



# Understanding Rancière, Understanding Modernism

Edited by **Patrick M. Bray**

B L O O M S B U R Y

# Understanding Rancière, Understanding Modernism

## Understanding Philosophy, Understanding Modernism

The aim of each volume in **Understanding Philosophy, Understanding Modernism** is to understand a philosophical thinker more fully through literary and cultural modernism and consequently to understand literary modernism better through a key philosophical figure. In this way, the series also rethinks the limits of modernism, calling attention to lacunae in modernist studies and sometimes in the philosophical work under examination.

Series Editors:

Paul Ardoïn, S. E. Gontarski, and Laci Mattison

Volumes in the Series:

*Understanding Bergson, Understanding Modernism*  
edited by Paul Ardoïn, S. E. Gontarski, and Laci Mattison

*Understanding Deleuze, Understanding Modernism*  
edited by Paul Ardoïn, S. E. Gontarski, and Laci Mattison

*Understanding Wittgenstein, Understanding Modernism*  
edited by Anat Matar

*Understanding Foucault, Understanding Modernism*  
edited by David Scott

*Understanding Rancière, Understanding Modernism* (forthcoming)  
edited by Patrick M. Bray

*Understanding James, Understanding Modernism* (forthcoming)  
edited by David H. Evans

*Understanding Cavell, Understanding Modernism* (forthcoming)  
edited by Paola Marrati

*Understanding Blanchot, Understanding Modernism* (forthcoming)  
edited by Christopher Langlois

*Understanding Merleau-Ponty, Understanding Modernism* (forthcoming)  
edited by Ariane Mildenberg

*Understanding Derrida, Understanding Modernism* (forthcoming)  
edited by Jean-Michel Rabaté

# Understanding Rancière, Understanding Modernism

Edited by  
Patrick M. Bray

Bloomsbury Academic  
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Inc

B L O O M S B U R Y  
NEW YORK • LONDON • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

**Bloomsbury Academic**

An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Inc

1385 Broadway  
New York  
NY 10018  
USA

50 Bedford Square  
London  
WC1B 3DP  
UK

**www.bloomsbury.com**

**BLOOMSBURY and the Diana logo are trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc**

First published 2017

© Patrick M. Bray and Contributors, 2017

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

No responsibility for loss caused to any individual or organization acting on or refraining from action as a result of the material in this publication can be accepted by Bloomsbury or the editor.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Bray, Patrick M. (Patrick Maxwell), editor.

Title: Understanding Rancière, understanding modernism / edited by Patrick M. Bray.

Description: New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. | Series: Understanding philosophy, understanding modernism | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016038805 | ISBN 9781501311383 (hardback) |  
ISBN 9781501311390 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Rancière, Jacques—Criticism and interpretation. | Modernism (Literature)—History and criticism. | BISAC: LITERARY CRITICISM / European / French. | LITERARY CRITICISM / Semiotics & Theory.

Classification: LCC B2430.R274 U53 2017 | DDC 194—dc23 LC record available at  
<https://lccn.loc.gov/2016038805>

ISBN: HB: 978-1-5013-1138-3  
ePub: 978-1-5013-1139-0  
ePDF: 978-1-5013-1137-6

Series: Understanding Philosophy, Understanding Modernism

Cover image © Getty Images

Typeset by Newgen Knowledge Works (P) Ltd., Chennai, India

# Contents

Notes on Contributors	vii
Series Preface	xi
List of Abbreviations	xiii
Introduction: Toward a New Aesthetic Theory <i>Patrick M. Bray</i>	1
Part 1 Conceptualizing Rancière	
1 <i>The Hatred of Democracy</i> and “The Democratic Torrent”: Rancière’s Micropolitics <i>Emily Apter</i>	11
2 Rancière’s Nineteenth Century: Equality and Recognition in <i>Nights of Labor</i> <i>Bettina Lerner</i>	33
3 <i>The Ignorant Schoolmaster</i> : Intellectual Emancipation in Circular Form <i>Leon Sachs</i>	51
4 Literature as Rancièrian Film Fable <i>Margaret C. Flinn</i>	73
5 <i>The Emancipated Spectator</i> and Modernism <i>Cary Hollinshead-Strick</i>	83
6 <i>Mute Speech</i> : The Silence of Literature in Rancière’s Aesthetic Paradigm <i>Giuseppina Mecchia</i>	97
7 <i>Le fil perdu</i> : The Music of the Indistinct <i>David F. Bell</i>	111
Part 2 Rancière and Aesthetics	
8 A Method of Equality: Rancière, Jokes, and Their Relation to <i>They Drive by Night</i> <i>Tom Conley</i>	127
9 Feminist Art: Disrupting and Consolidating the Police Order <i>Tina Chanter</i>	147
10 Rancière and Proust: Two Temptations <i>Suzanne Guerlac</i>	161

11	The Conception of the Will in Rancière's Aesthetic Regime of the Arts: Pathos and Reverie in Stendhal, Ibsen, and Freud	<i>Alison Ross</i>	179
12	Dreaming Bourdieu Away: Rancière and the Reinvented Habitus	<i>Marina van Zuylén</i>	199
13	Rethinking the Aesthetics/Politics Nexus in Latin America	<i>Silvia L. López</i>	219
Part 3 Glossary of Key Terms			
	Distribution of the Sensible	<i>Daniel Brant</i>	235
	Fable	<i>Audrey Évrard</i>	239
	Intellectual Equality	<i>Zakir Paul</i>	245
	Mute Speech	<i>Alison James</i>	251
	Regimes of Art	<i>Robert St. Clair</i>	255
Part 4 Interview with Jacques Rancière			
	Understanding Modernism, Reconfiguring Disciplinarity: Interview with Jacques Rancière on May 11, 2015	<i>Translated from the French by Patrick M. Bray</i>	263
	Index		291

## Notes on Contributors

**Patrick M. Bray** is associate professor of French at Ohio State University. He has published on critical theory, space in literature, as well as film. He is the coeditor with Phillip John Usher of a volume of *L'Esprit Créateur* called "Building the Louvre: Architectures of Politics and Art." His book, *The Novel Map: Space and Subjectivity in Nineteenth-Century French Fiction* was published by Northwestern University Press in 2013.

**Emily Apter** is professor of comparative literature and French at New York University. She is the editor of the book series Translation/Transnation at Princeton University Press. She is the author of numerous books including *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (Verso, 2013) and *Feminizing the Fetish: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Obsession in Turn-of-the-Century France* (Cornell University Press, 1991). She has a book forthcoming from Verso Press entitled *Politics small p: Towards a Theory of Unexceptional Politics*.

**David F. Bell** is professor of French studies at Duke University and serves as the coeditor of *SubStance*. His work examines critical theory and narrative, as well as science and technology. His books include *Real Time: Accelerating Narrative from Balzac to Zola* (University of Illinois Press, 2004) and *Circumstances: Chance in the Literary Text* (University of Nebraska Press 1993).

**Daniel Brant** earned a PhD in French from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He has published articles on Francophone Caribbean literature and culture from Guadeloupe and Haiti.

**Tina Chanter** is head of the School of Humanities at Kingston University London. She has published widely on questions of aesthetics, politics, sexuality, race, and class in film, literature, and philosophy. She is the author of *Whose Antigone? The Tragic Marginalization of Slavery* (SUNY Albany Press, 2011) and *The Picture of Abjection: Film, Fetish, and the Nature of Difference* (Indiana University Press, 2008).

**Tom Conley** is Abbott Lawrence Lowell professor of romance studies and a professor of visual and environmental studies at Harvard University. He is the



author of seven books on the intersection of literature and the graphic imagination, on French film, on cartography, and on Renaissance culture.

**Audrey Évrard** is assistant professor of French at Fordham University. She is currently working on a book manuscript, provisionally titled *Precarious Militancy: French Social Documentary Cinema (1995–2015)*. She has published several articles and essays on French documentary cinema in *Contemporary French Civilization*, *Jump Cut*, *Working USA*, and more recently, *Nottingham French Studies*. She also contributed to *Directory of World Cinema: France* (eds T. Palmer and C. Michael; London: Intellect, 2013) and *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-imperialism* (eds. E. Ness and Z. Cope; London: Palgrave, 2015).

**Margaret C. Flinn** is associate professor French at Ohio State University. She has published on visual culture in France from the interwar period to the present. Her book *The Social Architecture of French Cinema, 1929–39* was published by Liverpool University Press in 2014.

**Suzanne Guerlac** is professor of French at UC Berkeley. Her work explores cultural ideologies and articulations between literature and philosophy. She is the author of several books including *Thinking in Time: An Introduction to Henri Bergson* (Cornell University Press, 2006) and *Literary Polemics: Batallie, Sartre, Valéry, Breton* (Stanford University Press, 1997) (cowinner of the Modern Language Associations Scaglione Prize).

**Cary Hollinshead-Strick** is assistant professor of comparative literature and English at the American University of Paris. She specializes in the history of performance, theater, and media.

**Alison James** is associate professor at the University of Chicago. Her first book, *Constraining Chance* (Northwestern University Press, 2009), studied the tensions between chance and determinism in the works of Georges Perec. Her second book project examines the documentary imagination in French literature.

**Bettina Lerner** is assistant professor of French and deputy chair of the Department of Foreign Languages & Literatures at City College CUNY. Her work focuses on popular culture in nineteenth-century France. Her book, *The Invention of the Popular: Literature and Culture in Nineteenth-Century France*, is forthcoming from Ashgate.

**Silvia L. López** is professor in the Department of Spanish and the Program in Latin American Studies at Carleton College. Her work focuses on literary and social modernity in Latin America as well as cultural criticism. She has published articles on Adorno, Lukács, Benjamin, Garcia Canclini, Schwarz, Dalton, and Argueta.

**Giuseppina Mecchia** is associate professor of French and Italian at the University of Pittsburgh. She has published on several topics related to French and Italian modernity, critical theory, and space and time.

**Zakir Paul** received his PhD in comparative literature from Princeton University in 2015. He is currently completing a book manuscript on the category of “intelligence” in twentieth-century French literature and thought, with a special focus on Proust, Bergson, and Valéry. He has translated and introduced Maurice Blanchot’s *Political Writings 1953–1993* (Fordham University Press, 2010) and Jacques Rancière’s *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art* (Verso Books, 2013). His work has appeared in *L’Esprit créateur*, *The Germanic Review*, *The Journal of Modern Literature*, and *Critical Inquiry*. He teaches at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

**Alison Ross** is Australian Research Council future fellow in philosophy at Monash University. Her work examines philosophical aesthetics, theories of sensation, and theories of media. She is the author of *Walter Benjamin’s Concept of the Image* (Routledge, 2014) and *The Aesthetic Paths of Philosophy: Presentation in Kant, Heidegger, Lacoue-Labarthe, and Nancy* (Stanford University Press, 2007), as well as a coedited collection of essays, with Jean-Philippe Deranty, *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene* (Continuum, 2012).

**Leon Sachs** is associate professor of French at the University of Kentucky. Specializing in the history and culture of education, he is the author of *The Pedagogical Imagination: The Republican Legacy in 21st Century French Literature and Film* (University of Nebraska Press, 2014).

**Robert St. Clair** is assistant professor of French at Dartmouth College. An expert of French poetry, he has published on Baudelaire, Rimbaud, the French Commune, Comics, and laziness. He is currently finishing a book on the body and utopia in Rimbaud’s poetry.

**Marina van Zuylen** is professor of French and comparative literature at Bard College. She is the author of *Difficulty as an Aesthetic Principle* (G. Narr, 1994) and *Monomania: The Flight from Everyday Life in Literature and Art* (Cornell, 2005). Her latest book is *The Plenitude of Distraction* (Sequence Press, 2016). She has published articles on aesthetics, literature and medicine, philosophy, and literature. Her essays have praised some of the most beleaguered modern maladies—boredom, fatigue, distraction, idleness—and analyzed snobbery, dissociative disorders, and obsessive compulsive aesthetics.

## Series Preface

Sometime in the late twentieth century, modernism, like philosophy itself, underwent something of an unmooring from (at least) linear literary history, in favor of the multi-perspectival history implicit in “new historicism” or varieties of “presentism,” say. Amid current reassessments of modernism and modernity, critics have posited various “new” or alternative modernisms—postcolonial, cosmopolitan, transatlantic, transnational, geomodernism, or even “bad” modernisms. In doing so, they have reassessed not only modernism as a category, but also, more broadly, they have rethought epistemology and ontology, aesthetics, metaphysics, materialism, history, and being itself, opening possibilities of rethinking not only which texts we read as modernist, but also how we read those texts.

Much of this new conversation constitutes something of a critique of the periodization of modernism or modernist studies in favor of modernism as mode (or mode of production) or concept. *Understanding Philosophy, Understanding Modernism* situates itself amid the plurality of discourses, offering collections focused on single key philosophical thinkers influential both to the moment of modernism and to our current understanding of that moment’s genealogy, archeology, and becomings. Such critiques of modernism(s) and modernity afford opportunities to rethink and reassess the overlaps, folds, interrelationships, interleavings, or cross-pollinations of modernism and philosophy. Our goals in each volume of the series are to understand literary modernism better through philosophy as we also better understand a philosopher through literary modernism.

The first two volumes of the series, those on Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze, have established a tripartite structure that serves to offer both accessibility to the philosopher’s principle texts and to current new research. Each volume opens with a section focused on “conceptualizing” the philosopher through close readings of seminal texts in the thinker’s *oeuvre*. A second section, on aesthetics, maps connections between modernist works and the philosophical figure, often surveying key modernist trends and shedding new light on authors and texts. The final section of each volume serves as an extended glossary of principal

terms in the philosopher's work, each treated at length, allowing a fuller engagement with and examination of the many, sometimes contradictory ways terms are deployed. The series is thus designed both to introduce philosophers and to rethink their relationship to modernist studies, revising our understandings of both modernism and philosophy, and offering resources that will be of use across disciplines, from philosophy, theory, and literature, to religion, the visual and performing arts, and often to the sciences as well.

# List of Abbreviations

Selected books by Jacques Rancière in English translation

A	Jacques Rancière, <i>Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art</i> , trans. Zakir Paul (New York: Verso, 2013).
AD	<i>Aesthetics and Its Discontents</i> , trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Polity, 2009).
AL	<i>Althusser's Lesson</i> , trans. Emiliano Battista (London and New York: Continuum, 2011).
AU	<i>The Aesthetic Unconscious</i> , trans. Debra Keates and James Swenson (Cambridge UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009).
D	<i>Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics</i> (London: Continuum, 2010).
DPP	<i>Disagreement. Politics and Philosophy</i> , trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
ES	<i>The Emancipated Spectator</i> , trans. Gregory Elliott (New York and London: Verso Books, 2009).
FF	<i>Film Fables</i> , trans. Emiliano Battista (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006).
FI	<i>The Future of the Image</i> , trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2007).
FW	<i>The Flesh of Words</i> , trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).
HD	<i>The Hatred of Democracy</i> , trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Verso, 2006).
IC	<i>The Intervals of Cinema</i> , trans. John Howe (London and New York: Verso, 2014).
IS	<i>The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation</i> , trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).
MPS	<i>Mallarmé: The Politics of the Siren</i> , trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2011).
MS	<i>Mute Speech</i> , trans. James Swenson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).
NH	<i>The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge</i> , trans. Hassan Melehy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

- NL *Nights of Labor: The Worker's Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, trans. John Drury (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).
- OS *On the Shores of Politics*, trans. Liz Heron (London and New York: Verso, 1995).
- PA *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004).
- PL *The Politics of Literature*, trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2011).
- PN *Proletarian Nights: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, trans. John Drury (New York: Verso, 2012).
- PP *The Philosopher and His Poor*, trans. John Drury, Corinne Oster, and Andrew Parker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
- SP *Staging the People. The Proletarian and His Double*, trans. David Fernbach (London and New York: Verso, 2011).

Selected books by Jacques Rancière in French

- AS *Aisthesis, Scènes du régime esthétique de l'art* (Paris: Galilée, 2011).
- CM *La Chair des mots: politiques de l'écriture* (Paris: Galilée, 1998).
- CV *Courts Voyages au pays du peuple* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1990).
- DI *Le Destin des images* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2003).
- EC *Les Écarts du cinéma* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2011).
- FC *La Fable cinématographique* (Paris: Seuil, 2001).
- FP *Le Fil perdu: Essais sur la fiction moderne* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2014).
- HDF *La haine de la démocratie* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2005).
- IE *L'Inconscient esthétique* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001).
- LA *La Leçon d'Althusser* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2011).
- LPO *La Parole ouvrière. 1830/1851*, eds. Jacques Rancière and Alain Faure (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1976).
- ME *Malaise dans l'esthétique* (Paris: Galilée, 2004).
- MH *Les Mots de l'histoire. Essais de poétique du savoir* (Paris: Seuil, 1992).
- MI *Le Maître ignorant. Cinq leçons sur l'émancipation intellectuelle* (Paris: Fayard, 1987).
- MPI *Moments Politiques: Interventions 1977–2009*, trans. Mary Foster (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2014).
- MPP *La Mésentente: politique et philosophie* (Paris: Galilée, 1995).

- MTE *La Méthode de l'égalité*, eds. Laurent Jeanpierre and Dork Zabunyan (Paris: Éditions Bayard, 2012).
- NP *La Nuit des prolétaires. Archives du rêve ouvrier* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1981).
- PLF *Politique de la littérature* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2007).
- PM *La parole muette: Essai sur les contradictions de la littérature* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 1998).
- PO *La Parole ouvrière*, Jacques Rancière and Alain Faure (Paris: la Fabrique, 2007).
- PPF *Le philosophe et ses pauvres* (Paris: Flammarion, 2007).
- PS *Le Partage du sensible: politique et esthétique* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2000).
- SE *Le Spectateur émancipé* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2008).
- TP *Et tant pis pour les gens fatigués: entretiens* (Paris: Editions Amsterdam, 2009).





# Introduction: Toward a New Aesthetic Theory

Patrick M. Bray

The contemporary French philosopher Jacques Rancière has become over the past two decades one of the most influential voices in literary, art historical, and film criticism. His work reexamines the divisions that have defined our understanding of modernity, such as those between art and politics, representation and abstraction, and literature and philosophy. Working across these divisions, he engages the historical roots of modernism at the end of the eighteenth century, uncovering forgotten texts in the archive that trouble our notions of intellectual history.

Rancière's story is that of a generation that Hélène Cixous called "les incorruptibles" (after the revolutionary leader Robespierre), placing him in dialogue with and as a successor to Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, and others.<sup>1</sup> As a young student at the prestigious École Normale Supérieure, Rancière contributed, along with Étienne Balibar, to Louis Althusser's *Reading Capital* in 1965. The outsized aspirations and deceptions of May 1968 led Rancière and many others to question the paradoxical elitism of academic Marxism, and in 1974 he published a repudiation of Althusser, *Althusser's Lesson*. Rancière's simple yet formidable revelation was that Marxist theorists, indeed nearly all philosophers, claim to speak for the people as their natural representatives, but in so doing they deny the very equality they supposedly espouse. Like Michel Foucault before him, Rancière returned to the archives to find the traces of popular philosophy and literature, silenced by their benevolent spokesmen. What he discovered were workers who aspired to be poets and philosophers, seeking emancipation through writing. In a series of groundbreaking works in the 1980s that would constitute the foundation of his thought, Rancière told the history of early-nineteenth-century workers'

<sup>1</sup> Cited by Jacques Derrida in *Apprendre à vivre enfin* (Paris: Galilée, 2005), 28.

writing in the nights after their long working day was through (*The Nights of Labor*), he exposed self-serving efforts by philosophers to speak for the poor (*The Philosopher and His Poor*), and he rediscovered the radical pedagogy of nineteenth-century thinker Joseph Jacotot, who proposed that through language everyone possesses in Rancière's words an "equality of intelligence" (*The Ignorant Schoolmaster*). Intelligence is not granted by a master; it must be affirmed as given in a politics of emancipation.

In the 1990s, Rancière's works turned toward aesthetic concerns in what would appear superficially to be a move away from his preoccupations with equality and politics. However his innovative notion of the "partage du sensible" (often translated as the "distribution of the sensible") goes to the heart of his thinking on equality by proposing that what politics and art have in common is the distribution and division of the perceptible world. Going back to Plato, Rancière shows how the division of society into distinct classes excludes the masses from governing, since they are said not to have the time to engage in serious matters of state—politics is a challenge to this division and an affirmation of equality. Art, as the creative deployment of artifice, plays with our perception of the world to invite us to see ourselves in different roles, upsetting the "natural order" of society. One of Rancière's recurring arguments is that while art and politics act in similar ways, they are not the same thing—there is an art to politics, and a politics to art, but art is not politics. The antidemocratic views of a Flaubert, for example, express themselves in one of the most democratic novels of the nineteenth-century, *Madame Bovary*, where any subject is deemed worthy of novelistic representation, even an unexceptional provincial adulteress.

Since 2000, Rancière has published one or two books a year, expanding his range to include contemporary art, comparative literature, and film studies. His radical philosophy in these works can be seen as a critique and a continuation of the work of Gilles Deleuze. For Rancière, Deleuze's emphasis on "becoming imperceptible" subsumes the tensions between politics and art. Yet in his several influential books on cinema, Rancière takes Deleuze's monumental *Cinéma I* and *Cinéma II* as his point of departure, using Deleuze's division of cinema into two distinct periods as a way to explore what is common to each, namely, the distance between, on the one hand, the "dream" or the "fable" that cinema could finally be the art of pure sensation, freed from the constraints of plot and representation and, on the other, cinema as the quintessential art of storytelling. Similarly, his notion of the "regimes of art" adds important nuance

and elaboration in the realm of art to Michel Foucault's concept of *épistémès*, while also putting into question the distinction between the modern and the postmodern.

Part I of *Understanding Rancière, Understanding Modernism* conceptualizes Rancière's thought through a series of chapters that perform close readings of his major works. This section provides an introduction to Rancière for the uninitiated as well as a deeper understanding of the stakes involved in his writing. Through the lens of a single work, each chapter investigates Rancière's thinking within the nexus of modern aesthetics, politics, and philosophy. But as Rancière says repeatedly, inspired by the radical nineteenth-century education reformer Jacotot, "everything is in everything"; an analysis of any one of Rancière's texts inevitably touches on issues central to his thought present in all of his works. In this first section, the touchstone works that come up most often are the seminal *Nights of Labor* and *Mute Speech*, but also his most recent work, *Le fil perdu*, which has not yet appeared in English. Rancière's books which fit more classically within the "critical theory" rubric (at least in Anglophone countries), *Aisthesis* or *La Mésestente*, for example, provide valuable conceptual frameworks; however, the contributors find Rancière's unique contribution in his engagement with singular problems and texts and not in sweeping theoretical abstractions. As Rancière says in the interview for this volume, "It is a singularity that makes an object [of study] and a problem appear at the price of exploding the borders between disciplines."

The chapters in this first section find in Rancière refreshingly new ways of talking about politics, art, film, and literature, but their analyses rely on other discourses in order to open up his texts. In so doing they mount historical and disciplinary critiques of his work, pushing back against the way Rancière strives to work outside of historical, literary historical, art historical, and philosophical frameworks. His work is therefore not easily reconcilable with any disciplinary strictures. Rancière's thought liberates us from conventional ways of understanding, but also leaves work for scholars to contextualize his thought historically and conceptually, allowing for an interdisciplinary critique.

The first three chapters look at Rancière's more directly political works, specifically how democracy and equality are framed in radically new ways. Emily Apter's masterful analysis of *Hatred of Democracy* explores in depth Rancière's obscure intertextual reference to Hippolyte Taine's *Graindorge*. She reveals how, embedded in the term "the democratic torrent," we discover a complex genealogy of Rancière's micropolitics, dependent on the notion of "milieu." Bettina Lerner studies Rancière's writings on nineteenth-century workers, especially

*Nights of Labor*, to understand how his archival unearthing of workers emancipatory struggles informs his more recent work on politics and aesthetics. While noting Rancière's critique of philosophical ventriloquizing, which erases the voices of the poor, Lerner discerns one of Rancière's own blindspots, notably, how his attention to singular events and his suspicion of historical and identitarian narratives risks glossing over voices that emerge within a community. Leon Sachs's chapter places one of Rancière's key books, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, into its historical and national context, that of the debates around Republican education in France in the 1980s. As Sachs argues, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* is not only an historical account of an obscure nineteenth-century education reformer or a treatise on intellectual equality, but it is also a political intervention directed against certain dominant trends in French (and American) pedagogical thinking that go to the heart of our own teaching practice.

The next four chapters of the first section investigate Rancière's dynamic thinking about aesthetics, whether in film, theater, or literature. What emerges in these chapters, and will have an echo in the other sections of this volume, is Rancière's reliance on literature as a model for all aesthetic works. Far from reducing everything to literature, Rancière's emphasis on literature stems from the link between the written word and emancipation; as Sachs shows in his chapter, in the Rancière/Jacotot pedagogical model, "nothing is hidden behind the written page." Margaret Flinn's chapter argues that, while Rancière's writing on film, specifically in *Film Fables*, proposes that cinema (both the films themselves and film theorists) projects itself as coming "after literature" and thus supplanting literature, Rancière's own thought ends up proposing literature as film's privileged Other. Cary Hollinshead-Strick analyzes Rancière's reconceptualization of the spectator in relation to modernism. Extending his assertions of intellectual equality from *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* to the idea of spectatorship, Rancière affirms that the modern spectator (of theater, film, photography, sculpture, etc.) is perfectly capable of understanding and translating what she sees. As Hollinshead-Strick asserts, for Rancière, spectators "connect movements and images into figures that create new kinds of space." Giuseppina Mecchia takes a critical approach to Rancière's most influential book on literature, *Mute Speech*, by tracing its unacknowledged philosophical debts and historical leaps of faith. For Mecchia, Rancière's alternative thinking of the event (which she places in dialogue with Badiou) and his rejection of conventional models of literary history, while problematic from a disciplinary point of view, explain his appeal to contemporary scholarship in that his work repoliticizes aesthetics. David Bell's

chapter, which rounds out the first section, gives an account of Rancière's most recent work on aesthetics, *Le fil perdu*. Rancière claims that modern literature after the French Revolution has abandoned Aristotle's logic of narrative based on a beginning, a middle, and an end; this simple aesthetic shift belies a far-reaching transformation not only in how actions and words can be represented, but also with regard to social hierarchy and the notion of equality. Rancière proceeds, convincingly, to question the *doxa* of contemporary literary theory, overturning Barthes's "l'effet de réel," Benjamin's "shock of modernity," and Lukács' theory of the novel. Yet for all its ambition to change how we think about literature, *Le fil perdu*, as Bell argues, limits its scope to well-known modern French and English authors, leaving the reader to wonder what the implications are outside of Europe and outside the confines of literature.

Part II of *Understanding Rancière, Understanding Modernism* opens up Rancière's work in relation to modernism in the broadest sense, encompassing modernist fiction, film, and artworks as well as the notion of modernism itself. These chapters explore the ramifications and limits of Rancière's radical philosophy in the various disciplines he encounters, from film theory (Conley), to feminism (Chanter), to sociology (van Zuylén). The contributors in this section think alongside Rancière across several of his works, using the critical tools he has discovered (and which the chapters in Part I studied) to raise further questions about aesthetics and politics. Both Suzanne Guerlac in this section and Giuseppina Mecchia in the first section demonstrate that Rancière "needs literature" for his politics of emancipation. As he says in our interview, literature has taught him that "writing is actually a research process, a process of invention. In writing, it isn't enough to simply find the form that expresses ideas about the world; it is essentially about finding world experiences through trying to write sentences." As these chapters show, understanding Rancière, understanding modernism, requires an engagement with texts on the level of writing.

The first chapter in this section, by Tom Conley, evokes Rancière's "troubled" cinephilia in order to read Raoul Walsh's *They Drive by Night*, a film whose political aesthetic turns around jokes that stage class tensions and sexual tensions. Conley's chapter explores how Rancière's *politique de l'amateur* (as opposed to the New Wave's "auteur" politics) allows for a reframing of the economics and politics of the Hollywood studio system. Tina Chanter's chapter considers the benefits and consequences of Rancière's aesthetic theories for feminism and critical race theory (which echo in important ways Bettina Lerner's concluding

remarks). While his idea of the “distribution of the sensible” offers the promise of an artistic disruption of the police order, Chanter shows how artistic practice itself has shifted debates on consensus, diversity, and inclusivity, and she argues for opening up a dialogue between Rancière’s thought and feminism. Suzanne Guerlac shows the brilliant insights and also the missed opportunities in Rancière’s writing on Marcel Proust, a writer who upsets notions of modernist literature, autobiography, memory, and space and time. Guerlac argues that, while Rancière’s discussion of literature as contradiction has liberated Proust studies from some recent critiques that challenge the intellectual integrity of Proust’s novel, Rancière’s focus on words leads him to miss the originality of Proustian time, which ironically shares much with Rancière’s idea of a “democratic temporality.” Alison Ross juxtaposes theories of the will from Romantic aesthetic philosophers who inform Rancière’s theory with narrative depictions of pathos and reverie in Stendhal, Ibsen, and Freud as they are studied in Rancière’s recent work. Ross takes on questions of ontology and ethics, often elided in Rancière’s work, and relates them to the “emancipatory capacity of the aesthetic regime.” In Marina van Zuylen’s chapter, Rancière’s antagonism to Bourdieu’s sociology, in particular the idea of “habitus,” is shown to be a useful foil in debates around equality and determinism. Yet as van Zuylen shows, Bourdieu and Rancière share more than just a preoccupation with social hierarchy, but also a long-term, if largely unrecognized, interest in ways of defying social expectations. The final chapter, by Silvia López, follows Rancière’s influence in Latin America, especially in relation to the resistance to decades of failed neoliberal policies. López, in ways that recall Tina Chanter’s chapter, examines in particular the use of forgotten public spaces by artists who seek new forms of citizenship through dissensus.

Part III consists of a glossary of Rancière’s key terms, in the form of short chapters. As independent works, each glossary entry resonates with and expands upon the longer texts of the first two parts. Although Rancière rejects systems and elaborate theoretical jargon, a few key terms anchor his texts and serve as critical tools: distribution of the sensible, fable, intellectual equality, mute speech, and the regimes of art. While not an easy read in French, Rancière nevertheless relies on the richness of the French language for many of his conceptual inventions. These terms have not always passed into English with all of their original clarity. The short chapters in this section not only define these terms, but delve into their complexity and their development in Rancière’s works.

The fourth part of *Understanding Rancière, Understanding Modernism* consists of the translation of an extended interview I conducted with Rancière in May 2015. In it, he reflects on the context of his thinking on modernism and on the disciplinary conjunctures that have dominated work in the humanities. The interview can serve as a succinct introduction to Rancière's thought and an illustration of the breadth of his work, ranging from philosophy, French crime fiction, Soviet film, and German design to contemporary museums and political interventions.

The contributors to *Understanding Rancière, Understanding Modernism* engage with the multiplicity of Rancière's thought through close readings of his texts, through comparative readings with other philosophers, and through an engagement with modernist works of art and literature. Unlike many of his illustrious predecessors in French theory, Rancière's thought does not constitute a definable system, and does not seek out devout followers; "Rancièrian" is hard to pronounce, which I take as a good sign. Instead of a system, Rancière proceeds by undoing or refashioning categories of thought, daring us to draw conclusions even while his own writing remains schematic. Over the course of forty years and over thirty books, however, certain patterns emerge, certain questions return, allowing us to see a new, more political aspect of what we have come to call modernity.





## Part One

# Conceptualizing Rancière



# *The Hatred of Democracy* and “The Democratic Torrent”: Rancière’s Micropolitics

Emily Apter

In the concluding pages of his 2005 broadside, *The Hatred of Democracy* [*La haine de la démocratie*], written during Chirac’s presidency and Sarkozy’s short stint as minister of finance, in the lead-up to the global financial crisis, Jacques Rancière would draw a parallel between “intellectuals today” and the authoritarian elites in Second Empire France who wage all-out war against “the democratic torrent”<sup>1</sup>:

To understand what democracy means is to hear the struggle that is at stake in the word: not simply the tones of anger and scorn with which it can be imbued but, more profoundly, the slippages and reversals of meaning that it authorizes, or that one authorizes oneself to make with regard to it. When, in the middle of the manifestations of heightening inequality, our intellectuals become indignant about the havoc wreaked by equality, they exploit a trick that is not new. Already in the nineteenth century, whether under the *monarchie censitaire* or under the authoritarian Empire, the elites of official France—of France reduced to two hundred thousand men, or subject to laws and decrees restricting individual and public liberties—were alarmed at the “democratic torrent” that prevailed in society. Banned in public life, they saw democracy triumphing in cheap fabrics, public transport, boating, open-air painting, the new behavior of young women,

<sup>1</sup> The expression “torrent demographics” appears in quotations without a specific reference in Rancière’s footnote. It would seem to have been drawn from Second Empire political literature. In Taine’s *Graindorge* we find an allusion to “cette prodigieuse multitude mouvante” (that prodigious multitude in motion), which approximates the “democratic torrent.” It appears in a chapter titled “Society,” which links democratization not only to certain pastimes but also to the explosion of advertising. Hippolyte Taine, *Vie et Opinions de Monsieur Frédéric-Thomas Graindorge* (Paris: Hachette, 1959), 300. In addition to the explicit reference to Taine as a source for political attitudes toward democracy in Second Empire France, Rancière also cites Armand de Pontmartin’s musings on “democracy in literature,” a critique of *Madame Bovary* published in the *Nouvelles Causeries du samedi* in 1860.

and the new turns of phrase of writers. However, they were not innovative in this regard either. The pairing of democracy viewed both as a rigid form of government and as a permissive form of society is the original mode in which the hatred of democracy was rationalized by Plato himself.<sup>2</sup>

Rancière identifies democracy with “a paradoxical condition of politics” associated with the “egalitarian contingency that underpins the inegalitarian contingency itself” (HD 94). One can take this formula literally as a reference to the suspicion and contempt of elites toward the leveling effects of mass culture and the widening of the franchise, but it really has to do with the supposition that democracy ungrounds itself by spreading democratization. For Rancière, micropolitical practices in the domains of art, leisure, and work furnish conditions of redistributed power even as they engender new forms of policing and censorship. Thus a process of making-equal is inseparable from inegalitarianism and vice versa: such paradoxes hold as the essence of “politics” in all its unexceptional guises.

*The Hatred of Democracy* makes scant reference to literature and unlike other works of Rancière (*La parole muette. Essai sur les contradictions de la littérature* (1998) [*Mute Speech: Literature, Critical Theory, and Politics*]; *Le Partage du sensible: Esthétique et Politique* (2000) [*The Politics of Aesthetics*]; *Politique de la littérature* (2007) [*Politics of Literature*]; *Aisthesis. Scènes du régime esthétique de l’art* (2011) [*Aisthesis. Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*]; and *Le fil perdu* (2014) [*The Lost Thread*]), it offers no concerted politics of the aesthetic. But there is one figure who surfaces as a literary point of reference in Rancière’s suggestive parallels between Second Empire society and neoliberal Europe in the early 2000s, and that is Hippolyte Taine. Those popular pastimes, leisure pursuits, and objects of consumption, those fleeting figures of a mass society that both offend and energize the conservative state, alluded to by Rancière, are in Taine tallied on the basis of an anthology of Second Empire attitudes and mores in the 1867 novel *Notes sur Paris: Vie et opinions de Frédéric-Thomas Graindorge*: “Pour un bon florilège de ces themes, voir *Vie et opinions* ...”<sup>3</sup> Rancière footnotes this obscure work in a perfunctory yet intriguing way. Indeed, Taine’s novel works as a key to understanding the “democratic torrent,” to rethinking paradoxes of egalitarianism, to addressing the difficulty of defining

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Hatred of Democracy*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Verso, 2006), 93–94. Further references to this translation will appear in the text abbreviated as HD.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Rancière, *La haine de la démocratie* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2005), 102.

what politics *is* (prior to or exceeding its naming by political institutions) or *is not*. (And for Rancière, as we know, politics is certainly *not* democracy, where democracy is the name for a presumptive legal equality valid only for those parts of the people who are counted.)<sup>4</sup>

Taine, in Rancière's reading, elucidates the messy, hatable contents of democracy—which, in embodying a reckless adherence to "limitless growth," ultimately brings about the recession of political space. As Rancière underscores in *Hatred of Democracy*:

The "government of anybody and everybody" is bound to attract the hatred of all those who are entitled to govern men by their birth, wealth, or science. Today it is bound to attract this hatred more radically than ever, since the social power of wealth no longer tolerates any restrictions on its limitless growth, and each day its mechanisms become more closely articulated to those of State action. . . . State power and the power of wealth tendentially unite in a sole expert management of monetary and population flows. Together they combine their efforts to reduce the spaces of politics. (94–95)

Rancière, in fact, never delivers the hypothetical piece he might have written on Taine's *Graindorge*, one which might have approached the text as a sociology of obstructions to true democracy, as a study in the evacuated foundation of democracy, or as an exemplary document of the capitalization of social life and the curtailment of political space.<sup>5</sup> But I will argue that *Graindorge* links the "democratic torrent" to Rancière's aesthetics of milieu in ways that activate Taine's own theory of milieu in its full philological development. In this way, activating Rancière's scattered and parsimonious allusions to Taine, I find material for extending the reach of his own *aesthetic* politics.

*Graindorge* is a document of the "democratic torrent" which by and large failed to endear him to his readers. This comes through in an exchange with

<sup>4</sup> Given Rancière's redefinition of the terms "le politique," "la politique," and "la police," it is important to keep in mind the ambiguity in English, since depending on how we translate "politics" back into the Rancièrian lexicon, "politics" might be inherent to democracy or antithetical to it. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement. Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 61–62.

<sup>5</sup> Rancière holds to the belief that the figment of "democratic man," going back to Plato, is the product of an operation . . . that aims to ward off an impropriety pertaining to the very principle of politics. The entertaining sociology of a people comprised of carefree consumers, obstructed streets and inverted social roles wards off the presentiment of a more profound evil: that the unnameable democracy is not a form of society refractory to good government and adapted to the lowest common denominator, but the very principle of politics, the principle that institutes politics in founding 'good' government on its own absence of foundation. (HD 37–38)

Sainte-Beuve. Taine had written him an anxious letter acknowledging his influence on this experiment in “moral physiology,” and requesting his frank assessment when the work came out in book form (it was originally published as a series of articles with illustrations by Isidore Planat in *La Vie parisienne*).<sup>6</sup> Sainte-Beuve responded with fair warning that the book would not be well received because it was too judgmental and harsh in its depictions of social types. “Why, he asks, are you in such a hurry to translate your impressions into written notes, and these notes into laws?”<sup>7</sup>

*Graindorge* answers that question in its probe into the laws of the market at the dawn of a new era of finance capital. Perhaps even more than Balzac, Flaubert, or Marx, Taine devised a language for describing distribution networks of material artifacts and determinations of the market value of goods and social advantage. According to Jonathan Dewald, from Graindorge’s “sharp interest in contemporary material life” we learn

the cost of women’s dresses, their fabrics and colors, how marriage proposals were made and what went through the minds of the parties to them, how much income the different levels of Paris society required. . . . Graindorge’s opinions (in addition to appreciation for material comfort) also display a radical detachment from conventional moralities and a readiness to acknowledge the harsh realities of modern life. *Notes sur Paris* can be read as exemplifying the mode of intellectual life that the Magny group represented; one that combined engagement with contemporary social life, philosophical materialism, and freedom from institutional and pious moralizing.<sup>8</sup>

Taine, one could say, prefigured the theoretical moment in which we find ourselves now: one of philosophical materialism attuned to the financialization of everything. His literary experiment records how new forms of finance capital generate a milieu that permeates all modes of existence.

Graindorge is an uprooted Frenchman, educated in Britain and Germany, and enriched in America, where he made a fortune by investing in pork and oil and profiting from slave labor. His character is a mystery, and must be painstakingly

<sup>6</sup> Letter of Hippolyte Taine to Sainte-Beuve, June 15, 1867, in *Hippolyte Taine: Sa Vie et Sa Correspondance*, Tome III (Paris: Hachette, 1904), 339.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 341. Letter of Sainte-Beuve to Taine, July 16, 1867.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Dewald, *Lost Worlds: The Emergence of French Social History, 1815–1970* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 25. See also Anne Green, *Changing France: Literature and Material Culture in the Second Empire* (London: Anthem Press, 2011); and Sudhir Hazareesingh, *From Subject to Citizen: The Second Empire and the Emergence of Modern French Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

reconstructed after his death through techniques of forensic autopsy.<sup>9</sup> In this task, “Taine,” his eponymous executor, relies on one M. Marcelin (director of *La Vie parisienne*), who had “several views taken of the apartment of the deceased by a photographer in repute. By the aid of several portraits he had obtained the principal traits of the person and costume of M. Graindorge” (NP v). The photographic evidence turns up strange artifacts—a stuffed crocodile in the boudoir, a portrait of his black servant Sam—but they are mere trace-elements of eccentricities belied by the character’s bland self-presentation: “His phrases in themselves were mere *statements of facts*, dull, and very precise” (NP vii; emphasis in the original). Graindorge personifies matter-of-factness, facing his own death with practical equanimity: “The conclusion you omit to draw is, that it would be better for me if I were dead; that is my opinion too,” and applying the same attitude to social engineering (NP viii). One of his aims in coming to Paris is the creation of a matchmaking service modeled on the Bourse. “Is not marriage an affair? Is anything else considered in it but proper proportions? Are not these proportions values, capable of rise and fall, of valuation and tariff? Do we not say, a young girl of one hundred thousand francs? Are not life-situations, a handsome figure, a chance of promotion, articles of merchandise quoted at five, then, twenty, fifty thousand francs, deliverable only against equal value?” (NP 174). The business plan for a “universal matrimonial agency” (a kind of match.com, Facebook, and Grindr *avant la lettre*) is outlined in chapter XIV “A Proposition, New, and Suited to the Tendencies of Modern Civilization, Designed to Assure the Happiness of Households and to Establish on a Sound Basis a First-Class Institution Hitherto Left to Arbitrary Direction and to Chance” (NP 176, 169). Graindorge’s *astuce* is to fine-tune the marriage market by applying the financial instruments of data and risk management: “Each offer inscribed at the agency shall be accompanied by a demand, specifying approximately the amount of fortune, and the kind of position demanded in exchange” (NP 176). A photographic record that includes close-ups of teeth, feet, and hands, will accompany a complete dossier of “medical certificates, mortgage clearances, title-deeds, evidences of income and of property, legal attestations as to correct

<sup>9</sup> The final chapter offers more insight into Graindorge’s character. Its conceit is a letter addressed to M. Marcelin by Graindorge’s “private secretary and chiropodist.” After outlining the indignities he endured while in Graindorge’s employ, and criticizing “the unfortunate traces which a grossly commercial life had left on his mind,” he churlishly registers the meager estate left to him upon Graindorge’s death. Hippolyte Taine, *Notes on Paris: The Life and Opinions of M. Frédéric Graindorge*, trans. John Austin Stevens (Henry Holt and Co. 1875), 351. Further references to this work will be to this translation and will appear in the text abbreviated as NP.