

Logical Revolts: Jacques Rancière and Political Subjectivization

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Staging the People: The Proletarian and His Double, by Jacques Rancière. New York: Verso, 2011, 239 pp.

The Intellectual and His People: Staging the People, Volume 2, by Jacques Rancière. New York: Verso, 2012, 177 pp.

Proletarian Nights: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France, by Jacques Rancière. New York: Verso, 2012, 442 pp.

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“Rebellion,” Jacques Rancière writes in one of the books reviewed here, “has no legitimacy, simply a logic.”¹ *Les Révoltes logiques* was the name of an ambitious radical history journal founded by Rancière and others in 1975 and published until 1985. For the philosophers and historians of the *LRI* collective, the events of May '68 not only demonstrated the failure of theoretical paradigms invoked by historians and social scientists to explain the dynamics of popular rebellion—humanist or structural Marxism, moral economics, or inherently resistant popular cultures—but also demonstrated that these frameworks were ultimately complicit with, and supportive of, the dominant orders they sought to critique. The journal's title, taken from Arthur Rimbaud's dour post-Commune poem “Democracy,” insisted that “what is called rebellion or revolt is also a scene of speech and reasons: neither the eruption . . . of a popular unruliness irreducible to the discipline of power, nor the expression of a historical necessity and legitimacy” (S 10). As a “scene of speech and reasons” the subjects and categories of rebellion—the worker, the artisan, the woman, the militant, the student, the colonized—must themselves be rigorously interrogated by historians—approached as objects of ongoing political struggle and contestation rather than as expressions of an authentic ethos or as sociological facts. Against positivist historiography, even when written from below, Rancière and other contributors to *LRI* were attentive to how the

representational practices of political activists, as well as historians, always risk fixing the experiences and actions of historical agents within an unquestioned field of categories and identities and, even when proclaiming the emancipation of these subjects, reify their positions and assign them a proper place and function within what Rancière would later theorize as the “distribution of the sensible” (*le partage du sensible*): the reigning “allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, ways of saying.”² The Baron Dupin’s declaration “everyone at home in his own place, everyone for himself” was not only what Rancière considers an authoritative motto of the July Monarchy (P 264), but a concise modern reiteration of a classical formula given clearest philosophical articulation by Plato: “let all do their own business and develop the virtue specific to their condition.”³ In Rancière’s work, “be always what you are” is the defining imperative of power (S 25). As announced in the journal’s first issue, *LRI* aimed to trace the complex historical “trajectories and intersecting paths of rebellion, its contradictions, its lived experience and its dreams” (I 130); at the heart of the experimentally innovative historiography of *LRI*, and also a “vital thread” running through Rancière’s four decades of research, is a sustained engagement with the paradoxical historical logics of individual and collective forms of political subjectivization.⁴

Staging the People and *The Intellectual and His People* bring together all of the articles Rancière wrote for *LRI* (originally published in France in 2003 as single volume titled *Les scènes du peuple*). When read alongside *Proletarian Nights*, Rancière’s brilliant and difficult study of working-class poets and visionaries in nineteenth-century France, these volumes provide an important background for understanding the subsequent development of Rancière’s political thought, while also challenging key aspects of its reception in contemporary Anglo-American political theory—most importantly, what I will characterize below as the dominant “evental” reading of Rancière’s work. Historically dense and stylistically demanding, these works resist, in their form and content, the articulation of a theory that can be neatly extracted from the dizzying proliferation of words—the “democratic disorder of speech”—they put on elaborate display.⁵ All of these works were written after Rancière’s 1969 break with his former teacher Louis Althusser, whose dismissal of the events of May as an inconsequential student rebellion, and continued loyalty to the French Communist Party, alienated many of his former disciples and radical Maoist segments of the French intellectual left. In *Althusser’s Lesson* (1974), Rancière railed against Althusser’s epistemic authoritarianism, his “uncriticized despotism of science,” which cloaked “its consecration of the existing order in the language of revolution.”⁶ Rancière’s rejection of the intellectual’s pedagogical claim to speak on behalf of an ideologically deluded people incapable of speaking for themselves, first articulated

in his trenchant critique of Althusser, echoes on almost every page of these recently translated works. Rancière's intellectual trajectory after his break from Althusser was shaped by a radical affirmation of the capacities of ordinary people to think, and by a prolonged and wide-ranging examination of the consequences that follow from the presumption of a fundamental equality of intelligence and capacity.

Rancière's radical egalitarianism, and his suspicion of the fixed categories and identities that inhibit its enactment, animated his sustained engagement with social history during the 1970s. In these works, he rejected the social historian's task of recovering an authentic working-class consciousness or experience in the archive and instead examined the polyphonic political aspirations of disparate populations as articulated in their own words, poems, songs, and dreams. Rejecting both the "clenched fist and locked arm" of ascetic proletarian militancy and the carnivalesque of inherently resistant popular cultures, Rancière traced the surprising emergence of a "polemical form of subjectivization that is drawn along particular lines of fracture" (S 15). While he resists the epistemic authority of an explanatory "theory," a unifying hypothesis nonetheless resonates throughout Rancière's work from this period: transformative political praxis emerges not from the action of a unitary subject or emancipated consciousness but from the experience of being divided, not from the cohering identifications of class, for example, but from transformative processes of *disidentification*. As he would later state, "the place of a political subject is an interval or a gap; being together to the extent that we are in-between names, identities, cultures, and so on."⁷ "The path of emancipation appears a passing by way of the capacity to become different; not to become conscious, but by dizziness and the loss of identity" (S 26). The forms of political subjectivization traced across these chapters do not emerge among the most impoverished of proletarians, as Marx predicted, nor among the most skilled artisans fighting for the threatened integrity of their craft, as many social historians explained, but among populations who exist outside of, or at the border of, such designations and sociological classifications. Research into the historical logics of political subjectivization, Rancière argues, should not focus narrowly on those social and political spaces where we have come to expect radicalism—on the factory floor, the artisan workshop, or the council meeting—but rather "in the dead times of no work, on the roads and squares of the space allotted to the possession of all, in the vague solitary reveries and the emotion of fortuitous gatherings" (P 120).

Rancière's provocative research program is most clearly announced in the first chapter from *Staging the People*—"The Proletarian and His Double, Or, The Unknown Philosopher"—and best exemplified by its last—"Good

Times, Or, Pleasure at the Barrière.” These two chapters are probably also the most closely engaged with questions that preoccupy contemporary political theorists interested in Rancière. In the first, Rancière distinguishes his work from other efforts to recover the hidden voices of working-class protest, to endow the mute “pleb” with articulate claims, to make the subaltern, as Gayatri Spivak once famously put the point, speak.⁸ Rancière argues that well-intentioned efforts to recover expressions of a unitary class subjectivity that could be clearly distinguished from the corrupting discourses of the bourgeoisie are unknowingly haunted by a familiar figure: “the unknown soldier whose habitual silence and occasional speech underpin the ability of political discourse to confer collective identities, giving history the weight of its acting subjects and reserving for philosophy the lightness of its thinking ones” (S 25). Rancière traces a number of distinctions across these works—between the historically embedded and the philosophically transcendent, the laborer and the aesthete, utility and disinterested contemplation—and demonstrates how they have been employed by social historians to sustain the hierarchies of social classification their activist scholarship often aims to transcend. Rancière urges readers to direct attention instead to the speech through which these divisions are violated and confused, where “two worlds are put in one and the same world.”⁹ What happens, he asks,

if proletarians, instead of expressing their identity in their products or their struggles, start to reflect this on the painter’s canvas or in the sophist’s mirror? What if this reflection leads them into the giddiness and verbiage of speculation? If they start not only offering but also practicing—with ascetic joy or wrenching pangs—those speculative truths that may well be revolutionary but do not upset too much the academic existence of those who profess them: that being is identical to nothingness, the finite to the infinite, and—in the last analysis—sacrifice identical to pleasure? (S 29)

Occasionally passages such as these suggest that Rancière is claiming that the path to political emancipation can be causally traced to the joiner who takes up poetry, or the carpenter who becomes a critic. His point, however, is not to draw readers’ attention to causal mechanisms and stultifying explanations of political radicalism, but to examine in historical detail how disempowering logics of identification are not only imposed by the dominant class interests of the police order, but reiterated and reinforced by prevailing discourses of emancipation themselves. Rancière is carefully attentive to the traps and double-binds lurking within emancipatory logics and radical political claims: in one essay from the first volume, workplace solidarity is proclaimed through the subordination of women (“A Troublesome Woman”); in another, trade union collaboration with the Vichy regime is justified in the radical language

of syndicalism and worker autonomy (“From Pelloutier to Hitler: Trade Unionism and Collaboration”). When we turn to history to understand the emergence of new political subjects and claims, things are always “rather more complicated” than our political theories often lead us to believe (S 177).

These complications are vividly displayed in “Good Times, Or, Pleasure at the Barrière,” where Rancière examines the unintended consequences of the French government’s efforts to regulate the theater in Paris after the revolution of 1848. Rather than reading these regulations of spectacle as “the deployment of one of those grand strategies of power,” “panoptical totalizations” resisted by the “release of popular energies,” Rancière turns instead to “the disquiet that arose less from a counterculture opposing from below the thought and culture of those above, than from the real and imaginary displacements authorized by a cultural space in which meeting-places or passageways between classes proliferated” (S 179). Rancière focuses on the 400 *gouettes* that proliferated in Paris and the surrounding area in the wake of 1848, popular singing societies that provided spaces of cross-class interaction in a society increasingly riven by opposing and fixed class identifications. The “mixed spectacle” of these popular amusements was attacked by writers across the ideological spectrum—from bourgeois economists and Christian moralists to communist radicals—and it is the underlying commonality of their critiques that most interests Rancière here and elsewhere, their shared focus on the “intermingling of the stigmata of poverty and the stigmata of pleasure” (P 258). “The *gouette* was one of the places that dynamized a class,” Rancière concludes, “not by unifying it but rather by dividing it, making it produce minorities” (S 181). “Minorities” here name those that fall outside of, or move in between reigning social classifications, not a numerically small demographic group; Rancière’s qualitative minorities can be numerical majorities. “The genuinely dangerous classes,” Rancière writes, “were perhaps less those savages supposedly undermining the basement of society than the migrants who moved on the boundaries between classes” (S 181). The *gouettes* produced a culture of disorder where “dreaming minorities” “equally removed from accepted images of culture and counterculture alike” were able to experiment in practices beyond the ossified social ascriptions of their daily lives (S 182). His interest is in this “mixed cultural space which saw the confusion of styles, places, practices, and classes,” that facilitated the participation in and invention of “other worlds and other conditions” (S 184). “The worker who, without having learned to spell, tried his hand at making verses to the taste of the day,” Rancière writes, “was perhaps more dangerous for the existing ideological order than the one who sung revolutionary songs” (S 181). Rancière’s preoccupations with the Saint Simonian organizer who takes up the trombone, the metalworker who becomes a street

singer, and the shoemaker who becomes an acrobat, occasionally seem like idiosyncratic exaggerations narrowly responding to the political and scholarly controversies of the polemical *gauchiste* milieu of the 1970s, and some readers may not feel the same wonder and astonishment at these discoveries, but Rancière's provocations on these matters can still be productively disorienting for contemporary political theorists once again enthralled by the militant drama of Jacobinism, the party, the exception, and the event.

Intra-left polemics animate most of the essays gathered in *The Intellectual and His People*, which, partly because of this, is the more occasional of the two volumes. Here too, the topics range widely across the chapters—from Rancière's investigation of historical efforts to create "the people's theater" to the postwar French left's turn away from Marxism—but, as with the first volume, a single theme resonates, in this case, the critique of the epistemic authority claimed by dissident intellectuals in their efforts to speak on behalf of a people incapable of speaking for themselves. Jules Michelet, the great nineteenth-century French historian and romantic champion of the regenerative vitality of the common man, is Rancière's exemplary figure of these self-aggrandizing claims of the people's intellectual (I 113), but Michelet's nationalistic attempt to give voice to the voiceless is echoed in "the revolutionary or proletarian intellectual of modern times," a discourse of elite knowledge that "claims at the same time an identity with the living consciousness of those excluded from knowledge" (I 107). At the center of *The Intellectual and His People* is Rancière's critique of the rise of the "nouveaux philosophes" during the 1970s, former Maoist militants who argued that the totalizing emancipatory claims of various Marxisms led directly to the gulag (they were influenced by both Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* and Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*). The intellectual and political trajectory of such prominent and disillusioned militants as André Glucksman, Bernard-Henri Lévy, and Alain Finkelkraut led them to reject not only Marxism but also broader efforts on the left to achieve collective emancipation from capital imperialism, whether in the form of the "Third Worldism" of postcolonial radicalism or emerging claims of radical democracy. New philosophers like Glucksman employed the figure of the solitary suffering individual over the dominated class as a way of shifting public discourse away from the politics of collective emancipation and towards the ethics of individual rights and legal protection. As Kristin Ross demonstrates in her penetrating study of *May '68 and Its Afterlives*, the suffering and powerless individual of the new philosophers became an essential part of the emerging discourse of human rights and what Rancière would later theorize as the ethical turn of "postpolitics."¹⁰ The critical essays in this volume presciently anticipate these developments just as they were first beginning to unfold.

In “The Philosophers’ Tale: Intellectuals and the Trajectory of *Gauchisme*” (co-authored with Danielle Rancière), Rancière persuasively demonstrates how the new philosophers’ “great denunciation of the terrorism of all power” enabled both their critique of the institutional authorities of both sides of the Cold War, while simultaneously enhancing their own media power and televisual authority. Their repudiation of Marxism aside, these disillusioned militants, Rancière argues, were able to set themselves up as authorized spokesmen of “the social” or of “the real” itself in a way that mimics the very “master discourses they repudiate,” offering yet another “mirage of anti-authoritarianism that actually supports other forms of authority” (I 112). It is impossible to engage fully with the subtlety of Rancière’s philosophical and historical analysis here, but at its center is what he calls the pervasive “discourse of the plebs,” Glucksman’s figure for the universally voiceless subjects of power on whose behalf the new philosophers set themselves up as spokesman and protectors. The silently suffering individual— “the dispossessed, the wretched of the earth, those excluded from power, those who have nothing to lose but their chains, and who are moved solely by the desire to be no longer oppressed”—was the figure that motivated the new philosophers’ turn away from political emancipation towards ethics and the regulations of international law (I 109). It is also the figure that sustains “the mythos of the powerful and powerless,” whereby the plebs, who are voiceless by definition, once again authorize an intellectual elite to speak on their behalf, and in doing so increase this power without the possibility of accountability since the pleb cannot counter the intellectual’s representational claims: to be able to speak and contest these representations would no longer qualify one as a pleb. What is essential to this reauthorization of intellectual hierarchy and epistemic authority is that the pleb remains a resource of “pure negativity” and in this way sustain “the intellectual’s fantasy”: “It is a matter of sadness or anger for intellectuals,” Rancière writes, “to discover that those below never conform to their concept: they have always other desires, always other things to lose but their chains; and they talk too much—of truth, justice, morality, of work well done, of family” (I 109).

This democratic excess of popular speech makes up the archive of *Proletarian Nights*, the 1981 book that marks the culmination of Rancière’s decade-long immersion in the nineteenth-century archive of French workers. In this remarkable book, the suspicion of intellectual spokesmen and of stultifying explanatory frameworks leads Rancière back to the words of the workers themselves—to their diaries, letters, poems, newspapers, and plans. He presents these obscure texts without contextualization or unifying explanation and his own authorial voice is complexly intermingled with the voices of his subjects, which makes for difficult and sometimes disorienting reading.

Rancière's experimental style, which is motivated by refusal to claim a superior vantage point to those whose words he catalogues, means it is often impossible to distinguish Rancière's voice from the dense and wayward chorus of his subjects. Rancière offers neither the interpretive mastery of contextualization nor allows the texts to simply speak for themselves as source documents. Instead, he writes in a way that dramatizes the poetics of the historian's craft while exposing its limitations and necessary occlusions. Written history necessarily entails a "poetic regulation of the excess," Rancière writes in *The Names of History*, but for that reason should continually draw attention to the irreducible excess of signification that it regulates.¹¹ James Swenson has insightfully described Rancière's rejection of the "discourse of mastery"—the analytic effort to "set forth philosophical positions or theses in a singular voice"—and his experiment with "free indirect speech" as a stylistic and formal elaboration of his central premise of fundamental intellectual equality.¹² This way of engaging history requires "not only a different tale, but a different form of telling."¹³ *Proletarian Nights* is the premier example of Rancière's efforts in experimental historiography.

More analytically inclined political theorists will likely find the stylistic experimentation of *Proletarian Nights* irritatingly obscure, but Donald Reid's excellent introduction provides a helpful map of the book's unfamiliar terrain. In its general outline, *Proletarian Nights* is a study of Parisian workers under the July Monarchy (1830–1848) who wrote poetry, prose, polemics, letters, and diaries after the workday was over. It is a study of worker's lives when they were not engaged in the activity that purportedly defined them: work. Some of the figures will be familiar to readers of Rancière's translated later books—Jeanne Deroin and Joseph Jicotot, for example—while other important figures will not—Louis Gabriel Gauny, J.P. Gilland, and Pierre Vinçard. *Proletarian Nights* intervenes in worker history by breaking up the purportedly necessary relationships between the worker and work, militance and worker ethos, class consciousness and political subjectivization. Eschewing the identarian logic of these relationships, Rancière relates an alternative worker history that emphasizes the times and spaces of no-work, the "conquest of the night for doing something else than sleeping," the challenge to the reigning distribution of the sensible.¹⁴ Rancière's focus is not on the emergence of class consciousness, or on the desire of workers to affirm and command their own labor, but rather on the poetic desire to be free of labor and its determinations altogether. Emanating from the idiosyncratic beliefs, heretical theologies, marginal associations, and outrageous doctrines and enthusiasms of these worker poets and visionaries is a courageous struggle against what Rancière calls the "unyielding predetermination of their lives." *Proletarian Nights* catalogues these struggles as everyday improprieties of writing, speaking out,

taking up a musical instrument, putting on a show. The emphasis is on small dramas of sensory redistribution wherein the prevailing ethos of working-class life is interrupted by the appearance of unexpected aesthetic reconfigurations thought to be the property of—and appropriate to—the dominant class defined by both ownership and the leisure it affords.

This “unyielding predetermination” takes many forms in *Proletarian Nights*, as do the struggles against it (and withdrawals from it). The book surveys the grim realities of countless anonymous lives broken and crushed by the forces of political and economic modernity. “Savagery,” Rancière succinctly writes at one point, “is everywhere” (P 359): unemployed journeymen starve to death along country roads, others kill themselves out of fear of suffering a similar fate. *Proletarian Nights* offers a devastating catalogue of the profoundly insecure lives of the nineteenth-century precariat, but even those who have the “security” of work nonetheless experience the “horror of being locked in the logic of their own bare life” (P 62). Rancière examines how the bourgeois conflation of worker and work—and the reign of necessity it entails—is duplicated in the moralizing working-class discourses of productivity and trade. For both, he writes, “the root evil lies in the realm of mixed loves and misconstrued devotions where workers try to lay hold of the acme, the *ne plus ultra* of aristocratic pleasure: . . . leisure” (P 287). If many of the social historians and working-class radicals Rancière engages in *Proletarian Nights* rejected the inauthenticity of workers who put on the pretensions of the bourgeoisie, these are just the figures in whom Rancière is most interested: those who “desert what is said to be their culture and their truth,” “perverted proletarians whose discourse is made up of borrowed words,” those who “swap their work tools for the writer’s pen,” “dreamers, prattlers, versifiers, reasoners, and indulgers in sophistry” (P 15).

While a proliferation of efforts to escape “unyielding predetermination” animates all of these texts, no coherent ideology or political vision emerges from these “vain murmurings and groans and dreams” (P 3). Rancière is interested in the process of doubling, duplicity, and disidentification itself, not primarily in its content. “To keep the worker in his place, the real-life hierarchy must have its double in an imaginary hierarchy,” he writes, “the latter undermining the former not so much by offering emblems of popular power as by introducing duplicity into the very core of the worker’s activity in his place” (P 9). This emphasis on the enactment of duplicity—the “as if”—and Rancière’s preoccupation with “laborers secretly in love with useless things” brings the aesthetic dimension of *Proletarian Nights* clearly into view (P8). The aesthetic components of political subjectivization that Rancière examines in later works—where “what is at stake in emancipation [is] getting out of the ordinary ways of sensory experience”—is clearly anticipated in

these early works.¹⁵ It is in this sense misleading to describe a recent “aesthetic turn” in Rancière’s work, since this is a concern that has animated his research for over forty years. What the workplace kills in the worker, Rancière writes, is “any feeling for another world—anything and everything delicate, sensitive, poetic and superior that heaven has put in them” (P 107). If Maoists militants in the wake of May 1968 called on intellectuals to return to the factories to recover the lived experience of the working class, *Proletarian Nights* insists on an alternative itinerary: workers in their leisure hours turning to the art and to thinking believed to be the property of the dominant classes. As Rancière puts it in an interview: “not the re-education of intellectuals, but the eruption of negativity, of thinking, into a social category [the worker] always defined by the positivity of doing.”¹⁶ *Proletarian Nights* presents the workers’ movement as an aesthetic movement, as a challenge to the dominant configurations of time and place through which the worker’s life was governed. Rancière’s description of the motley crew of Icarians—followers of French utopian Étienne Cabet—attempting to establish an egalitarian commune in Texas applies to many of the strange singularities that populate *Proletarian Nights*: “a strange army of double beings influenced simultaneously by the vanity of philanthropists and the avidity of the desperate, and caught up in endless contradictions of discouraged dedication and impatient enjoyment” (P 365).

The account of political subjectivization traced historically in all three of these books presents an interesting challenge to the prevailing reception of Rancière’s work in contemporary political theory, which has focused mostly on the radical democratic theory of *Dis-agreement*. This reception has typically placed Rancière alongside other influential theorists of the event, the revolutionary, the ruptural; Rancière is presented alongside such influential theorists as Carl Schmitt, Giorgio Agamben, and Alain Badiou, as another theorists captivated by the indelible drama of the exception in political life. Thus, Todd May argues that for Rancière “democratic politics is an extraordinary and rare event”; Joseph Tanke draws a contrast between the disruptive political world and what he calls the “everyday world of the police”; Peter Hallward examines the limitations of Rancière’s “rare and ephemeral” conception of politics; and Slavoj Žižek celebrates this same conception and its insistence on “magic, violently poetic moments.”¹⁷ We can call this the evental reading of Rancière.¹⁸ There are many passages in Rancière’s work that confirm this approach, of course, as when he describes democracy as “a state of exception where no oppositions can function,” or when he writes that democracy must be grasped as a “rupture in the logic of the arche,” and that “the normal state of things equals the non-existence of politics.”¹⁹ This evental emphasis is not entirely wrong, then, but the works reviewed here offer

other resources in Rancière's writing that resist its central preoccupations and terms. What the works reviewed here most clearly reveal, and that the dominant reception in political theory obscures, is Rancière's distinctive approach to the politics of the ordinary. In contemporary political theory, the politics of the ordinary is usually associated with theorists influenced by ordinary language philosophy and Stanley Cavell, on the one hand, or those taking up Foucauldian or Deleuzian investigations into "micropolitics" on the other (or some combination of the two). Rancière belongs to this contemporary theoretical constellation as much as he does with the one preoccupied with "the axioms of rupture," emergency, or the "supposedly radical experience of the heterogeneous."²⁰ Rancière suggests as much in some of his recent writing. When confronted with the eventual reading of his work in a recent interview, Rancière replied: "I didn't mean to suggest that equality exists only on the barricades, and that once the barricades come down, it is over, and we go back to listlessness. I am not a thinker of the event, of the upsurge, but rather of emancipation as something with its own tradition, with a history that isn't just made up of great striking deeds but also of the ongoing effort to create forms of the common different from the ones on offer from the state and the democratic consensus."²¹

The books under review clearly demonstrate the truth of this claim and offer an elaborate archive of Rancière's exploration of everyday forms of political subjectivization. Together, they should change the way contemporary political theorists in the English-speaking world read and engage his work. They may also offer a provocation for political theorists to experiment more broadly than they have with different ways of relating history to theory, beyond the stale oppositions of contextualism and normative analytics, genealogy, and hagiographic recovery. *Proletarian Nights* ends with the reveries of the Widow Gay, alias Jeanne-Désirée, a feminist seamstress from Brussels who earlier in her life had been the radical founder of *La Femme libre*. Writing to a lover from her distant past—Victor Considérant—in May of 1890, and reflecting on a century of defeated revolutions, her letters offer Rancière a way of approaching the past free of either the captivating nostalgia of left melancholia or the confident assertions of scientific history. Her reveries of past struggles rekindle the "poetic grandeur" of the Widow Gay's utopian pasts, restoring the traces of their memory—for her and her lover, as well as for Rancière and his readers—as potential "legends of the future" (P 428). In these rich historical explorations of the everyday contours of political subjectivization, Rancière brilliantly illuminates the importance of recovering such lost and untimely dreams of emancipation for a time that seems for many to be defined by the systematic foreclosure of alternative political futures and the failure of political imagination.

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Notes

1. Jacques Rancière, *The Intellectual and His People*, 124. Further citations of the three books reviewed will be placed in parentheses as follows: I for *The Intellectual and His People*; P for *Proletarian Nights*; and S for *Staging the People*.
2. Jacques Rancière, *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 29.
3. Jacques Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, trans. John Drury, Corinne Oster, and Andrew Parker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 220.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 227.
5. Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, trans. Hassan Melehy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 90.
6. Jacques Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, trans. Emiliano Battista (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 124.
7. Jacques Rancière, "Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization," in *The Identity in Question*, ed. John Rajchman (New York: Routledge, 1995), 63–72, 68.
8. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–316.
9. Jacques Rancière, "Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man?" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, no. 2–3 (2004): 297–310, 303.
10. Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); see also Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Natural Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).
11. Rancière, *The Names of History*, 91.
12. James Swenson, "Style indirect libre," in *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics*, ed. Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 258–72, 259.
13. *Ibid.*, 259.
14. Jacques Rancière, "From Politics to Aesthetics?" *Paragraph* 28 (March 2005): 13–25, 14.
15. *Ibid.*, 14.
16. Cited in Kristin Ross, "Introduction," to Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), xviii.
17. Todd May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière: Creating Equality* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008); Joseph J. Tanke, *Jacques Rancière: An Introduction* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 64; Peter Hallward, "Staging Equality," in *Jacques Rancière*, ed. Rockhill and Watts,

- 140–57, 152; Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Center of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 2000), 128.
18. There are important exceptions, especially Davide Panagia's work on "the politics of sensation." See Davide Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009). Samuel Chambers has argued against the "ruptural" quality of "pure politics," but without placing emphasis on aesthetics. See Samuel A. Chambers, *The Lessons of Rancière* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
 19. Jacques Rancière, "Ten Thesis on Politics" (trans. Davide Panagia), *Theory & Event* 5, no. 3 (2001): 1-17, 4, 13.
 20. Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 217.
 21. Jacques Rancière, "Democracies against Democracy," in *Democracy in What State?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 76–81, 79.

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