely either on ideology critique or reification theory, as establishing epistemic qualifications for political emancipation, as if in order to be free, you must free yourself of your reveries and stop experiencing the world as you do so that you may know the world as it ought to be known. Freedom, in other words, can come only with knowing the world correctly. Rancière finds such critical moods in Althusser's theory of interpellation and the epistemic break hermeneutic for reading Marx, but he also considers these as available in a certain kind of critical stance that accepts the status of the epistemic as the basis for the formulation of political insights.<sup>32</sup> The sovereign stature of critical epistemology is, for Rancière, yet another dividing line that adjudicates legitimacy to certain forms of experience at the cost of others, producing scenarios wherein those who cannot render their experiences intelligibly simply don't count.

No doubt this provides a substantial challenge to our appreciation of Rancière's works, especially since scholarship in the social sciences and humanities is *de facto* oriented toward producing intelligibilities in the form of interpretations and understandings.<sup>33</sup> And it presents equally robust challenges to our appreciation of what critical thinking might be like, given how accustomed we are to enacting and teaching critical reflection in the Porphyrian mode of epistemic analysis. Throughout his oeuvre Rancière resists the privilege of the epistemic as both the root for and a branch of political thinking, and he does so by persistently offering up to readers scenes that can't be judged or interpreted but are nonetheless available to experience because they are affective in their transformation of sensibilities. He eschews the relentless predation of intelligibility via an equally relentless practice of description, aided by a prodigious deployment of

*style indirect libre* (free indirect discourse).<sup>34</sup> This is what is at stake in his scenographic mode and his affective pragmatics, that is, to develop a critical milieu that positions things that typically don't belong together alongside (rather than against) one another, generating multiple moments of unweaving, through improper forms of solidarity. Such is the nature of Rancière's aesthetics and politics.

Consider in this regard one last example, Rancière's scenography of "divided beauty" and his treatment in *Aisthesis* of Johann Winckelmann's discussion of the Belvedere Torso. With *Aisthesis* we are dealing explicitly with scenography as both mood and mode of political writing: Rancière's book is written in fourteen discrete scenes, and each scene is explicitly *not* meant to be illustrative of an idea. The aesthetic here does not operate as representative of anything. Unlike Martha Nussbaum, for instance, who will claim a purposiveness of the literary in terms of the propositional character of stylistics (as when she says that "any style makes, itself, a statement"),<sup>35</sup> Rancière denies such purposiveness to his scenographies. For him a scene is "the optical machine that shows us thought busy weaving together perceptions, affects, names and ideas, constituting the sensible community that these links create, and the intellectual community that makes such weaving thinkable. The scene captures concepts at work, in their relation to the new objects they seek to appropriate, old objects that they try to reconsider, and the patterns they build or transform to this end."<sup>36</sup> So, how is the Belvedere Torso scene arranged and what does it render thinkable?

It is a scene that displays the inactivity of a part that has no-part (see figure I.1). The object of the scene, and the scene's arrangement, posits a break in the sensible regime of representation through the advenience of the aesthetic regime of the sensible: the break breaks with the privilege of sculpture within the hierarchies of the arts. What we have in view with the Belvedere Torso is not simply a mutilated statue but a statue afflicted by the injuries of time that have transformed it into a found object, a ready-made. There is no grandeur of Greek Antiquity here but the most ruined of found ruins. And Rancière places this ruin alongside the rediscovery of Ancient Greek Art as if to ask, How much ruin is necessary before we must accept that there is no longer a work of art here?

The scene itself works as allegory for the finitude of the logic of representation in democratic systems of government. In order for democracy to happen, according to Rancière, the form, function, and status of repre-



FIG. 1.1 — The Belvedere Torso.  
Photo by Jean-Pol Grandmont /  
Wikimedia Commons.

sentation as the modes in and through which persons, events, and things are made sensible are overturned. This posits the at once paradoxical and counterintuitive idea that the rise of democracy announces the limits of representation itself. That is to say, democracy emerges when the hylomorphic relation of form and content in representation is no longer viable because the force of efficient causality that sustained the function of representation is dissolved. This centrifuge of relationality is a characteristic of the aesthetic regime of the sensible, which, it's worth repeating, coincides with those incipient democratic moments that disarticulate extant structures of and commitments to representation as the ground of political authority.

The scene of “divided beauty” regards a broken statue of an illustrious figure, known for his heroic labors, whose ability to act has been mutilated, as has our possibility of viewing him as the archetype of heroic agency. The Belvedere Torso is the statue of a Hercules with no head, arms, or legs, sitting, and not doing anything. It overturns the ambitions of Aristotelian dramaturgy because here we have an inactive, inert agent who is doing

nothing. Treatments of the statue up until Winckelmann's commentary (in his second volume of *The History of Art*, 1764) tried to persuade audiences that there was a purpose to the work, that the Belvedere Torso intended to show action of some kind, even of the contemplative variety. Some artist had even tried to complete the figure by imagining it as a sitting statue of a hero who had accomplished an action. Not only a hero, then, but a successful one too. In other words, some artistic and critical renderings attempted to recast the work as purposeful. But Winckelmann, Rancière tells us, refused to compensate for the lack that is the mutilated no-part, insisting, "There is no action to imagine."<sup>37</sup> Indeed the statue is pure inactivity because "a mutilated statue is not only a statue lacking parts. It is a representation of a body that cannot be appreciated any longer according to two main criteria used by the representative order: firstly, the harmony of proportions—that is to say, the congruence between parts and the whole; secondly, the expressivity—that is, the relation between visible form and a character—an identity, a feeling, a thought—that this visible form makes recognizable in unequivocal traits. It will be forever impossible to judge."<sup>38</sup>

The subject of this scene could just as easily be a political system. Indeed for Rancière it is, because the subject of the scene is not the statue itself but the collapse of an entire way of ordering the world, or, better put, the scene that has the mutilated statue as one of its parts portrays the dissensus of sensorial and perceptual organization. But more than that, the mutilated statue in Winckelmann's work is the site for the impossibility of judgment in the face of something that has no purpose, meaning, or interest. The Belvedere Torso doesn't simply lack parts; it lacks the necessary conditions for parts to relate to one another so as to count as either purposeful or meaningful—neither coherence nor contiguity, nor consensus nor proportion, nor purpose nor necessity, nor any other principle of cohesion suffices to warrant a judgment. The Belvedere Torso is, for Rancière, "radically insufficient," and this radical insufficiency "corresponds to the structural breakdown of a paradigm of artistic perfection."<sup>39</sup> In the face of the mutilated statue, the extant criteria for judging beauty—the harmony of forms and their expressive powers (i.e., the Aristotelian ideal of representation defined in terms of the correct relation of form and content)—are broken, disassembled, and made ineffectual. In one word: disinterested.<sup>40</sup>

And yet the object works. Somehow. It possesses an active element (or more than one?) imminent to the possibility of the scene. To paraphrase

Jane Bennett's political ecology of things, the scene of the Belvedere Torso makes available the statue's vitality intrinsic to its materiality.<sup>41</sup> It's not just the case that the part that has no-part is decidedly not inert because of (or as a function of) its brokenness. On the contrary, the no-partness is the condition of possibility for activity itself, an activity or vitality that has no purpose. With this in mind, one could go so far as to provoke this consideration: the conspicuousness of the Belvedere Torso is such that what is disclosed in the scene is the vitality of a nonsovereign collective agency beyond the ideal of a coordination of wills.<sup>42</sup>

Thus when I say that the mutilated statue is a part that has no-part, I mean to highlight the extent to which the aesthetic and the political are superimposed upon one another in Rancière's thought in very explicit ways, to the point of being genuinely indistinguishable. That's all very well and good. But we have yet to consider the effects of the scene and answer the question What does the scene do? The short answer is quite simple: the scene—and the scenographic per se—does nothing other than arrange and dispose elements. Rancière's writing, in other words, is not oriented toward the making of a justifiable argument whose purpose it is to give reasons to think or act in a particular way. It is instead a writing that puts on display an arrangement of perception and sensation. In this respect the connection that David Owen and Jonathan Havercroft make between Rancière's scenes and Wittgenstein's notion of aspect-dawning is entirely apropos. The force of that affinity lies in the fact that neither Rancière nor Wittgenstein requires "a substantive principle that can be stated independently and in advance of the particular disputes within which it is manifest."<sup>43</sup> I would extend this further, as I have elsewhere, and say that the sensible world of the manifest is the site for an aesthetics and politics.<sup>44</sup> That is to say, the scene renders remarkable an aspect in a manner akin to how Wittgenstein makes the remarkability of things an event, as when he says "Don't take it as a matter of course, but as a remarkable fact, that pictures and fictitious narratives give us pleasure, occupy our minds."<sup>45</sup> For both Rancière and Wittgenstein, what is remarkable (i.e., in both the sense of something being appreciable and what gives us pause to regard) is the vitality of the manifest.

The Belvedere Torso scene manifests a part that has no-part that interrupts an established way of organizing the proper relation between form and function, action and purpose. The representative regime of the sensible

that expects action to be heroic, expressive, and meaningful is torn apart by the advenience of a ready-made, found object that cannot express anything and does nothing but changes everything. (As we shall see in chapter 4, “doing nothing” is an important mode of aesthetic and political action for Rancière.) The scene of the Belvedere Torso displays an artifact becoming media. And Rancière projects this becoming media through discrete acts of assembly that collect individual parts in order to compose themselves as a scene: the statue, the piece of writing, the cultural milieu, the criteria of judgment, and the structures of experience that legitimate interest (i.e., interest in the object, interest in the beautiful, interest in value, etc.). The scene calls for a division of all those elements that, up until that point, had authored the propriety of judgment. It is, in short, a scene of impropriety that recalibrates the relations of discrete units that constitute a collectivity grounded in “division, not completion”;<sup>46</sup> to wit, the Belvedere Torso scene manifests a parsing of the sensible.

To the extent that politics is an activity of organization it is aesthetic because scenographic. And this is the way Rancière’s writings are simultaneously political and aesthetic. They show the transformations of the sensible through acts of articulations of solidarity that admit of perceptibilities and sensibilities that undo authoritative structures of belonging. Equality is the operation of undoing, or dissolving, the structures of necessity that authorize the employment of persons, places, and times; this is the operation of dissensus. It is in this manner of impropriety that I peruse throughout *Rancière’s Sentiments*.

In this book I try to show the interaction of all these dynamics so as to keep in play the simultaneity of Rancière’s aesthetics and politics. Most of the time I do this at the cost of justifying his arguments, defending his political conclusions, defining the meaning of his terms, or attesting to their applicability through either endorsement or example. My mode of reading focuses on distending dispositions rather than stacking propositions; I privilege description over prescription. This is the sense of “sentiment” I work with throughout the book that informs both my mode of reading Rancière’s works as well as my appreciation of the scenographic work of *dispositio* in his aesthetics and politics. The sentimental mode of reading I adopt thus seeks to articulate repeated combinations of the following insights about Rancière, implicit in my discussions above:

1. Everything and anything has the power of sensorial appearance.
2. The disposition or style or arrangement of things is of primary political importance.
3. Given 2, politics is aesthetic.
4. The site of political and aesthetic attention is the dividing line that relates persons, things, and events.
5. Meaning, explanation, intelligibility, and understanding are not the exclusive determinants of critical thinking in the social sciences and humanities.
6. Given 5, nonpurposiveness (or disinterest) is a real dimension of experience.

The first chapter, “Rancière’s Partager,” focuses on the variability of Rancière’s notion of *partager* that I take to be central to his aesthetics and politics. I begin by unpacking some conventional senses of the term *partager*, which in French signifies both sharing and dividing. It is a liminal term Rancière employs throughout his oeuvre, and though it’s convenient and accurate to call it a term, it is better to regard it as a sensibility that works to coordinate a whole series of critical practices and literary dispositions. So in the second part of chapter 1, I show how *partager* resonates throughout Rancière’s writings as mood. In doing so I propose to consider Rancière’s *partager* as the basis of his theory of radical mediation.<sup>47</sup>

In chapter 2, “Rancière’s Police Poetics,” I delve into Rancière’s style of thwarting relations. Here I am most explicit about the centrality of Aristotelian poetics as one of the principal sites of repeated engagement throughout Rancière’s oeuvre. Relying extensively on the work of Paul Ricoeur, I reconstruct the kind of reading of Aristotle to which Rancière is responding. There is a bigger story to tell here, which I don’t recount for reasons of space and fit, that regards the postwar French political and aesthetic reception of and response to Aristotelian hylomorphism in philosophy, literature, and cinema. But the basic moral of the story is this: Aristotelian poetics is the prototype of bourgeois decorum that exalts the privilege of being over becoming. More to the point, in chapter 2 I elaborate what I take to be Rancière’s most scandalous proposition: that political emancipation might have little to do with intellectual enlightenment.

In chapter 3, “Rancière’s Style,” I offer an extended discussion of the politics and aesthetics of Rancière’s deployment of *style indirect libre*, or

free indirect style. In this regard I focus on the role of Flaubert in Rancière's thinking and posit Flaubert as an alternative Jacotot. Also in this chapter I expand on Rancière's critique of intelligibility and understanding as fundamental to critical thinking. All of these combined elements labor to propose a way of doing critical work and reading theoretical writings as oriented to forms of relationality and assembly formation rather than treating works and concepts as objects of interpretation and application. I do this in order to give weight to Rancière's own aesthetic and political ambitions of eschewing the purposeful in both thought and experience. This chapter elaborates what an unpurposeful mode of critical inquiry might be like.

In the fourth and final chapter, "Rancière's Democratic Realism," I focus on the place of reverie in Rancière's oeuvre and how reverie is at the heart of his democratic realism. This is to say that I emphasize the work of dreaming in Rancière's affective pragmatics, and I do so by elaborating his critique of the Marxist tradition, especially that line of Marxist critical modernism that, he claims, has dismissed reverie as a real political practice. Throughout I focus on some scenes in *Aisthesis* and on the project of that book more generally. The emphasis of the chapter is on the role that leisure plays in Rancière's work as a way of undermining an extant partition of the sensible in modern life between those who are and those who are not entitled to take time.

Finally, a note on my writing: I try to write in such a way as to occupy the sentimental mood I find characteristic of Rancière's oeuvre. This means writing with an awareness of the work of distension and extension as well as fluidity and interconnectivity. At times this leads to repetition, not so much of insights as to formulations and points of emphases. In the conclusion of the book I attempt to collect those flows as well as possible in order to consider what an aesthetics of politics not rooted in the representation of experience through interpretation and judgment might look like.



## Preface

1. Jacques Rancière, *The Method of Equality: Interviews with Laurent Jeanpierre and Dork Zabunyan* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2016), 65.

2. Rancière, *The Method of Equality*, 66.

3. Ronald Beiner, *Political Judgment* (London: Methuen, 1983); Hannah Arendt and Ronald Beiner, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Kennan Ferguson, *The Politics of Judgment: Aesthetics, Identity, and Political Theory* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007); Hina Nazar, *Enlightened Sentiments: Judgment and Autonomy in the Age of Sensibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012); Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

4. "Incommensurable," *OED Online*, accessed October 11, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/93659#eid803570>.

5. Rancière, *The Method of Equality*, 67.

6. The most famous instance of such denunciations is expressed in the emergence of New French Thought. See especially Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Antihumanism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990). For Rancière's contributions to questions of political failure(s), see Jacques Rancière, *Staging the People: The Proletarian and His Double* (London: Verso, 2011) and *The Intellectual and His People: Staging the People*, vol. 2 (London: Verso, 2012).

7. Bonnie Honig adopts this position in her discussion of the "taking foreigner" that refers to practices of "enacting the redistribution of those powers, rights, and privileges that define a community and order it hierarchically." Bonnie Honig, *Democracy and the Foreigner* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 8. It is possible to read *Democracy and the Foreigner* as at once an extension of and engagement with Rancière's account of democratic participation.

8. Linda M. G. Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 141. In her most recent book, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), Zerilli develops a rich philosophical account of democratic critical judgment and its world-building possibilities. But though she deftly defends the position of a post-Kantian mode of Arendtian reflective judgment that is absent the demand of conceptual application, she nonetheless holds to the application of the concept of judgment for democratic life.

9. On this point Zerilli is close to Wolin's admonition against the theory application model, whereby "theories are likened to appliances which are 'plugged into' political life." Sheldon S. Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," *American Political Science Review* 63, no. 4 (1969): 1062–82, doi:10.1017/S000305540026320X.

10. Arendt and Beiner, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*.

11. Rancière, *The Method of Equality*, 67.

12. In this Rancière is in company with James Tully's articulation of practices of what he calls "diverse citizenship" and his distinction between a critical theory and a critical ethos. See James Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key*, vol. 1: *Democracy and Civic Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), esp. chapter 3, and *On Global Citizenship: James Tully in Dialogue* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), esp. 33–73.

13. Some may wish to constellate such a sensibility with modernism, as I do in my concluding remarks.

## Introduction

1. Oliver Davis, *Jacques Rancière* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2013); Oliver Davis, *Rancière Now* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2013); Samuel A. Chambers, *The Lessons of Rancière* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Joseph J. Tanke, *Jacques Rancière: An Introduction* (New York: A&C Black, 2011); Todd May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière: Creating Equality* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008); Todd May, *Contemporary Political Movements and the Thought of Jacques Rancière: Equality in Action* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts, *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Jean-Philippe Deranty, *Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Charles Bingham and Gert Biesta, *Jacques Rancière: Education, Truth, Emancipation* (New York: A&C Black, 2010).

2. Oliver Davis and Jacques Rancière, "On Aisthesis: An Interview," in Davis, *Rancière Now*, 202. Also see Peter Hallward, "Staging Equality," *New Left Review* 2, no. 37 (2006): 109–29.

3. I adapt the term *affective pragmatics* from Brian Massumi's discussion of micropolitics in *Politics of Affect* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2015), 41.
4. Jacques Rancière, *Proletarian Nights: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* (London: Verso, 2014), ix.
5. Tobias Menely, *The Animal Claim: Sensibility and the Creaturely Voice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Anthony Pagden, *The Enlightenment: And Why It Still Matters* (New York: Random House, 2013); James Chandler, *An Archaeology of Sympathy: The Sentimental Mode in Literature and Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).
6. On recent debates in formalist aesthetics, see Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); Sandra Macpherson, "A Little Formalism," *ELH* 82, no. 2 (2015): 385–405; Frances Ferguson, "Jane Austen, *Emma*, and the Impact of Form," *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (2000): 157–80.
7. Rancière, *The Method of Equality*, 67.
8. Hallward, "Staging Equality," esp. 126–29.
9. Aletta J. Norval, "'Writing a Name in the Sky': Rancière, Cavell, and the Possibility of Egalitarian Inscription," *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 4 (2012): 823.
10. Such an orientation to theoretical work finds inspiration from the works of Elisabeth Robin Anker, *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Chandler, *An Archaeology of Sympathy*; Anita Chari, *A Political Economy of the Senses: Neoliberalism, Reification, Critique* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Amanda Anderson, *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Cultures of Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); and especially Theo Davis, *Ornamental Aesthetics: The Poetry of Attending in Thoreau, Dickinson, and Whitman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
11. Chandler, *An Archaeology of Sympathy*, xiv.
12. As I noted in the preface, Rancière here is proximate to the account of "diverse citizenship" in James Tully, *On Global Citizenship: James Tully in Dialogue* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014) and *Public Philosophy in a New Key*, vol. 1: *Democracy and Civic Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Also noteworthy is Tully's distinction between a critical theory and a critical ethos. My own deployment of the language of sentiments that invokes "dispositions," "sensibilities," "moods," and the like is intended to expand on Tully's distinction in the hope of taking the insights further away from an identification (for good and bad) with ethical theories. Hence my privileging of the term *critical dispositions* rather than Tully's "critical ethos." On the characterological dimensions of theoretical inquiry, also see part 3: "Ethos and Argument" in Amanda Anderson's *The Way We Argue Now*.

13. Jacques Rancière, Rachel Bowlby, and Davide Panagia, "Ten Theses on Politics," *Theory and Event* 5, no. 3 (2001).
14. Richard Grusin, "Radical Mediation," *Critical Inquiry* 42, no. 1 (2015): 124–48.
15. Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).
16. Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott, reprint ed. (London: Verso, 2009), 42.
17. On the status of the commons in Rancière's thought, see Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (London: Verso, 2015), and Bruno Bosteels, "The Mexican Commune," in *Communism in the 21st Century*, ed. Shannon Brincat (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2014). See also Thierry Briault and Jacques Rancière, "Entretien avec Jacques Rancière sur la Plastique et le Sens Commun," *Club de Mediapart*, November 25, 2015, <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/thierry-briault/blog/251115/entretien-avec-jacques-Rancière-sur-la-plastique-et-le-sens-commun>. Here Rancière says this:

Si "partage du sensible" peut se traduire par "sens commun," c'est à condition de bien préciser le sens de la notion. "Sens commun" chez moi ne désigne jamais une faculté de juger ou une disposition à la communauté qui appartiendrait à tous. Rien à voir donc avec un principe de charité ou d'intercompréhension. . . . Sens commun pour moi désigne l'ensemble des relations qui déterminent un monde sensible commun en déterminant, en même temps que ce qui apparaît, la façon dont nous pouvons le nommer et le penser. Cela désigne les conditions de notre expérience, c'est-à-dire à la fois la texture de ce que nous éprouvons et la capacité que nous avons de l'éprouver selon la place que nous occupons dans ce monde commun. Non pas une capacité partagée par tous mais le réseau de relations entre l'être, le perceptible, le dicible, le pensable et le faisable qui détermine les capacités des uns et des autres. . . . Il est une structure qui, à la fois, nous donne en partage un monde commun "sensé" et détermine notre capacité ou incapacité à produire du sens et à participer au commun. Le sens commun, en ce sens, est toujours *un* sens commun déterminé. Ce qui veut dire aussi qu'il n'est pas "la" structure à laquelle tout sujet est assujetti, qu'il est transformable et transformé par les actes qui tissent d'autres sens communs dans les interstices du partage dominant du sensible et éventuellement contre lui. Il est constamment tissé et retissé par les actes qui mettent des corps en rapport les uns aux autres dans des espaces et des temps et selon des protocoles de parole particuliers. Il est tissé et retissé par le choix de mettre ensemble des mots, des formes, des images, des gestes, des mouvements, des sons, des temps, des espaces.

[If partition of the sensible is potentially translatable as "common sense" it may be so if we specify a precise sense of the notion. "Common sense" for me does not refer to a faculty of judgment or a disposition that belongs to the entirety of a community. It

has nothing to do, in other words, with a notion of sympathy or inter-comprehension. . . . Common sense for me designates an ensemble of relations that coordinate a sensible world in common by establishing, at the same time as what appears, the manner in which what appears may be named and thought. This designates the conditions of our experience, which is to say at the same time the fabric of sensations and our capacities to sense according to where we are in relation to a common. Common sense is not a capacity shared by all but a network of relations between being, the perceptible, the sayable, the thinkable, the do-able that determines the capacities of everyone and everything in this weave of relations. It is a structure that at once provides a sharing of a sensible world in common and determines our capacities or incapacities of generating a sense and participation of an in-common. A common sense, in this sense, is always a particular determined sense. Which also means that there is not a single structure of subjectification for subjects, that any structure is alterable and transformed by acts that weave other senses in common within the interstices of a dominant partition of the sensible and, eventually, in contest with the dominant mode of partitioning. A common sense is consistently woven and rewoven by capacities that place bodies in relation to each other within spatiotemporal coordinates, and according to protocols of specific words. It is woven and rewoven by the willingness to assemble words, forms, images, gestures, movements, sounds, temporalities, and spatialities. (My translation)]

18. See Jonathan Sterne's discussion of perceptual technics in his *MP3: The Meaning of a Format* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

19. Frances Ferguson, "Our I. A. Richards Moment: The Machine and Its Adjustments," in *Theory Aside*, ed. Jason Potts and Daniel Stout (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2014), 262.

20. Davide Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

21. Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.

22. Ross, *Communal Luxury*, 46–47.

23. Rancière here is close to William Connolly and Connolly's treatment of the desire to punish. "The desire to punish," Connolly affirms, "crystallizes at that point where the shocking, vicious character of a case blocks inquiry into its conditions, repressing examination of uncertainties and ambiguities pervading the very concepts through which it is judged. Where astonishment terminates inquiry, the element of revenge is consolidated." William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 47. Though Connolly is not writing about Rancière, or about judgment per se, it is notable that there is a shared sensibility here regarding the disavowal of a sensation of shock vis-à-vis an experience, and how that dissensual experience, when felt within a judgment scenario, closes off the very possibility of inquiry. In parallel ways

both Rancière and Connolly wish to move away from a system of judgment that denies the productive political work of dissensus.

24. Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 41.

25. Rancière, *The Names of History*.

26. Pagden, *The Enlightenment*, 55.

27. Ross, *Communal Luxury*, 53.

28. Adrian Rifkin, "Cultural Movement and the Paris Commune," *Art History* 2, no. 2 (1979): 201–20.

29. Ross, *Communal Luxury*, 52.

30. Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation*, 21–44.

31. Jacques Lévy, Juliette Rennes, and David Zerbib, "Jacques Rancière: 'Les territoires de la pensée partagée,'" *Revue électronique des sciences humaines et sociales*, January 8, 2007, <http://www.espacestemp.net/articles/jacques-Rancière-les-territoires-de-la-pensee-partagee/>.

32. Jacques Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011); Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2014).

33. Charles Taylor, "Interpretations and the Sciences of Man," in *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 2: *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 15–57; Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*, ed. James Tully (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1988), 29–67.

34. *Style indirect libre*, or "free indirect discourse" (as it is often translated in English), is a style of prose writing associated with the rise of the novel and especially associated with the works of Austen and Flaubert. It is characterized by the ability of the novel's narrator to give voice to the thoughts, feelings, ideas, and sensations of characters without the need or benefit of attributional prefaces like "he surmised" or "she thought to herself." Its effects are many, but most notable is free indirect style's ability to create an intimacy with the characters, as if we are privy to their mental states without having to be forewarned about them. But also important is its ability to render the authority of words indistinct so that the status of the authorial voice is displaced, making it difficult, if not at times impossible, to distinguish among author, narrator, and character. This latter point is of central importance to the tradition of French political theory from which Rancière draws. Though it is beyond the scope of this book, the availability and repeated engagement with Flaubert in twentieth-century French philosophy helps explain the strain of French literary and political thinking that challenges the authority of the author, as in

Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author" in *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Macmillan, 1978) and Michel Foucault's "What Is an Author?" in *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984). Free indirect style thus allows for the possibility of displacing authorial intention in speech and language. For an excellent discussion of this, see especially Frances Ferguson's essay "Now It's Personal: D. A. Miller and Too-Close Reading," *Critical Inquiry* 41, no. 3 (2015): 521–40.

35. Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 7. Another way of stating the distinction between Nussbaum's sense of the literature's purposiveness and Rancière's sense of the aesthetic's unpurposiveness is that Rancière does not sign on to Nussbaum's Aristotelian hylomorphism that imagines an appropriate relation between form and content, as Nussbaum explains: "There may then be certain plausible views about the nature of the relevant portions of human life that cannot be housed within that form without generating a peculiar implicit contradiction" (7). For Nussbaum's project, content and form are bound in necessary ways, but it is precisely that relation of necessity that Rancière's scenographies undo to engender "a peculiar implicit contradiction."

36. Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, trans. Zakir Paul (London: Verso, 2013), xi.

37. Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 2.

38. Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 3–4.

39. Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 6.

40. On disinterest in Rancière see Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation*, 21–45.

41. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 3.

42. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008); Sharon R. Krause, *Freedom beyond Sovereignty: Reconstructing Liberal Individualism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). With this provocation I am not suggesting an indebtedness on the part of Rancière either to a Heideggerian discussion of conspicuousness and worlding nor to a substantially modified account of liberal individualism (Krause). What I am suggesting is that there is an elective affinity of sensibilities in this assembly of authors and ideas that is at once compelling and productive for our appreciation of Rancière's scenographic assemblages.

43. Jonathan Havercroft and David Owen, "Soul-Blindness, Police Orders and Black Lives Matter: Wittgenstein, Cavell, and Rancière," *Political Theory*, July 11, 2016, 11.

44. Davide Panagia, *Ten Theses for an Aesthetics of Politics*, Forerunners: Ideas First (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

45. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed. (New York: Pearson, 1973), section 524, p. 142e.
46. Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 11.
47. Grusin, "Radical Mediation," 124–48.

## Chapter 1. Rancière's Partager

1. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Rousseau: "The Discourses" and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 161.
2. Jacques Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, ed. Andrew Parker, trans. Corinne Oster and John Drury (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 225.
3. The contemporary writer who has done the most work on radical mediation and method in contemporary political thought is Michael Shapiro. See especially *Studies in Trans-Disciplinary Method: After the Aesthetic Turn* (New York: Routledge, 2013).
4. *Partager* has been translated as "division," "distribution," and "partition," as in the division, distribution, or partition of the sensible. Though all of these translations are accurate, none of them accurately attends to the distensive nature of the aesthetico-political operation of radical mediation that *partager* does. Thus, to avoid constant specifications of its distensions I retain the French throughout.
5. J. David Bolter and Richard A. Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).
6. Richard Grusin, "Radical Mediation," *Critical Inquiry* 42, no. 1 (2015): 124–48.
7. Grusin, "Radical Mediation," 129.
8. Jacques Rancière, "Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization," *October* 61 (1992): 61.
9. Rancière, "Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization," 61.
10. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence, reprint ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984); Martin Jay, "'The Aesthetic Ideology' as Ideology; or, What Does It Mean to Aestheticize Politics?," *Cultural Critique*, no. 21 (1992): 41–61; Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 1991).
11. Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).
12. Rancière, "Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization," 61. Crucial here is Rancière's