

Received: March 7, 2015
Accepted: March 25, 2015
Scholarly analysis or debate
UDC: 141.7 Рансијер Ж.
321.7:111.852

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The Politics of Aesthetics and the Hatred of Democracy according to Jacques Rancière

Abstract: Among readers of Jacques Rancière there is a discussion about the possibility of aesthetics substituting for real political action. This is because while the French author elaborates on the conception of the emancipated spectator, he states that the political task of art cannot be the removal of the spectator from her “passive” condition into the dimension of political action, but only the suspension of the relationship between “active” and “passive”. However, in *Aisthesis*, published in 2011, Rancière warns the reader that it is not a case of abandoning the aesthetic utopia, even if any teleological view is withdrawn. In this article, I intend to discuss these paradoxes by confronting the considerations of *Le Spectateur émancipé* and *La Haine de la démocratie*, trying to show that if politics itself presupposes action, the politics of aesthetics must be understood as a non-identification process that takes subjects out of the places that were “addressed” to them beforehand. In *La Haine de la démocratie* one of the symptoms of the crisis of representative democracy is presented by the fact that it produces oligarchies and, on the other hand, new social dynamics appear as the conquest of a new citizenship that confronts these political oligarchies. Noting that demonstrations today, whether in Turkey, Spain, or New York, are similar to artistic *happenings*, Rancière can say that where there is aesthetics there is democracy. Understanding this last statement is the aim of the present article.

Keywords: Jacques Rancière, Aesthetics, Contemporary French Philosophy

What can a discourse that takes up the problem of emancipation mean today? The post-utopian period that followed the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall decreed an end to the dream of social transformation, ceding space to a dream of postmodern disenchantment with the unrealized promises of a society to come. The end of all future projections produced “presentism” as a new kind of temporality, the effect of which is the fact that the subject lives imprisoned within his or her immediate everyday reality, without imagining the “non-place” of a better

state of things to come. Even if this “presentism” identifies the ills of the present, the recognition of its impotence to resolve them seems to supplant the means of overcoming them.

At the same time when political discourse in Rancière is, to a certain extent, a reaction to “postmodern disenchantment” and to the “melancholy of the left”, it’s not surprising that it raises doubts regarding Rancière’s conception of emancipation. This conception, drawn from the teaching of Joseph Jacotot – for whom emancipation is not a goal to be reached, but rather a principal of verifying equality – effectively refers to real politics.¹ The production of a “scene of equality” might, in this sense, produce at most the effect of a pedagogical experience, the political character of which would be circumscribed to a specific situation. When Rancière refuses to respond to questions such as “*Que faire?*” he points to the fact that every “intellectual” avant-garde is based on the principle of inequality between those who “know” and those who “do not know” the direction of History. Even though that articulation between aesthetics and politics is based on the appearance of an “aesthetic regime of the arts”, it does not involve a reactivation of the project of “Aesthetic Education” guided by the idea that a “cultural improvement” might contribute to humanity’s development toward Enlightenment.

The fact that Rancière does not adhere to the project of an aesthetic education is consonant with his critique of the incorporation of Schiller’s thoughts by the historical avant-gardes. The consequence of this incorporation was the belief that the revolutionary activity of “the integration of art and life” could come to achieve the promise of politics. However, Rancière’s affirmation, in the prelude of *Aisthesis*, that only those who read that book in a hurry would find in it the abandonment of the aesthetic utopia seems very disconcerting.²

In this article, I will discuss first the sense in which Rancière does not abandon the idea of a real political practice, despite his refusal to acknowledge that a task critical of ideology might give the “correct” direction to action. Second, I will discuss how aesthetics can effectively be a preparation for politics, even if the “aesthetic utopia” does not mean that aesthetics will collaborate in order to reach an idyllic “non-place” in the future.

If it is necessary to put the problem this way, this is not due to a special “taste” for paradoxes on Rancière’s part, but because today’s political problems present themselves in a paradoxical way. For this reason, I do not intend to “resolve” it, given that they are not “resolvable”. Instead, my aim is to try to enter into these paradoxes in order to make them a bit clearer.

The direction of this discussion leads, inevitably, to the question of the articulation between aesthetics and politics in *Disagreement (La Méésentente: politique et philosophie)*, in which Rancière holds forth on the idea that politics does not have an essence. Instead, he maintains, politics occurs whenever it creates a relationship – inexorably, a conflicted one – with the dimension of *police*. In these terms, *police* does not mean the same thing as a “security apparatus” in the Foucaultian sense, but rather the social distribution of occupations and places that defines who may and who may not take part in modes of language and visibility in the social sphere. *Politics*, on the contrary, is the name of a disagreement between police partitioning, on the one hand, and claims of equality, on the other, redefining the “natural” division of bodies destined for one place or another, and therefore inscribing a part for those who previously had nothing allotted to them. Politics, therefore, is the part of those without a part.

In this sense, politics concerns an encounter between two forms of logic that do not quite fit each other: namely, egalitarian logic and police logic. Certainly, for Rancière, this polemical

¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1991, 19–44.

² Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scènes du régime esthétique de l’art*, Paris, Galilée, 2011, 16.

encounter cannot be resolved with a final synthesis, as the tone of conflict is bound to remain. However, between these two divergent logical forms lies a third element that must be considered in the political process. This element is disagreement, which appears as an emptiness, or a gap, which Rancière calls *Wrong (Le Tort)*, and that opens up between two dimensions that do not meet each other. When the Wrong occurs, it means that a fissure has been created in the consensual logic that stiffens politics and promotes a false stability and a false sense that there are no other possibilities of realization, as today's economic and management discourses do.

Naturally, this conception of politics creates problems in Rancière's thinking when it deals with the possibility of stabilizing social relations, given that this conflict appears to be something constitutive of society. Inasmuch as Rancière's Marxist inheritance weighs on his thinking, in his consideration of society as inherently divided, the term "police" must not be magnified beyond what it means. Thus, we must not succumb to the temptation of confusing "police" with "the ideological apparatuses of the state", given that the police exercise only a process of dividing bodies. What egalitarian logic puts into question is the simply "natural destiny" attributed to a body's place; in other words, it questions the idea that previously defined places exist. Therefore, the first idea of a democratic decision to occupy a certain position of power would be a raffle.

It is perfectly plausible that a society might live within a police order in a stable way for a long time; from Rancière's perspective, the only thing that will not occur in such a scenario is politics. However, the claim of democracy can also be understood as a dynamic of realization, given that there is no ideal to be reached, nor is it possible to weave together theoretical considerations of what to do in order to reach a fully democratic society. Therefore, in *Hatred of Democracy (La Haine de la démocratie)*, Rancière rejects the simplistic idea that we live today in a "crisis of the representative system", the alternative to which would be a return to "horizontal" forms of direct democracy. The problem here resides in the fact that representative democracy actually produces oligarchies that reproduce within the state, causing the very means of making claims for an increase of participation in decision-making processes to become a political task.³

Since democracy is not an ideal to be reached, but rather a process, it can be identified in these particular terms with politics in the precise sense elucidated by Rancière:

Democracy is not the parliamentary system or the legitimate State. It is not a state of the social either, the reign of individualism or of the masses. Democracy is, in general, politics' mode of subjectification if, by politics, we mean something other than the organization of bodies as a community and the management of places, powers, and functions. Democracy is more precisely the name of a singular disruption of this order of distribution of bodies as a community that we proposed to conceptualize in the broader concept of the police. It is the name of what comes and interrupts the smooth working of this order through a singular mechanism of subjectification.⁴

³ Jacques Rancière, *La Haine de la démocratie*, Paris, Fabrique, 2005, 101.

⁴ Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999, 99. "La démocratie n'est pas le régime parlementaire ou l'État de droit. Elle n'est pas davantage un état du social, le règne de l'individualisme ou celui des masses. La démocratie est, en général, le mode de subjectivation de la politique – si, par politique, on entend autre chose que que l'organisation des corps en communauté et la gestion des places pouvoirs et fonctions. Plus précisément, démocratie est le nom d'une interruption singulière de cet ordre de la distribution des corps en communauté que l'on a proposé de conceptualiser sous le concept élargi de police. C'est le nom de ce qui vient interrompre le bon fonctionnement de cet ordre par un dispositif singulier de subjectivation." Jacques Rancière, *La Mécontentement : politique et philosophie*, Paris, Galilée, 1995, 139.

According to Rancière, politics is a mode of singular subjectification, the concrete *action* of which bursts through and reconfigures the police-driven distribution of bodies by making a polemical claim of equality. However, there is no political subject that comes before politics: politics constitutes itself at the same time as it is happening.

Thus, when Rancière gives *Disagreement* the subtitle of *Philosophy and Politics*, what he intends to mark is not a reflection on “the organization of the state” or on “forms of government”, but, rather, an encounter in which philosophy always arrives too late. In other words, “political philosophy” can only exist when politics has already taken place. However, the most that philosophy can do in relation to politics is expose its lack of a foundation.⁵

Consequently, one must avoid the opposite errors concerning philosophy’s attempt to normalize politics, whether in the *Archi-Politics* attempt in Plato’s *Republic* to reduce politics to its philosophical foundation, or in Marxism’s *Meta-politics* error of believing that the dialectical movement of history could direct the realization of politics and eliminate all of its conflictual dimensions.

Just as politics precedes philosophy, the same takes place in relation to aesthetics, which is only political to the extent to which it establishes singular interventions at the moment when politics occurs. This is why the relationship between aesthetics and politics cannot be anything other than indirect, which undoes the entire 20th-century conception of integrating art within a revolutionary project of social transformation.

To a significant extent, Rancière wants to present an alternative to the conceptions that have traditionally guided the Left’s proposals regarding art, especially the idea that art might contribute to the critical task of revealing social structures hidden by ideology, as was the case throughout the construction of the problem of the Society of the Spectacle, as established by Guy Debord in the 1960s. In *The Emancipated Spectator (Le Spectateur émancipé)*, Rancière is in consonance with the positions of thinkers like Sloterdijk, Bauman, and Boltanski regarding the fact that transformations in the sphere of labour resulted in changes in the dynamic of capitalism from the 1970s on.⁶ These changes can be expressed in Sloterdijk’s idea that things today have lost gravity and that “everything that was once solid has faded into air.” There is no longer a “back there” to be revealed, because today, every individual is “conscious” of his or her situation as a consumer. Therefore, a “critique of ideology” these days does not have any effect in terms of removing the individual from his or her “alienation” and “passivity”, and putting him or her in the sphere of political action: those who wish to participate in politics have somehow already been convinced.

If politics *tout court* implies a process of subjectification linked to action, the politics of aesthetics, within what Rancière calls an “aesthetical regime of the arts”, seeks – on the contrary – a suspension of oppositions between the “active” and “passive”. In order to understand how this relationship is formed, it’s important to recognize the significance that Rancière attributes to an aesthetic judgement that shows itself to be “political” inasmuch as it opens the virtual community of the *as if*:

The modern emergence of aesthetics as an autonomous discourse determining an autonomous division of the perceptible is the emergence of an evaluation of the perceptible that is distinct from any judgment about the use to which it is

⁵ Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy...*, op. cit. 61–93.

⁶ For the debate between Rancière and Debord, Bauman, Sloterdijk and Boltanski, see Jacques Rancière, “The Misadventures of Critical Thought”, in: *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliot, London–New York, Verso, 2009, 25–50.

put; and which accordingly defines a world of virtual community – of community demanded – superimposed on the world of commands and lots that gives everything a use [...]. So the autonomization of aesthetics means first freeing up the norms of representation, and second, constituting a kind of community of sense experience that works on the world of assumption, of the *as if* that includes those who are not included by revealing a mode of existence of sense experience that has eluded the allocation of parties and lots.⁷

For Kant, aesthetic judgement is a reflective judgement, which means that, unlike a determining judgement, it cannot be subsumed by concepts. Therefore, in the case of aesthetic judgement there is a “free play of the faculties” that produces a suspension between the *active* capacity for understanding to produce a concept, and the *passivity* of pure sensation. Thus, the philosopher affirms that the universality of judgement can only occur if we consider the *hypothesis* that all people are capable of feeling what is Beautiful. This verification, according to Kant, must pass through a communicative process in which the subject who experiences the feeling of the Beautiful does not merely want to experience it for him- or herself, but rather wants to share it with another subject whose feeling he or she assumes to be similar. Thereby, a virtual community begins to form.

In Rancièrian terms, the “aesthetic regime” contains a presupposition of the universalization of the capacity of aesthetic fruition, breaking with the idea that art is a topic for “specialists”, whose practical effect is to create a hierarchy between “men of taste” and “vulgar men.” The aesthetic regime is opposed to the representative regime because it presupposes the knowledge of rules and criteria of composition in order to correctly evaluate a work of art, to the extent to which, in the aesthetic regime, aesthetic fruition becomes *anyone’s* topic.

For Rancière, the aesthetic era brought a sort of paradoxical thinking to Western thought, the principal characteristic of which consists of a suspension of the dichotomies of traditional philosophical thinking. This mode of thinking permits a junction of contradictory elements within itself, synthesizing the *active* and the *passive*, the *logos* and the *pathos*. When Schelling, for example, wrote of the aesthetic experience as a unity between the conscious and the unconscious (or between human freedom and the necessity of nature), he was defending aesthetic experience as one that goes beyond the subject-object dichotomy that characterizes science, making art a privileged path for the Absolute that German Idealism sought.⁸

Schelling’s work is in consonance with the Kantian notion that Genius contains a paradoxical dimension: it is at once the active power of creation of a model and of a new aesthetic norm, but – to the extent to which it is incapable of communicating the rules of its making – it finishes by closing the passive dimension of sensitivity. Rancière’s approach to the problem of Genius displaces the common-sense comprehension of Genius as a talent that surpasses normal human capacities. To the contrary, the construction of this notion is connected to an egalitarian ideal, since the rules of artistic doing cannot be communicated conceptually.

⁷ Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement...*, op. cit. 57–58. “L’apparition moderne de l’esthétique comme discours autonome du sensible qui se sépare de tout jugement sur son usage et définit ainsi un monde de communauté virtuelle – de communauté exigée – en surimpression sur le monde des ordres et des parts qui donne à toute chose son usage. [...]. L’esthétique ainsi autonomisée, c’est premièrement l’affranchissement par rapport aux normes de la représentation, deuxièmement la constitution d’un type de communauté du sensible fonctionnant sur le monde de la présomption, du *comme si* qui inclut ceux qui ne sont pas inclus en faisant voir un mode d’existence du sensible soustrait à la répartition des parties et des parts.”

⁸ Jacques Rancière, *L’inconscient esthétique*, Paris, Galilée, 2001, 25–32.

However, arguing for the universality of aesthetic judgement today also bears polemical results, notably against the sociology of art. It is in this perspective that Rancière elaborates a critique against Bourdieu, for whom the “disinterest” of taste functions, at its core, as an apparatus for maintaining social differences: the “man of taste” is the bourgeois who symbolically distances himself from the “man of the people”. However, the fact that Rancière criticizes Bourdieu should not obscure the fact that his thinking does not discard all of the sociology of art. Rancière rejects any notion of transcendence to the work of art that, according to his approach, never arises as an isolated phenomenon, but always emerges from a sensible fabric that determines its mode of presentation within a determined regime of the arts. Therefore, understanding a work of art is also determined by exhibition and performance spaces, by critics’ and curators’ discourses, and by art institutions.⁹ Still, in Rancière’s view, negating the lower classes’ capacity for aesthetic contemplation – as Bourdieu does – means creating a principle of inequality, whereby these classes ought to content themselves with their current social position.¹⁰

The work that Rancière develops in *Proletarian Nights (La Nuit des prolétaires)* with analyses of exchanges of letters and literary critiques in proletarian newspapers aims to show that, to the contrary, the intellectual production of the French working classes around 1830 owed nothing to the so-called “cultured classes”.¹¹ When Rancière writes that “aesthetic revolution” precedes political revolution,¹² he means to show that the circulation of literature in the 19th century that could indirectly reach anyone established a type of emancipation that differed from the model at work in Marxist-influenced social struggles that aimed to create a sort of “class consciousness” based on an authentically proletarian culture. The circulation of novels – even though many of these were written by authors whose politics were conservative, or even reactionary – generated a sensible social fabric that removed those workers from the situation for which they were originally destined; namely, the servitude of manual labour. It gave them dreams and musings at night. Naturally, we must bear in mind the appearance of an “aesthetic revolution”, in defiance of the rules of the representative regime that created indifference regarding themes and characters: therefore, *anyone* and *any subject* became worthy of representation. The “politics of aesthetics” exists exactly at the rupture of the hierarchies of the representative regime, especially the hierarchy that confers the privilege of a hero’s action.

If the universality of aesthetic judgement can only, according to Rancière, occur within a specific regime – namely, the aesthetic regime – then it would in fact be fair to question how to consider the politics of a work of art when transposed to non-Western contexts. This sort of questioning is at the core of Jean-Louis Déotte’s counter-critique, which consists in joining Lyotard against Rancière, showing how Lyotard’s concept of *Differend (Le Différend)* has a greater amplitude and seeks a more intense dialogue with the sphere of alterity.¹³

However, I will merely mention Déotte’s critique in passing, because my primary interest here is to consider the extent to which today’s artistic interventions can create a “virtual community”. The fabric of discourses that the circulation of literature in the 19th century promoted was fundamental for the construction of the concept of the *distribution of the sensible (partage*

⁹ Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis...*, op. cit. 10.

¹⁰ Jacques Rancière, *Le philosophe et ses pauvres*, Paris, Flammarion, 2007, 3–14.

¹¹ Jacques Rancière, *La Nuit des prolétaires*, Paris, Fayard, 2012.

¹² Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis...*, op. cit. 17.

¹³ Jean-Louis Déotte, “De la diferencia entre un desacuerdo y un diferendo”, in: *Que es un aparato estético?* Santiago de Chile, Metales Pesados, 2012, 90–115.

du sensible). Nevertheless, we must consider that, even in today's Europe, the rise of other artistic practices has significantly diminished the social importance of literature.

In order to pose this question, it is important to note that Rancière does not attribute special value to the technical transformation of the work of art as an element at work in the changes of perception. Rancière critiques Walter Benjamin in *The Distribution of the Sensible* (*Le partage du sensible*), defending the notion that it is impossible to deduce the political properties from technical transformations, given that in order for art to be able to give visibility to the masses, the anonymous must already have appeared as a theme in the work of art.¹⁴

I would like to suggest that the problem of aesthetic politics ought to be considered from the starting point of the problem of *fiction* and how it arises in different regimes. Rancière argues that, within the representative regime, what can be called the problem of narrative is at stake, always structuring itself in accordance with the model of conflict-action-undoing, which confers a privilege to the pole of *action* that operates on conflict and surpasses passivity. In order for the narrative to function, it is necessary to follow a series of rules of verisimilitude, particularly the unity of time and space. As I have mentioned, the novel transformed narrative structure in the 19th century, which also implied a new form of perceiving the world, removing the emphasis on characters' actions and psychology, and serving as an interruption of the scene, in which what is at play is first and foremost a descriptive process of the scene. This explains the description, in the third scene of *Aisthesis*, of Julien Sorel's happiness: when Sorel was arrested, he was thereby freed from the entire plot of causes and consequences that characterized all of his efforts, throughout the book, at achieving social mobility.¹⁵

Rancière's thoughts regarding the problem of fiction are extremely original. He attempts to escape the dichotomies between "reality" and "fiction": his idea is that reality must be fictionalized in order to be understood.¹⁶ However, what characterizes fiction within the aesthetic regime is counterposed to the model of fiction that the representative regime traditionally establishes based on the idea of narrative as beginning, end, and resolution. Therefore, in *The Future of the Image* (*Le Sestin des images*), Rancière shows that images always come about in an articulation between functions and operations of the visible and the invisible, the sayable and the unsayable.¹⁷ If the aesthetic regime seeks to articulate these elements and establish a unity

¹⁴ "It is thus necessary, in my opinion, to take thinks the other way around. In order for the mechanical arts to be able to confer visibility on the masses, or rather on anonymous individuals, they first need to be recognized as arts." See: Jacques Rancière, "The Distribution of the Sensible", in: *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill, New York, Continuum, 2004, 32. This question of the *medium* in Rancière and Walter Benjamin also interested Jean-Louis Déotte; cf. Jean-Louis Déotte, "Walter Benjamin, la question de la técnica y del cine", *Que es un aparato estético ?...*, op. cit. 74–88.

¹⁵ Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis...*, op. cit. 61–77.

¹⁶ "Political statements and literarity locutions produce effects in reality. They define models of speech or action but also regimes of sensible intensity. They draft maps of the visible trajectories between the visible and the sayable, relationships between modes of beings, modes of saying, and modes of doing and making. They define variations of sensible intensities, perceptions, and abilities of bodies". Jacques Rancière, "Distribution of sensible", op. cit. 39.

¹⁷ "The images of art are operations that produce a discrepancy, a dissemblance. Words describe what the eye might see or express what it will never see; they deliberately clarify or obscure an idea. Visible forms yield a meaning to be constructed or subtract it. [...] All these relations define images. This means two things. In the first place, the images of art are, as such, dissemblances. Secondly, the image is not exclusive to the visible. There is visibility that does not amount to an image; there are images which consist wholly in words. But the commonest regime of the images is one that presents a relationship between the sayable and the visible, a relationship which plays on both the analogy and dissemblance between them." Jacques Rancière, "The Future of Images", in: *The Future of Images*, trans. Gregory Elliot, London – New York, Verso, 2007, 7.

of action, Rancière holds that the politics of aesthetics is present in the possibility of reconfiguring these elements, proposing new arrangements of signs that, for their part, articulate new forms of perceiving the real.

Thus, the political task of aesthetics today does not lie in determining a political content in the sense of denouncing a dominant ideology; instead, it lies in producing singular devices of intervention that will be capable of reconfiguring political fictions, thereby proposing new and other forms of perceiving these events. It is important to note that in new forms of protest and political participation, whether in Turkey, in the Arab Spring, in Spain, or in Brazil, the tendency for *anyone* to participate – and not merely a movement organized by unions or political parties – has also implied a change in aesthetics among these movements, which, to a large extent, were similar to *happenings* and have incorporated various operations derived from contemporary art.

In July 2013, a wave of demonstrations all over Brazil surprised the traditional political organizations because they were not organized by unions, political parties, or organizations, but counted on the presence of *anyone*, to employ a Jacques Rancière term. One of the interesting aspects that were seen was a new social dynamic whereby multiple operations of contemporary art were incorporated with a political purpose. Naturally, if one takes into account the institutional aspects and the legitimizing discourses, it would be incorrect to call it “art” proper, but the intervention in public space that they promoted revealed how much an aesthetic potency could achieve a “sharing” in the perceptions of the use of the city and point to other possibilities. In this respect, I could cite a young people’s collective named “*Coletivo Projetação*” that, using relatively simple technical support, a computer and a projector that they took to the demonstrations, projected words and images that reassigned the space onto which they were projected, for example, using the side of a bus to project protest images and words critiquing the poor quality of public transportation. This “almost cinema” emerges as if from nothing among the crowd revealing the anonymous force of this demonstration, whose “technique” is not a “property” of those who created it, but can easily multiply itself so that other subjects can appropriate it. Maybe this is a good example of how aesthetics can propose new political fictions for politics.

In this process of proposing new fictions, the Wrong plays an important role as a lacuna, an emptiness, into which the political subject may project new fictions and propose new reconfigurations. This makes us think that, although we are no longer faced with 1960s art criticism that aimed to reveal something hidden by ideology, the problem of fiction’s creation of new articulations, as addressed by Rancière, still creates a critical operation to the extent to which it allows us to see something, thereby preparing the subject for politics *tout court*.

Naturally, when Rancière considers that aesthetics can prepare us for politics, he is not putting forth a revolutionary project of the historical avant-gardes calling for an integration of art and life. However, in his affirmation in *Aisthesis* that he is not abandoning a utopian aesthetic, “utopia” must be understood as “unacceptable, a non-place, the extreme point of a polemical reconfiguration of the sensible, which breaks down the categories that define what is considered to be obvious.”¹⁸ In other words, it should be understood as the idea that the politics of aesthetics operates always in the here-and-now, rather than in the projection of a paradise on earth that may one day come to exist through revolutionary action.

Leaving aside the illusions that fed the 20th century’s revolutionary undertakings, Rancière’s thinking makes us face the demand for repositioning the problem of emancipation and the

¹⁸ Jacques Rancière, “The Distribution of the Sensible”, op. cit. 40.

urgent necessity of political activity today. Naturally, Rancière wants to distance himself from, for example, the importance that Sartre had for his generation, which legitimated his words because he was an intellectual of great renown. For Rancière, the political task of an intellectual today is no longer to say what must be done, but first, to provoke thoughts so that every subject might be able to formulate his or her own political fictions.

Translated by Raphael Soifer