

2011

**THE POLITICS OF KANT'S AESTHETICS: HANNAH ARENDT,
JACQUES RANCIÈRE, AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF COMMON
SENSE**

Owen Ryan Glyn-Williams

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/digitizedtheses>

Recommended Citation

Glyn-Williams, Owen Ryan, "THE POLITICS OF KANT'S AESTHETICS: HANNAH ARENDT, JACQUES RANCIÈRE, AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF COMMON SENSE" (2011). *Digitized Theses*. 3574.
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/digitizedtheses/3574>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Digitized Special Collections at Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Digitized Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact wlsadmin@uwo.ca.

THE POLITICS OF KANT'S AESTHETICS: HANNAH ARENDT, JACQUES
RANCIÈRE, AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF COMMON SENSE

Spine title: THE POLITICS OF KANT'S AESTHETICS

Thesis format: Monograph

by

Owen Glyn-Williams

Graduate Program in Theory and Criticism

2

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

© Owen Glyn-Williams 2011

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

CERTIFICATE OF EXAMINATION

Supervisor

Examiners

Dr. Antonio Calcagno

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Mark Franke

The thesis by

Owen Ryan Glyn-Williams

entitled:

**THE POLITICS OF KANT'S AESTHETICS: HANNAH ARENDT,
JACQUES RANCIÈRE, AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF COMMON
SENSE**

is accepted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Date

Chair of the Thesis Examination Board

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the political significance of Kant's aesthetics, as it is taken up in the political thought of Hannah Arendt and Jacques Rancière. While both Arendt and Rancière model their notions of political community on Kant's notion of *sensus communis*, or aesthetic common sense, I point to important differences in their respective appropriations of Kant. Whereas Arendt draws out of Kant's work on aesthetic judgment a politics of adherence to common sense (consensus), Rancière looks to Kant's concepts of disinterest and disconnection to develop a politics of "dissensus", aimed at reconfiguring common sense along more egalitarian lines. I argue that Rancière's ability to account, not just for the aesthetic partitioning of communities, but also for their radical transformation or *re*-partitioning through dissensus, makes him better able than Arendt to account for the introduction of political subjects rendered invisible and audible by historically cemented forms of common sense.

Keywords

Kant, Arendt, Rancière, Critique of Judgment, 'Analytic of the Beautiful', 'Analytic of the Sublime', *sensus communis*, consensus, dissensus, disagreement, disinterest, emancipation, subjectivization.

Acknowledgements

This Thesis would not have been possible without the patient and engaged supervision of Antonio Calcagno. His genuine interest and his love of philosophy have been an inspiration to me. I would like to thank some of my peers with whom I discovered and worked through the thought of Jacques Rancière with great excitement, especially David Janzen and Galen Crout, my parents Mike and Kim for their love and friendship (they are veritable *maîtres ignorants*, as Rancière would say), the Doyles for their passionate interest and support, and Jarek for conversation and laughter. Finally, thank you Caitlyn, for everything.

CERTIFICATE OF EXAMINATION.....	II
ABSTRACT.....	III
1 CH. 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	6
1.2 THE AESTHETICS OF ARENDT'S PUBLIC REALM:	8
1.2.1 <i>Plurality and Public Commonness</i>	8
1.2.2 <i>Common Sense from the Transcendental to the Historical:</i>	13
1.3 REIFICATION OF THE HISTORICAL SENSUS COMMUNIS	22
1.4 CONCLUSION.....	31
2 CH. 2: AESTHETIC COMMUNITY AND ITS 'DISSENSUAL' TRANSFORMATION.....	33
2.1 I. INTRODUCTION	33
2.2 RANCIÈRE AND AESTHETIC COMMUNITY.....	34
2.2.1 <i>What is Common is Sense:</i>	34
2.2.2 <i>Common Sense as Police Order:</i>	38
2.3 RANCIÈRE AND THE POLITICS OF DISSENSUS	46
2.3.1 <i>The Debate Over Human Rights</i>	51
2.3.2 <i>Is Emancipation Political or Social?</i>	55
2.4 RANCIÈRE'S 'IMMANENT TRANSCENDENTAL' AND ITS DISSENSUAL TRANSFORMATION.....	57
2.5 CONCLUSION.....	63
3 CH. 3: EMANCIPATION: IS THE SUBLIME POLITICAL?	64
3.1 DISSENSUS AS THE KANTIAN SUBLIME?.....	66
3.2 WHY THE SUBLIME IS NOT POLITICAL FOR RANCIÈRE.....	71
3.3 DEMOCRACY AND DISSENSUS: REVOLUTION BEYOND THE SUBLIME	74
3.3.1 <i>Dissensus and Dis-inter-est</i>	76
3.4 CONCLUSION.....	80
4 CONCLUSION.....	81
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	86

List of Abbreviations

Immanuel Kant:

CPJ – Critique of the Power of Judgment

Hannah Arendt:

HC – The Human Condition

OT – The Origins of Revolution

LKP – Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy

OR – On Revolution

RJ – Responsibility and Judgment

EJ – Eichmann in Jerusalem

BPF – Between Past and Future

EU – Essays on Understanding

HAR – Hannah Arendt Reader

Jacques Rancière:

DA – Dis-Agreement: Politics and Philosophy

D – Dissensus: Aesthetics and Politics

PA – The Politics of Aesthetics

AD – Aesthetics and Its Discontents

ES – The Emancipated Spectator

“PPA” – “The Paradoxes of Political Art”

“UD” – “The Use of Distinctions”

“WSR” – “Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man”

“TTP” – “Ten Theses on Politics”

“DW” – “Dissenting Words”

Panagia, Davide:

PPT – The Poetics of Political Thinking

PLS – The Political Life of Sensation

1 Ch. 1: Introduction

Over the past several decades, Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* has spurred a proliferation of writing and reflection on the implications of aesthetics beyond the merely formalistic evaluation of the beautiful and the sublime. Nowhere is this more acutely manifest than in the attempt to (re)think the relationship between aesthetics and politics, and this thesis will focus primarily on the contribution to this effort by Hannah Arendt and Jacques Rancière.¹

Reflection on the relationship between aesthetics and politics is at least as old as Plato, but these reflections are dominated by a concern with articulating the specific role that *art* assumes – or ought to assume – in the realm of politics. The ‘aesthetic’ in Kant’s work, however, initiates a whole range of new problems. While it is true that the third *Critique* is a pivotal contribution to the theory of the evaluation of artworks, his articulation of the *sensus communis* or ‘communal sense’ also decisively connects the aesthetic to the political. They are always already linked because community itself presupposes a shared *aesthesis* or *sensorium*, a common way of perceiving, feeling, and imparting meaning that enables communication and the collective experience of a common world. Both Arendt and Rancière appropriate this insight to articulate a chiasmatic relationship between aesthetics and politics.

¹ Major contributions have also come from Theodore Adorno and Pierre Bourdieu, both of whom assume Kant’s third *Critique* as a major point of reference.

The insight that what is communal in community is neither a shared identity (racial or ethnic), nor Rousseau's 'general will', but a shared *sense*, a common sense of the world, can be conceived along the lines of what Lars Tønder calls 'inessential commonality'. (Tønder 203) An inessential community has borders that are not static, that is, not destined to include some and exclude others along fixed and invariable lines. Whereas one can only ever participate in a common world constituted along the lines of particular identity traits (race, nationality, gender, citizenship etc.) if one is *already* a part of it, i.e., already possesses the essential traits that fit its criteria, community as common 'sense' *has no essentially determinate participants*.

Without doubt, a community grounded in a *sensus communis* has its own kind of parameters. One of the ways Arendt (re)interprets Kant's common sense, particularly in her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (1970), is by claiming that it is not a sense common to everybody, and in the same way. Different historical *milieus*, with distinct linguistic, cultural, and historical traditions engender different forms of common sense, which determine and circumscribe the possibilities for political interlocution and action (LKP 84). What I argue throughout this thesis, however, is that Arendt does not draw out the most radical consequences of this insight. If common sense—as the coordinates of aesthetico-political community—is decisively contingent, particular, and local, rather than universally identical, is it not conceivable that these very parameters can be contested and altered? Moreover, might we not surmise that politics has something to do, not just with what takes place *inside* the strictures of historically inherited common sense, but that it might also comprise those processes capable of *transforming* it?

This is where we turn to the work of Rancière, whose novel concept of ‘dissensus’ makes precisely such processes of transformation thinkable. While he shares with Arendt a conception of ‘common sense’—what he is noted for calling a ‘distribution of the sensible’ [*partage du sensible*]*—*as the basis of community, he conceptualizes a vision of politics as the *re*-distribution of common sense. This theory presupposes the capacity, not just to speak and act according to the existing strictures of the community sense, but to intervene in the connections between words and things, images and associations, the visible and the invisible, to engender a different sensible world. It allows for the process of emancipation—a process not adequately politicized in Arendt’s thought—that can introduce new subjects and previously unperceived objects into the common world. Dissensus, in Rancière’s work, is precisely such a politicization, the rendering public what was previously cast into the ‘darkness’ of the private world, as Arendt frequently describes it.

But the differences between these two thinkers of the aesthetics of politics should not be exaggerated, and I hope to shed light on the extent to which their respective projects are highly complementary. James Ingram, in his “The Subject of the Politics of Recognition: Hannah Arendt and Jacques Rancière”, and Andrew Schapp, in his “Enacting the Right to Have Rights: Jacques Rancière’s critique of Hannah Arendt”, have focused on the contrast between their conceptions of recognition and human rights respectively, but there is as yet, to the best of my knowledge, no attempt to think through the complex relationship between their unique aesthetics of politics. To this end, I hope to contribute to the effort to read these two thinkers with and against one another.

The argument that I develop over the course of this thesis is the following: an understanding of politics as situated immanently within the sensible world, within the forms of experience engendered by the historical *milieus* that we inhabit, *and which understands these forms as transformable and mobile*, enables a conception of public or communal participation that leaves room for the insertion of contentious and unperceived subjects.

In order to make this argument, I propose the following itinerary: In the second chapter I introduce Arendt's notion of the public realm as a 'space of appearance' that is grounded in an aesthetic of common sense, that is, a public sense or *inter-est* that frames community as the perception of common objects of concern. This leads to an analysis of Arendt's appropriation of the *sensus communis*, in which she makes the decisive link between the aesthetic—our shared ways of perceiving and imparting meaning on the world—and politics, understood as the ability to communicate and debate on the objects perceived as public. Of special importance here is Arendt's historicisation of Kantian aesthetic common sense, that is, her insistence that common sense is contingent on the particular historical *milieu* in which it takes shape, as opposed to being universal and the same for all peoples. Finally, I argue that Arendt does not draw some of the important consequences of this historicisation, namely the risk that, by determining the parameters of intelligible and 'sensible' political interlocution, common sense takes on a function of constraining the possible participants and modes of participation in the common. If the aesthetic coordinates of the public realm are not understood as susceptible to radical transformation on the part of those who are publically invisible and inaudible, then the struggle for equality on the part of figures like the *sans papiers* in France (immigrant

workers who are denied basic rights by the French State) have no hope of inserting themselves into the public realm and being perceived as an issue of common concern. In other words, if such figures are to *politicize* what many would prefer to perceive as their merely private plight, than politics cannot be reduced exclusively to the inner logic or common sense of a given historically situated public realm. This reduction, I argue, is one that Arendt can be seen to make.

Chapter Three begins with an analysis of the similarities between Arendt's and Rancière's respective endeavors to fuse the aesthetic and the political. I show how Rancière's aesthetics of politics actually divides into two modalities: 'consensus' and 'dissensus'. Along these lines, I argue that Arendt's political aesthetics falls under the former category, whereas Rancière's falls under the latter. The concept of dissensus helps to articulate an aspect of politics undeveloped in Arendt's thought, namely those processes that resist the reification and hegemonization of the *sensus communis*, amending rather than simply dismissing her account of the public realm.

In the final chapter, I oppose the attempt by several commentators on Rancière's work² to find the analogue for the process of dissensus in the Kantian concept of the sublime, a concept that Arendt does not interpret as politically relevant. Because dissensus is defined by a rupture with the existing modes of perception and understanding, such an association is understandable. Nonetheless, I point to the seemingly overlooked parts of Rancière's more recent writings where it is clear that the

² Panagia, Davide. *The Poetics of Political Thinking*. Durham: Duke UP. 2004. Wolfe, Catherine. "From Aesthetics to Politics: Kant, Rancière, Deleuze. 2006

notion of 'disinterest', at the heart of Kant's 'Analytic of the Beautiful', provides the analogue for the process of dissensus. Disinterest, which is Kant's term for the *negative* relation of aesthetic experience to any epistemic or moral determination, is a radically *disjunctive*, de-contextualizing interruption of our 'normal' ways of judging our perceptions. Rancière's reference to the theory of the beautiful, which is grounded in the immanence of the common world of sociality (*sensus communis*), reveals a link between his own conception of politics and that of Arendt, which he situates squarely within the sensible world. Against the quasi-theological conceptions of the political which seek to subordinate politics to an ethics of the unrepresentable Other—which has more in common with the experience of the sublime than the beautiful—Arendt and Rancière attempt to articulate the inscription of difference and alterity *at the very heart* of the reigning order of aesthetic recognition and identification.

2 Ch. 2: Arendt's Public Realm and the Reified *Sensus Communis*

Even the experience of the materially and sensually given world depends upon my being in contact with other men, upon our common sense which regulates and controls all other senses and without which each of us would be enclosed in his own particularity of sense data which in themselves are unreliable and treacherous. Only because we have common sense, that is only because not one man, but men in the plural inhabit the earth can we trust our immediate sensual experience.

– Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the role of Kant's aesthetics in Arendt's concept of the 'public realm', focusing on the affinities that she sees between Kant's notion of the *sensus communis*, or aesthetic common sense, and her own conception of the 'public' space of appearances. Throughout her work, Arendt argues that the public realm, as a space for the exchange of 'words and deeds', relies on a shared, robust sense of 'reality' and its sensible 'givens', a 'communal sense' which allows the irreducible perspectival plurality characteristic of the human condition to coalesce in a common world or '*interest*' wherein political interlocution becomes possible. (HC 57)

I argue that the very same gesture that allows Arendt to conceptualize the public realm as a space that preserves the integrity of plurality, also reifies this realm in the name of its continuation or 'permanence', sealing this space off from the intervention of new political subjects capable of transforming it; namely, the orientation of speech, judgment, and action toward commonly perceived objects. Such interventions always rely on challenging the 'given' world, on contesting what 'appears' by altering the *sensus communis*, a process that Arendt's conceptualization does not sufficiently allow for, so I maintain. Although she effectively historicizes the *sensus communis* by situating it immanently within contingent spatiotemporal situations, thereby acknowledging that changes in the reigning form common sense do in fact occur with shifts in historical circumstances, as opposed to the ahistorical universally identical common sense theorized by Kantian transcendental subjectivity, these shifts do not appear to be relevant for her conception of political activity. This results, I argue, in a conception of the

political that de-politicizes those forms of action that could alter the public world and the *sensus communis*.

In the first part, I look at Arendt's concept of the public realm and its aesthetic foundations in 'appearance'. Here, I highlight the manner in which, drawing on an analysis of Kant's aesthetics and, in particular, his *sensus communis*, she uniquely fuses the aesthetic and the political, and accounts for the commonality of community by means of a 'common sense'. I shall focus on the aforementioned historicization of this common sense. Finally, by looking to the critical reception of her work on the notion of community as common sense I will demonstrate that the 'world', reified into a conservative *sensus communis*, is incapable of accounting for radical political transformation and the introduction of the genuinely new, as she claims it does.

2.2 The Aesthetics of Arendt's Public Realm:

2.2.1 Plurality and Public Commonness

The impact of Arendt's experience as a German Jew living through the calamitous events of Twentieth Century totalitarianism and war on her theoretical work has been widely recognized and analyzed by her commentators, and it cannot be overstated. In these events, she saw the culmination of a contempt for the unpredictability and plurality of the human condition, which is at least as old as Plato's flight from the realm of appearance for the realm of ideas. Arendt was also heavily influenced by her experience

of post-war America, however, and the rule of consumer society and individualism that she perceived there. Perhaps the principal thread that ties Arendt's vast corpus together into a unified project is the struggle to articulate how to preserve the realm of the political as a domain of difference, newness and singularity against the totalitarian tendency to level down and eliminate the manifestation of human uniqueness, while at the same time preserving the integrity of a life in common with others.

Ultimately, Arendt found the model she was seeking in the notion of the public realm. Inspired by the ancient Greek *polis* and the Roman *res publica*, Arendt conceived the public realm as an agonistic space of great 'words and deeds' that, while gathering diverse individuals into a common space, allowed the singularity of each participant to become manifest and be witnessed by the 'spectators' of the public sphere (HC 57). In *The Human Condition*, she argues that what distinguishes the public realm from the private and social (economic) realms is that 'appearance' is all that matters, and she refers to it as a space of appearances. "The term 'public'," she explains, "signifies two closely interrelated but not altogether identical phenomena... first, that everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity. For us appearance—something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves—constitutes reality." (HC 50) And "second, the term 'public' signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all and is distinguished from our privately owned place in it." (HC 52)

What holds a community together in the public realm is appearance. Although different perspectives are constitutive of it, everybody in the public realm ultimately sees the same things; "differences of position and the resulting variety of perspectives

notwithstanding, everybody is always concerned with the same object.” (HC 58) This concern with the same objects of appearance constitutes for Arendt what she calls an *inter-est* between one another, something “which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together.” (HC 182) What is important, for Arendt, is that it is not identity that constitutes community, but the sharing of a ‘sense’ of reality, which at once retains plurality of perspectives and commonness. *Inter-est*, as Lisa Disch claims, “is the same but nonidentical object of public concern.” (Disch 143) The exchange of diverse and singular words and deeds proper to the public realm relies on a common world in which this diversity can coalesce. Without this *inter-est* (being-between), shared meaning and understanding collapses, and with it the base level of sameness against the background of which the revelatory and individuating manifestation of difference characteristic of action and speech unfold. While action and speech aim to “distinguish oneself from all others,” (HC 49) “most action and speech is concerned with this in-between... so that most words and deeds are *about* some worldly objective reality.” (HC 182) Public *inter-est* is best conceived, not as the sufficient guarantor of unity among diverse individuals, but as the necessary common (aesthetic) space for such unity to be possible in the first place.

To the same extent that the *inter-est* of the public realm binds-together diverse individuals, however, it also allows Arendt to partition off the modalities of human activity that qualify as political, from those that do not. In particular, it is the activities of ‘action’ and ‘speech’ that colour the common world: “most words and deeds are *about* some worldly objective reality.” (HC 182) Action and speech differ from other human activities in that they relate to the uniquely *human* condition which for Arendt is defined

by 'natality' (the fact that new possibilities enter the world with every child birth) and 'plurality' (that no two people are identical). (HC 178) "If action corresponds to the fact of birth," explains Arendt, "if it is the actualization of the human condition of natality, then speech corresponds to the fact of distinctiveness and is the actualization, that is, of living as a distinct and unique being among equals." (HC 178) Action and speech are not defined by the instrumental logic of production (they do, strictly speaking, produce anything), but by what and who they reveal. This emphasis on revelation, moreover, discloses the crucial role that spectatorship plays in the public realm, to the extent that its participants always witness and judge the speech and action of others. Only action and speech enact human being-together, because they appeal to, and are even constituted by, the presence of others who witness them. To this end, Arendt is careful to distinguish the 'reality' of one's private world from "the reality rising out of the sum total of aspects presented by one object to a multitude of spectators," (HC 57) which she privileges. This 'sum total of aspects' thickens the texture of the shared world, a thickening that cannot take place within the confines of the private sphere.

In contrast to action and speech, and their judgment by spectators, 'labour' and 'work', the two other activities proper to the human condition, do not qualify as political for Arendt. Labour, as "the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body," (HC 7) and work, which "provides the 'artificial' world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings," (HC 7) she maintains, do not address themselves to the 'human condition' of plurality, the condition *sine qua non* of "all political life." (HC 7) Action, conversely, is "the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, [and] corresponds to the

human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on earth and inhabit the world.” (HC 7) Unlike labour and work, the stakes of action are fundamentally communicative, and Arendt explicitly claims that “most political action... is indeed transacted in words.” (HC 26)

Arendt’s claim that labour and work are not, strictly speaking, political categories, is also tied to her insistence that the ‘freedom’ characteristic of political life must be distinguished from the ‘necessity’ that dominates social and economic life, a distinction whose neglect was, for Arendt, at the heart of totalitarianism. She argues that it is a perversion of the essence of politics to maintain that “the life process of society is the center of human endeavor.” (OR 58) Social and economic life, for Arendt, is carried out in the ‘darkness’ of the private realm, which for her includes not just the home but the workplace, public institutions such as schools, etc. And because, in Arendt’s conception of politics, “nothing matters that cannot make itself seen and heard,” and “visibility and audibility are of prime importance,” (HAR 233) only that space of appearances that is the public realm is properly political.

What I wish to emphasize in Arendt’s conception of the public realm is the extent to which it relies on a strong sense of the world as it appears to everyone. Publicness requires a ‘common sense’, which adjusts our private realities to the objects of perception and ways of perceiving shared by others, opening up the possibility of speaking to one another about them. “The only character of the world by which to gauge its reality,” Arendt argues, “is its being common to us all, and common sense occupies such a high rank in the hierarchy of political qualities because it is the one sense that fits into reality as a whole our five strictly individual senses and the strictly particular data they

perceive.” (HC 208) The fact that, already in *The Human Condition*, Arendt equates “the atrophy of the space of appearances [with]... the withering of common sense,” (HC 209) reveals that of a robust sense of the given world (‘reality’) is constitutive of her concept of the public.

2.2.2 Common Sense from the Transcendental to the Historical:

Arendt’s concern, manifest throughout her *oeuvre*, with *appearance* as the defining feature of politics and the public realm bespeaks an awareness of the centrality of aesthetics to politics. Nevertheless, it is not until her engagement with Kant’s principal treatise on aesthetics, namely *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*, that this centrality becomes explicit. Arendt sees in Kant’s notion of ‘taste’ as a *sensus communis*, or aesthetic common sense, the basis for sociability and publicity, which are at the core of her political theory. In what follows, I examine Arendt’s appropriation of Kant’s aesthetics, and specifically her historicisation of the *sensus communis*, that is, her assertion that common sense is not universally identical for all people, but is contingent on the cultural, linguistic, and historical particularities of a given people. (LKP 84) While Arendt is right to undermine the universalizing thrust of Kantian transcendental common sense, which conceives of common sense as transcendent to historical contingencies, I argue that she does not address some of the major considerations that arise from this undermining. In her desire to affirm the permanence of the world and preserve the integrity of the *inter-est*, she does not adequately address the potential for the *sensus communis* to reify into an ideological and reactionary force, foreclosing the radical intervention of new actors and new objects of common concern.

Aesthetics & Politics in Kant's Third Critique: Arendt was never able to write the third and final volume of her seminal *Life of the Mind*, which was to be entitled "Judging", and which was to deal extensively with Kant's third *Critique*. In the absence of this volume, we are left with the collection of lectures that Arendt delivered in 1970, which have been compiled and edited by Ronald Beiner and published as *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. Aside from scattered references throughout her *oeuvre*, these lectures contain Arendt's most explicit attempt to make out of Kant's reflections on the nature of the beautiful the basis of a politics of judgment, opinion, and publicity.

Arendt begins her *Lectures* with a justification of the centrality of Kant's aesthetics to what *ought* to be considered his 'political philosophy'. Against the dominant tradition of Kant scholarship, she privileges the third *Critique* over his moral treatises (*Critique of Practical Reason*, the *Groundwork* and the *Metaphysics of Morals*) as well as his more directly 'political writings' (*Perpetual Peace*, *Cosmopolitanism With a Universal Intent* etc.). As Arendt explains, "Kant became aware of the political *as distinct from the social*, as part and parcel of man's condition in the world, rather late in life, when he no longer had either the strength or the time to work out his own philosophy on this particular matter." (LKP 9) For Arendt, far from consisting in a combination of his moral and political writings, it is in Kant's aesthetics, and in particular his theory of aesthetic or reflective judgment, that his most important political legacy lies, and it is the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* that "actually should have become the book that otherwise is missing in Kant's great work." (LKP 9)

So what is it about Kant's aesthetic writings that stands apart from the rest of his work, as well as from the whole tradition of political philosophy? For Arendt, the answer

lies in what she identifies as a propensity toward 'sociability' revealed in his analysis of judgments of taste. Kant's turn toward such judgments, in his later writings, foregrounds a subjective capacity that is not reducible to the faculties of 'understanding' and 'reason,' which dominate his earlier critical philosophy. This is significant, for Arendt, because these faculties are by definition *not* in need of the presence of other human beings and are decidedly transcendent to the earthly realm of appearances and intersubjectivity. This is evident in Kant's repeated description of the cognitive structures of understanding and reason as proper to any intelligent being in the universe whatsoever. (CPJ 195)

Kant's turn toward judgment, however, marks a politically promising shift in that it concerns a subjective capacity that is essentially dependent on, and demands sociability, a being-with-others in a common world, and is thus intimately tied up with the immanence of the world. As Arendt explains, "the most decisive difference between the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Critique of Judgment* is that the moral laws of the former are valid for all intelligible beings, whereas the rules of the latter are strictly limited in their validity to human beings on earth." (LKP 13) It is precisely this immanence to the world essential to aesthetic judgment that makes the third *Critique* "more closely connected with the political than anything in the other *Critiques*." (LKP 13)

Indeed, Arendt sees her own distinction between the private and the public, so crucial to her theorization of politics (which strictly concerns the public world), as being lodged at the heart of Kant's third *Critique*. For Kant, the pleasure derived from experiences of the beautiful must be sharply distinguished from what he refers to as mere feelings of 'charm' or the 'agreeable' (CPJ 96). The agreeable is a strictly private,

idiosyncratic partiality toward a sensation of one sort or another, and by definition does not expect the agreement or approval of anyone else. "With regard to the agreeable," explains Kant, "everyone is content that his judgment, which he grounds on a private feeling, and in which he says of an object that it pleases him, be restricted merely to his own person." (CPJ 97) Already in *The Human Condition*, Arendt contends that "while the public realm may be great, it cannot be charming precisely because it is unable to harbor the irrelevant." (HC 52) What is 'relevant' always pertains to the world and its attendant problems and possibilities; it is relevant *to others*, as well as to oneself, which is not the case for the idiosyncratic concerns of private life. Whereas 'understanding' and 'reason' are universally necessary, regardless of the contingencies of the judging subject, and the 'agreeable' is completely contingent on private, subjective whim, 'judgment' is immanently tied up sociability, i.e., to the ways that others judge the objects of the common world. What both the universal- legislative and private- idiosyncratic modes of judging have in common is that they are solitary and worldless, lacking any reference to the ways of feeling and judging of other people.

Kant's descriptions of aesthetic judgments, however, are markedly different, and the 'Analytic of the Beautiful' is laden with a similar vocabulary to the one Arendt uses to describe publicity, namely, 'communicability', 'agreement', and 'sociability'. When we judge something as beautiful, Kant suggests, we expect the 'assent' of others, and are not likely be satisfied with the idea that this judgment is strictly personal. Far from being idiosyncratic, we expect that our judgments of the beautiful are "generally valid (public) judgments." (CPJ 99)

One of the defining features of aesthetic judgments is that they are 'reflective', rather than 'determining'. Determining judgments mechanistically subsume particularities under the universal concepts of the understanding (cognition), whereas reflective judgments lack immediate recourse to a concept, suspending the determining function of cognition. But one should not be misled into conceiving of Kantian reflection as, in the first instance, introspective. Aesthetic reflection differs from our contemporary understanding of the term, and does not involve searching within ones self, as it were, but is essentially other-directed. It appeals to *common* sense, to what Kant, in his appropriation of the Latin term, calls a *sensus communis*. What Kant sought in the idea of a *sensus communis* was a standard for deciding on matters of taste that neither relied on objectivity nor on pure subjective whim, but which provided an 'impartial' standpoint from which to render generally valid judgments, that is, from which a truly public judgment could be made. "By '*sensus communis*'," he explains, "must be understood the idea of a communal sense i.e., a faculty for judging that in its reflection takes account (*a priori*) of everyone else's way of representing in thought..." (CPJ 173)

For Kant, this does not mean that reflective judgment empirically reaches out to individuals and asks about their particular feeling in relation to a given object. As Arendt explains in her essay "The Crisis in Culture", "the thinking process which is active in judging something is not, like the thought process of pure reasoning, a dialogue between me and myself, but finds itself always and primarily, *even if I am quite alone in making up my mind*, in an anticipated communication with others with whom I must finally come to some agreement." [italics added] (BPF 220)

For Arendt, it is of no small significance that Kant chose to use the Latin term '*sensus communis*,' rather than simply using the popular expression 'common sense'. Throughout his work, Kant applied the term 'common sense' both to the capacities of the understanding and to practical reason. Common sense – both in common parlance and in Kant's sense – indicates a capacity shared by everyone *in their respective private uses of it*, i.e., in their solitary epistemic and practical judgments. "By using the Latin term," however, "Kant indicates that here he means something different: an extra sense... that fits us into community." (LKP 70) This 'extra' sense, which 'fits us into community', is the aesthetic basis of the political for Arendt; it bespeaks the manner in which human sensation adjusts according to the ways of sensing and perceiving proper to the community in which one has grown and are embedded. Sensing-with (con-sensus) lies at the heart of our ability to form opinions and actions whose scope and interest (*inter-est*) extend from our private, individual world, to the world we share in common with others.

One can argue, therefore, that Arendt sees in Kant's aesthetics a model of judging that resolves the tension between irreducible plurality and commonness, which animates her theoretical work from its very beginning. Aesthetic judgments reveal that the plurality of perspectives can coalesce in a common world (*sensus communis*), without this resulting in the erasure of that plurality. Epistemic or moral judgments cannot achieve this because they leave no room for debate, dialogue, and the appearance of different people to one another. Aesthetic judgments, conversely, cannot be made without appeal to the sociability of the common world, to the ways of sensing and 'representing' proper to other people. As Andrew Norris asserts, Arendt presents the political realm as:

one in which opinion and judgment as such are capable of achieving impartiality without relying upon either the unity of the will or the coercion of cognition. At the end of her life, Arendt turned to Kant's *Critique of Judgment* for a model of how this inherently public opinion might be conceived. In spite of Kant's own hostility toward rhetoric, his discussion of aesthetic, reflective judgment offers an account of how political speech and opinion might achieve impartiality in a form other than objectivity. (Norris 1996)

Borrowing Kant's own expression, Arendt calls this 'public' opinion an 'enlarged mentality'. Such a 'mentality', enriched by the intercourse of the public realm, is the ideal of Arendtian politics.

Historicizing the Sensus Communis: Arendt is open about the fact that her interpretation of Kant stretches or even redefines his own proper terms, claiming to be faithful to the 'spirit' of his work and not primarily concerned with exegetical accuracy. (LKP 33) Indeed, Arendt's particular *historical* inflection of Kant's *sensus communis* has far reaching consequences for the kind of politics that she sees Kant's aesthetics as making possible, and indicates that the transcendence endemic to Kant's unworldly transcendental subject is not sufficient for a thinking of an earthbound-politics. If one were to pose the question to Kant directly, "To whom is common sense common?" his answer would most certainly be "humanity as such". Arendt, however, answers differently. Beginning with her essay "Understanding and Politics", she explicitly inserts common sense into historical and cultural contexts. (EU 317) Not yet indexing her use of the term to Kant's aesthetics, she insists that there is a web of pre-understandings proper to different cultures that constitutes the particular character of a given people's political

life. In this essay, Arendt describes common sense as “that portion of inherited wisdom which all men have in common *in a given civilization.*” [italics added] (EU 317)

Whereas Kant places the *sensus communis* squarely in the general structure of human subjectivity proper to the transcendental subject—albeit, one that is always situated on earth and in human society—Arendt sees the *sensus communis* as historically embedded in our cultural inheritances. In Michael Gottsegen’s words, “Arendt turns Kant’s analytic in a direction that adds credence to a conception of political discourse and political judgment that is rooted in a web of norms, values, and principles that are contingently interwoven and spatiotemporally localized.” (Gottsegen, PTH 180) Arendt remarks, in the *Lectures*, that Kant lacks a sense of history altogether, and notes that the historical situatedness of man in general was not integral to Kant’s philosophy. “In Kant,” she explains, “history is part of nature; the historical subject is the human species understood as part of the creation, though as its final end creation’s crown, so to speak.” (LKP 8) This lack of a sense of history, evidently, has consequences for how Kant’s own understanding of the sociability at the heart of the *sensus communis* ought to be understood. While the third *Critique* is characterized by an ambivalence about the historicity of the *sensus communis*—given that it is the properly *human* capacity, and not a faculty of all rational beings in the universe—it must be remembered that this sense is ultimately a “*faculty* for judgment” that “holds our judgments up to human reason as a whole” (CPJ 156). Though strictly human, Kant’s *sensus communis* is identical regardless of the place or time in human history in which it is set to (reflective) work.

Arendt, conversely, suggests in her essay “The Crisis in Culture” that taste can be conceived as a *cultura animi* (cultivation of soul) that consists of those narrated tales and

recounted actions, venerated artworks and sacred texts that attest to the “temporal transcendence of the public realm itself.” (BPF 159) This *cultura animi* provides the forms of expression through which a people perceive and describe the world in common. It shapes a public ‘imagination’, filtering the perception of particular objects or events through recognizable categories, names, and modes of evaluation. “As such, imagination ‘determines the sensibility *a priori*,’ it is inherent in all sense perceptions. Without it, there would be neither the objectivity of the world—that it can be known – nor any possibility of communication—that we can talk about it.” (LKP 84) Imagination provides, for example, “a language which enables the citizen who stands before the community to speak of (for example) freedom and tyranny and to be understood. As such it is a language which enables the citizen to exercise his judgment in a publically comprehensible fashion.” (Gottsegen, PTH, 148) Certainly, ‘public comprehensibility’ does not mean that everyone agrees on the judgments that are exercised, for the public realm is defined by agonistic disagreement and debate. Nevertheless, it does guarantee a basic level of agreement about *what* is being judged, about the reality of the object present before the eyes and ears of the public.

Thus, the *sensus communis* ought to be understood as playing two interconnected but distinct roles in Arendt’s conception of the public realm: it functions both as a transcendental structure and as a normative measure. The transcendental function is found in the concept of imagination, described above. The concept of imagination is the ‘*a priori*’ basis of communicability. As Arendt claims “what makes particulars *communicable* is (a) that in perceiving a particular we have in the back of our minds... a ‘schema’ whose ‘shape’ is characteristic of many such particulars *and* (b) that this

schematic shape is in the back of the minds of many different people. These schematic shapes are products of the imagination..." (LKP 83) Imagination is central to our ability to compose statements and initiate actions that are publically comprehensible, indexing our acts, expressions and judgments to the horizon of pre-understandings that are the substance of a community, so that they may be meaningfully perceived and understood by others. Secondly, the *sensus communis* is said to enable reflection, which plays a normative function. Impartiality, toward which reflective judgment strives, subjects our judgments to the constraints of general validity. As I explained above, reflection is other-directed and searches among the ways of representing and judging proper to others for the appropriate judgment to be rendered. Whereas imagination creates the standards according to which we judge, reflection attempts to meet them by rendering publically valid judgments. The aesthetic categories of imagination and reflection provide Arendt with a framework for a conception of the common that simultaneously once allows for perspectival plurality and disagreement, while carrying with it the promise of communication, mutual understanding, and impartiality.

2.3 Reification of the Historical *sensus communis*

The fact that Arendt conceives of the *sensus communis* as embedded in historical worlds and cultural imaginaries presents her with a number of problems that do not constrain Kant: What, for example, are the political stakes of the fact that the *sensus communis* can and does change? How do different common senses—since for Arendt there are a plurality of them—interact with one another? If the *sensus communis* is contingent and historical, and thus changeable, is it conceivable that politics, beyond simply

accommodating the existing coordinates of communication and impartial validity, might also involve attempts to challenge these coordinates by radically contesting the existing cultural imagination?

Arendt opens something radical up by placing the *sensus communis* in the meaning-contexts and pre-understandings of the *world* and not in the *mind*. Nevertheless, I would argue that she does not bring this radical gesture to its furthest consequences. Her work seems to show a greater concern for preserving a robust sense of the given in the face of its contingency, privileging the survival and permanence of the world to its radical reconfiguration. In Arendt's words, "the existence of a public realm and... a community of things which gathers men together and relates them to each other depends entirely on permanence. If the world is to contain a public space, it cannot be erected for one generation and planned for the living only; it must transcend the life-span of mortal men." (HC 55) Likewise, as James Ingram summarizes Arendt's position, "the highest purpose of politics is to ensure through action the continued existence of a world in which politics, and thus freedom, plurality, and action, is possible." (Ingram, SPR 235) I do not wish to argue against Arendt's emphasis on the continuation and thickening of the world as a necessary condition for politics. The potential for the disintegration of a common world, the usurpation of the public realm by private and social activities plainly threatens the possibility of politics.³ I am interested, rather, in what aspect of politics is lost in this emphasis. There is a danger, I would argue, that Arendt's emphasis on the

³ One could argue that contemporary 'market' societies persistently threaten the existence of public space, and thus of politics. The reduction of parliamentary 'politics' to state and economic administration—what Arendt herself calls 'national housekeeping'—and the private ownership of the media are two of the primary means by which capitalist societies replace the common world with one that is administered in a unidirectional manner by the existing forms of power.

'continued existence' of the world risks overlooking the tendency for the *sensus communis* to reify into a reactionary and hegemonic structure. One of the consequences of historicizing the *sensus communis*, a consequence that, in my opinion, Arendt does not sufficiently address, is that it must be understood as embedded in discursive and ideological frameworks that legitimate and reproduce certain conditions in a given situation, including the conditions of injustice and inequality. Racism and xenophobia, for example, are often perpetuated by a *sensus communis*, composed of 'images' and 'concepts' that organize our perception of and judgments concerning certain classes of people.

Such a tendency for common sense to reify requires accounting for modes of *political* activity that can radically challenge, and not only enrich or prolong, the *inter-est* of the public world. I would argue that such challenges, moreover, are rarely 'publically comprehensible', because their very aim is to subvert and reorganize the register of intelligibility and common sense. In certain circumstances, therefore, the notion that an act or a judgment is genuinely political only if it issues from and appeals to common sense may be insufficient. While I do not mean to suggest, as some have⁴, that the goings on of the public realm are destined to the mere repetition of the same, it seems fair to presume that the constraints of communicability and impartiality could prevent the presentation of legitimately political actions that do not conform to the existing coordinates of the public realm and the *sensus communis*. It is therefore reasonable to surmise that politics must involve instances where the introduction of new subjects and

⁴ Homi K. Bhaba, *The Location of Culture*, 190-192

objects of common perception and concern requires a radical break and shift in the public *inter-est* itself.

In his *Metapolitics* (2005), Alain Badiou argues something to this effect. He describes Arendt's "peculiar neo-Kantianism" as engendering a type of , structured by the foreclosure of radical difference under the guise of the 'plurality of opinions'. I quote him at length:

Let us call 'community' plurality as such; the being-together, or in-common, of the plurality of men. Let us call 'common sense' the resource of judgment *directly bound to this plurality*. Arendt's formula is then the following 'The criterion is communicability, and the standard of deciding about it is common sense'... 'Communicability' suggests that the plurality of opinions is sufficiently wide-ranging to accommodate difference. And yet everyone knows from experience that this is inaccurate, and that there is no place for debating *genuinely* alternative opinions, which at best are subject to dispute. With 'common sense' one provides a norm which is in actual fact *transcendent*, because it suggests, not only plurality, but a subjective unity of this plurality, at least in principle. This concession to the One undoes the radicality of the multiple, which had allegedly been guaranteed. It opens the way to a doctrine of *consensus*[...]. (Badiou, *MP* 18)

While Arendt tends to be pre-occupied with the inner workings of the public realm, with the dynamics of reflection, speech and action as they unfold in the enclosure of public space, Badiou draws attention to the rigidity of the parameters that make such a political enclosure possible. In spite of Arendt's desire to balance uniqueness and singularity with the commonness of a shared sense of the world, Badiou suggests that this sense can reify into a transcendent limit, guarding the public realm from politically transformative interventions and compromising the potential for *radical* disagreement and dissimilarity.

Badiou's critique is based on what he interprets as the self-referential and closed process of *opinion formation*, or the genesis of politically appropriate, impartial judgments. He writes:

Opinion is formed as the general exercise of 'sharing the world with others'. One recognizes what is at stake in this attempt: to assign the formation of opinions to the plural *itself*, to make it the immediate subjectification of being-together. The price paid for this move is a severe restriction as to what an opinion is – let's be clear: as to what a politically justified opinion is... For this is an opinion which at least bears a trace of its protocol of formation, and which therefore *remains homogeneous to the persistence of being-together, or the share (partage)*. (Badiou, *MP* 19)

On Badiou's account, Arendt's 'plurality' is domesticated within the more comprehensive unity and sameness of political community *qua* public realm and *sensus communis*. Recall that the process of reflection indexes the plurality of perspectives to fixed examples—stories, schemas, images etc.—through which the plurality of opinions are distributed according to the normative strictures of communicability and the common world. In Arendt's promotion of those forms of action and speech that cohere with the sense of 'reality' proper to the public realm, Badiou argues, she forecloses those reality-shattering events and processes from her conception of political life. Gottsegen corroborates Badiou's objection to Arendt's politics when he claims that "the judging process itself, as a consequence of the prominence given to an 'exemplary' past by the *sensus communis*, emerges as essentially conservative." (Gottsegen, *PTH* 200)

In some ways, this is not exactly a fair characterization of Arendt's politics. In response to the accusation that her conception of the political leaves little if any room for heterogeneous, transformative action, she would likely point to her notions of 'thinking' and 'responsibility', which mutually support one another, and which, moreover, are

intended precisely to articulate the appropriate political response to 'evil' and injustice. At certain historical junctures, such as that of totalitarianism, when common sense begins to 'wither away' into a mere ideological (un)thinking, genuine thinking requires that one break with the tacitly accepted opinions and automatically obeyed rules dominant. The lesson of Adolf Eichmann's participation in one of the grossest injustices in history (the Holocaust), Arendt argues in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, is precisely that evil is 'banal' to the extent that, far from involving any diabolical profundity, his actions merely resulted from "an inability to *think*". (EJ 49) This means, for Arendt, that Eichmann lacked the ability "to think from the standpoint of somebody else." (EJ 49) Reiterating this point in her essay "Truth and Politics", she claims that Eichmann lacked the "capacity for an 'enlarged mentality' that enables men to judge." (Arendt, "TP" 556)

In contrast to Eichmann's deficiency, she points to those few figures who, out of their capacity to *think*, assumed *responsibility* for the world to which they belonged by doing precisely what Eichmann claimed was impossible or futile: they refused to participate, even if it meant sacrificing their lives. These "nonparticipators in public life under a dictatorship" (RJ 47) adhered to an ethics that, according to Arendt, is Socratic in origin, an ethics that holds that "it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong." (RJ 151) Their refusal was not out of sympathy or even empathy, but rather a capacity to imaginatively occupy the perspectives of those who would suffer as a result of their compliance, participation, and tacit approval; such figures acted out of responsibility, "dared to judge for themselves." (RJ 44)

Nonetheless, Arendt's concepts of thinking and responsibility do not provide a satisfying answer to the problems I have been raising. First, as Isabelle Herzog argues in

her essay "Hannah Arendt's Concept of Responsibility", the capacity to think and assume responsibility for the acts committed in and by one's community presupposes that one already belongs to and can participate in a political community. For Arendt, argues Herzog, "an agent will be held responsible for his/her words and deeds only if s/he belongs to a public sphere at the moment of his/her acts." (Herzog, "HAC" 43) In her *Responsibility and Judgment*, Arendt makes this point plainly: "the twentieth century has created a category of men who were truly outcasts, belonging to no internationally recognizable community whatsoever, the refugees and stateless people, who indeed can not be held politically responsible for anything." (RJ 150) They are "the only totally nonresponsible people." (RJ 150) This category of people who lack a definite polity evidently do not have the option of "nonparticipation" in public life, since they never participated in it in the first place. It is precisely these figures, secondly, that I would argue have the potential to pose a definite *challenge to*, rather than a mere *withdrawal from* the reified and ideological world in which they lack a definite place. Whereas Arendt de-politicizes those outside or at the margins of a given political community, I would maintain that they are, and have shown themselves to be, capable of engaging in political modes of action that *transform* the public realm from which they are excluded. I do not mean to suggest by this that the acts of thought and responsibility described above have no consequences in the world in and against which they are performed. Rather, as I argue at greater length in the next chapter, the position of exception and exclusion occupied by those rendered invisible/inaudible by the communal sense of the public realm is one whose politicization is uniquely able to reconfigure the very aesthetic

coordinates of the public realm, making new issues appear as common concerns and new judgments as 'generally valid'.

In spite of the one-sidedness of Badiou's critique of Arendt, therefore, he is nonetheless right to ask why, for Arendt, politics is not conceivable "as a thinkable *modification of public space*," (Badiou, *MP* 13) rather than as either participation (or, in situations of gross injustice, nonparticipation) therein. In his essay "Aesthetics and Politics in Kant and Arendt", Anthony Cascardi puts forth a similar point to Badiou, arguing that "Arendt favors a politics of rational communication over a politics of transformation." (Cascardi, "CT" 113) By grounding her politics exclusively on the communicable and the publically representable, according to Cascardi, Arendt nullifies a tension endemic to reflections on the political, "between rationality as communication grounded in common sense, and a transformative vision that relies on the feelings generated by those things that stand beyond the available limits of representation." (Cascardi, "CT" 113)

In the same volume⁵, Nancy Fraser responds to Cascardi's essay by arguing that such a tension is in fact preserved in Arendt's conception of politics. She asserts that Cascardi's "contrast between the politics of communication with the politics of transformation is misleading and overdrawn." (Fraser, "CTC" 168) There is no reason, according to Fraser, that these two dimensions of politics cannot be reconciled to one another. For Fraser, "one should try to do precisely what Cascardi faulted Arendt for attempting; namely, to construct a middle position between pure communication and pure

⁵ Calhoun & McGowan, *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*.

transformation, a position ‘that resolves the tension’ between them.” (Fraser, “CTC” 169) In many ways, however, Fraser overlooks the essence of the problem. What is being disputed is not whether Arendt does or does not *attempt* to construct such a position, but rather whether she *succeeds* in doing so.

Arendt claims in her *Lectures* that “all single agreements or disagreements presuppose that we are talking about the same thing – that we, who are many, agree, come together, on something that is one and the same for all of us.” (*LKP* 83) This second level of agreement, the level of common sense that circumscribes and determines the stakes of all action, speech, and judgment, must itself be subjected to a disputes, lest it reify into an order-of-things immune from subjective intervention. So long as we maintain that, while we may dispute about different aspects of the world, “the world itself is an objective datum,” (*BPF* 222) the reification of the public realm and common sense is a real danger.

We may agree with Fraser that, while defending the integrity of politics as concerned with what can be represented and communicated, “we ought to be interested in what (and *who*) can’t be represented *within some given, historically and spatially located discursive regime*.” (Fraser, “CTC”, 169) But my contention is that such an interest necessitates an account of the mechanisms or processes capable not just of contesting these historical regimes, but of introducing invisible and inaudible subjects into the existing space of appearances. As far as I am able to tell, Arendt’s account of the *sensus communis* as the condition of political community does not provide such an account. An account of this sort, I contend, would involve submitting the ‘given world’ itself to radical intervention transformation.

2.4 Conclusion

One of the things that is of great value in Arendt's reflections on the nature of judgment is that they reveal, via the notion of the *sensus communis*, that *political community*—which in her view is a community of people speaking, acting, and judging in the presence of others—always presupposes an *aesthetic community*, a shared modality of sensing and feeling the world. For Arendt, these modalities, as I have tried to show, are deeply rooted in particular historical *milieu*, rather than in the universally identical mind of the transcendental subject. I also argue, however, that Arendt's attempt to engender worldly solidity and a robust common sense falls over into a structure that appears immune to interventions by excluded and unperceived political subjects. The public realm, restricted to appearances — to public words and deeds — risks becoming conservative.

I have sought to show that those elements that are most radical in Arendt's work—such as her non-essentialist conception of community (as *sense/inter-est*), and her account of action and speech as opening up singular and unprecedented sequences of events—are compromised by her insistence on the permanence and survival of the public world and its *sensus communis*. In the following chapter, I look to the work of Jacques Rancière for a way of preserving Arendt's insights about the *sensus communis* as the condition of action, speech, and judgment, while pointing to his unique ability to account for the transformation of common sense. The object of this chapter will not be to refute

Arendt's conception of politics as proper to the public realm as a space of appearances, but to argue that politics must also comprise processes of what Rancière refers to as "dissensus", which insert new subjects and different objects of perception into the public realm, thereby transforming the aesthetic fabric of the community as such.

Ch. 3: Aesthetic Community and its 'Dissensual' Transformation

2.5 I. Introduction

In many ways, Rancière's intervention into political thought is similar to that of Arendt. He too is concerned with delimiting the field of the political, distinguishing it from 'society', government administration, and forms of power. Politics for Rancière, as for Arendt, is concerned with what can be seen and heard in common, with modalities of sensing in common with others. To this end, their respective theoretical enterprises share in a movement toward the aesthetic in questions of the political, not because they are separate domains that need to be brought into relation with one another, but because they are chiasmatically intertwined. Yet, against Arendt's insistence that politics take place *within* the parameters of a shared aesthetic community, Rancière argues that politics has no specific place or space, but that it always consists of the contestation and creation of such spaces.

Beginning with an analysis of Rancière's particular aesthetics of community and politics, and an exposition of the many similarities with Arendt's account, this chapter argues that Rancière is able (like Arendt) to think politics strictly within the immanence of the sensible world, but is able to do so without falling back on a transcendental conception of the historical world. To this end, he is able to think the processes of emancipation, in the form of 'dissensus', which challenges the transcendental coordinates of community, a process missing in Arendt's account.

He is able to do so in part by means an appropriation of Foucault's 'historical *a priori*', as elaborated in the latter's *Archaeology of Knowledge*. The notion of the historical *a priori* allows Rancière to situate the *sensus communis* within discursive and normative contexts that, because of their immanence to the world, are susceptible to subjective interventions capable of transforming these contexts.

2.6 Rancière and Aesthetic Community

2.6.1 What is Common is Sense:

In many ways, Rancière's thought marks a decisive break in recent French theory. A student of Louis Althusser in the 1960's, he began his prolific career as a scholar with a contribution to Althusser's *Reading Capital*. Eventually, however, Rancière increasingly began see Althusser's distinction between ideology and science—between those few who possess knowledge and the many who do not—as relying on a presupposition of inequality. His break with Althusser spurred a series of writings on the nature of equality (in *La Leçon d'Althusser* (1974) and *Le maître ignorant* (1987) and the emancipatory interventions of 19th century workers in France (in *La nuit des prolétaires* 1989). Although it has not been in as dramatic a fashion, Rancière has also been careful to distinguish his political thought from that of other great figures in post-war French thought. He neither contends, as Foucault does, that politics is fundamentally concerned with relations of 'power' ("Politics is not made up of power relationships; it is made up of relationships between worlds." D 42), nor has he shown a particular affinity with the

broadly ethico-religious work of figures like Jacques Derrida, who focus on the thematics of the un(re)presentable Other and the 'to come'⁶.

Rancière is perhaps closer to Arendt than any of these thinkers, to the extent that he conceives of politics as coextensive strictly with the fabric of common experience, with the realm of appearance, i.e., with aesthetic community. In a manner similar to Arendt's later engagement with Kant's aesthetics, Rancière argues that the commonality of community is sense. "What is common is 'sensation'. Human beings are tied together by a certain sensory fabric, a certain distribution of the sensible, which defines their way of being together." (ES 56) His aesthetic of community centers on a notion that he refers to as 'the distribution of the sensible' [*partage du sensible*], and this distribution, like the dividing lines between private and public in Arendt, partitions political community according to what is visible and invisible, what is perceived in common with others and in a common way, and what appears as publically incomprehensible. "The distribution of the sensible," he explains, "reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed...it defines what is visible or not in a common space, endowed with a common language etc. There is thus an aesthetics at the core of politics..." (PA 13)

Beginning with a few isolated references in his *La Méésentente* (1995), Rancière has increasingly recognized his indebtedness to Kant's aesthetics, as well as a growing interest in it. Indeed, his attempt to articulate the manner in which perception is

⁶ For Rancière's commentary on Derrida's notion of the 'democracy to-come' see: "Does Democracy Mean Something?" in the recently published collection of his essays entitled *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Ed. & Trans. Steve Corcoran. London: Continuum, 2010.

constituted and *formed* so that people within a given spatiotemporal situation experience things in the same way, is couched in the language of the Kantian transcendental. The opening lines of Rancière's *The Politics of Aesthetics* explain that, in his use of the term,

aesthetics can be understood in a Kantian sense—re-examined perhaps by Foucault—as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said of it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around properties of space and the possibilities of time.” (PA 13)

I will return later in this chapter to the importance of Foucault and his concept of the “historical *a priori*”, as articulated in the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, and the role it plays in Rancière's employment of the term ‘transcendental’. In any case, it is important to recognize that Rancière's aesthetic common sense (distribution of the sensible) can be understood as an *a priori*, or transcendental aesthetic, forming our spontaneous perception of the world. This, it is worth pointing out, it is not unlike Arendt's appeal to the transcendental imagination from the first *Critique* in her *Lectures*, which “determines the sensibility *a priori*,” and “is inherent in all sense perceptions.” (LKP 84)

Michael Shapiro has recently taken note of Rancière's debt to Kant, claiming that his conception of the “aesthetics at the core of politics” is, at least in part, rooted in Kant's aesthetics. Shapiro points out that “Ranciere's approach to the politics of aesthetics and his political imaginary have an obvious Kantian heritage...Rancière and Deleuze, among other post Kantians (who in effect accept Kant's displacement of an ontology of essence with an ontology of sense), focus their approaches to ‘the political’ on the ways in which spheres of experience or sensibility result from an active

partitioning.” (“AK”, 1) Kant was uniquely able to conceptualize the mediation of sense experience, and it is at the level of this mediation that Rancière’s conception of politics and community is formed.

Rancière’s ‘distribution of the sensible’ signifies a common sense, a communal sense that shares much with Arendt’s appropriation of the *sensus communis*. “A ‘common sense’ is, in the first instance, a community of sensible data: things whose visibility is supposed to be shareable by all, modes of perception of these things, and the equally shareable meanings that are conferred on them.” (ES 102) He has even begun, in recent years, to call the ‘distribution of the sensible’ as an ‘aesthetic community’ with a particular ‘*sensus communis*’. “An aesthetic community,” he argues in the *Emancipated Spectator* (2009), “is not a community of aesthetes. It is a community of sense, or a *sensus communis*.” (ES 57) Katherine Wolfe, in her essay “From Aesthetics to Politics: Kant, Rancière, Deleuze” remarks with regard to the commonality at the heart of Rancièrian community that “this commonality is no shared stock of goods or shared claim to a territory. Rather, it is a shared partition of the sensible: community pivots around common modalities of sense. In other words, the commonality upon which a community is founded is *sense*, and politics first becomes a possibility with the institution of *common sense*.” (Wolfe, 2006)

Like Arendt’s historicist appropriation of Kant’s *sensus communis*, Rancière’s is unequivocally contingent, local, and immanent to the forms of expression and associative frameworks of a particular space and time; it is “a spatiotemporal system in which words and visible forms are assembled into shared data, shared ways of perceiving, being affected, and imparting meaning.” (ES 57) Common sense, for Rancière as for Arendt, is

most certainly not a universal structure of an ahistorical mind. And yet, as I shall try to show, Rancière's historicisation has a second moment, one that I argue is not present in Arendt. While he insists that common sense and aesthetico-political community is always historically embedded, he does not proceed, as Arendt does, to elevate this historical world to quasi-sacredness, whose continuation and permanence should form the horizon of political action. Having recognized that it is conditioned by particular historical *milieus*, he proceeds to "de-historicize" (PA 50) common sense, to show that gaps, intervals, and interruptions which re-configure the sensible world, structured by inherited wisdom, can be instituted by political subjects who decisively break with historical determinations of their condition. As I will argue in more detail in the final section of this chapter, this de-historicization allows Rancière to conceptualize acts of dissensus that reconfigure the line between what is perceived as public and what as private, which is always a line separating the visible and the audible from the invisible and the inaudible.

2.6.2 Common Sense as Police Order:

De-historicization is part and parcel of a concern that Rancière demonstrates toward the constitutively exclusive structure of aesthetico-political community, a concern that is not as salient in Arendt's work. If aesthetic community, as Arendt showed in her *Lectures Kant's Political Philosophy*, allows certain subjects and objects to appear in public space in a common way for a group of people, then it necessarily renders other subjects and other objects imperceptible, or at the very least unperceived.

At the same time as the distribution of the sensible makes possible a common world, it also takes on a function that Rancière calls the 'police', which regulates the

possible participants and the modes of participation in this common world by partitioning who and what can be seen therein. The police is “a generally implicit law that defines forms of partaking by first defining the modes of perception of the world (*de monde*) and of people (*du monde*), upon which the *nomoi* of the community are founded. This partition should be understood in the double sense of the word: on the one hand, as that which separates and excludes; on the other, as that which allows participation.” (“TTP” 36) Participation in common life (Arendt’s public realm), Rancière reveals, is only possible because of a normative distribution or allotment (*nemein*) that precludes the partaking of certain parts of the common. It relies on a “count” of the “parts” (*DA 6*) of the community that divides (*partage*) this community from any heterogeneous parts that would threaten its unity, disavowing what Rancière refers to as its “fundamental miscounts (*mécomptes*)”. (*DA 10*)

While the temptation is to relate Rancière’s concept of the police to his early mentor Althusser’s account of the policeman who performs the function of interpellation, this is not what Rancière has in mind. The police, in his view, “is that which says that here, on this street, there’s nothing to see and so nothing to do but move along.” (“TTP” 37) It performs a function of directing perception at certain objects and not others; of seeing this object as a matter of public concern and another as merely private; of enforcing this understanding of a given phenomenon and not another. In some ways, however, the notion of the police is reminiscent of classical Marxist ideology in that it reinforces the sedimentation and naturalization of the existing ways of seeing that constitute the common world, turning them into “self-evident facts of sense perception” (*PA 13*). In doing so, it bolsters the permanence the given world. There is thus a

conservative force at the heart of common sense, which, while characteristic of Arendtian common sense, is not adequately problematized by her.

This added, conservative dimension that Rancière emphasizes in the notion of aesthetic community and the *sensus communis* allows us to point to the difference between the manner in which both Arendt and Rancière place the aesthetic at the core of politics. Arendt is not particularly concerned with the role of the *sensus communis* in closing off the common world from those who are unequal within it, by devolving into a saturated consensus. Rather, she is more interested in what it opens up; in how it makes possible the unfolding of action, speech, and judgment in a common world. Rancière, however, is more attuned to this role, and he proceeds, on the basis of this insight, to argue that politics must also involve those processes that upset the communal sense, that open it onto that which the existing configuration of shared perception renders invisible and inaudible: inequality. His name for such processes is precisely *politics*, which “consists in making what was unseen visible; in making what was audible as mere noise heard as speech...” (“TTP” 38) To the extent that Arendt does not make room in her conception of aesthetico-political community and the public realm for the intervention of excluded subjects who could, at least in principle, challenge the aesthetic framework of the community that relegates them to the mute darkness of the ‘private’ or ‘social’ realms, her political thought at times risks collapsing politics into the police.

Politics or the Police?: Defining Disagreement: Rancière’s distinction between politics and the police is upheld by a conception of the aesthetics of politics that is twofold.

Whereas Arendt only focuses on the aesthetic constitution and persistence of community, Rancière divides his aesthetic conception of politics into consensus and dissensus. There is, on the one hand, the *a priori* forms of experience—the common sense that supports inter-subjective life in the forms of interlocution and public action—which he distinguishes sharply from an aesthetics of rupture, intervention, and reconfiguration. The former aesthetic function he calls *consensus*, the latter he names *dissensus*.

This distinction, then, begs the question as to whether or not Arendt's public realm *is* in fact a space of consensus? Answering this question will enable us to better discern whether Arendt collapses politics into the police, that is, into the preservation of the existing perceptual parameters of community. But the answer to this question also depends on how this term is defined. Rancière has not simply adopted the quotidian meaning of consensus, and it is important to clarify the manner in which he distinguishes his own deployment of this term from our general understanding of it.

To begin with, "consensus does not merely mean an agreement between persons or groups. This agreement presupposes a specific distribution of the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable. Consensus frames a reality that is supposed to be one and the same for everybody. Consensus says that we may have conflicting interests, aspirations, and values, but that we are obliged, nonetheless, to agree that the given is given." (Rancière, "WMI", 2008) Typically, consensus is conceived of as *a posteriori*, as an agreement arrived at *after* dialogue and debate. But Rancière's unique deployment of the term consensus treats it as *a priori*. Any given dialogue, debate or exchange of ideas, to the extent that it is possible in the first place, *presupposes* a consensus about what makes

sense and what does not, what is given and compels us to agree on the self-evidence of the given in spite of any differences of opinion we may have.

While it is true that Arendt conceives the public realm as one that is characterized by conflict, disagreement, and perspectival plurality, these conflicts, disagreements, and perspectives are encompassed in an *a priori* consensus on what can be seen, heard, and spoken about. This is evident throughout *The Human Condition*, where Arendt claims that “Only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects *without changing their identity*, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear.” [italics added] (HC 57) She reiterates a similar point in her *Lectures*, stating that “all single agreements or disagreements presuppose that we are talking about the same thing—that we, who are many, agree, come together, on something that is one and the same for all of us.” (LKP 83) In that any potential dispute or debate in the public realm is mediated through a web of the categories and examples that are in themselves not disputed but simply given, Arendt’s public realm forecloses the occurrence of more radical disagreements.

One of the problems with Arendt’s conception of the public realm is that any challenge to the identity of the objects of public concern, a radical disagreement about their signification and significance, indeed, their very existence, can only ever amount to the destruction and the termination of politics. The problem is that, in the public realm, “differences of position and the resulting variety of perspectives notwithstanding, everybody is always concerned with the same object. If the sameness of the object can no longer be discerned, no common nature of men... can prevent the destruction of the common world.” (HC 58) For Rancière, conversely such disputes are the very essence of

politics, and, far from simply destroying the common world, they reconstitute it along different sensory lines.

So what Rancière calls consensus is precisely the preservation of the objective givens of the common world, the attempt to circumscribe disagreements within a 'world' whose 'reality' or 'givenness' is beyond dispute. A truly political disagreement, what he calls a *mésentente*, is a placing in question, and thus a challenge, of the very framework that makes individual agreements and disagreements, particular judgments and opinions possible in the first place; "it is less concerned with arguing than with what can be argued, the presence or absence of a common object between X and Y." (DA xii)

Disagreement occurs "when the interlocutors both understand and do not understand the same things by the same words." (DA xi) The interlocutors lack a common ground of sense to appeal to, producing a conflict between two sensible worlds, that according to Rancière calls the 'givenness' of the objective world into question: "*La mésentente est précisément ce fait que les données memes ne sont pas univoques, objectives, qu'il y a donc contestation non pas simplement des idées, des droits ou des revendications mais des données du problème.*" ("XP" 194)

To the extent that such disagreements are not a part of her conception of politics, Rancière accuses Arendt of participating in one of the three anti-political logics of the Occidental tradition, namely, 'parapolitics'. Whereas the two other logics, *archipolitics* and *metapolitics*, aim at the elimination of politics altogether—the latter by means of the harmonious fulfillment of the essential principle or *arché* of the community (Plato), and the former by collapsing politics into the infrastructural dynamics of the social (Marx)—parapolitics seeks to contain politics within acceptable parameters. As James Ingram

explains, “Parapolitics does not, like archi- or metapolitics, try to abolish politics altogether. Instead, it seeks to limit politics, admitting it only in homeopathic doses, containing its spontaneity, uncertainty, and contingency by limiting it to certain actors at certain times and places.” (Ingram, 2009) Although Aristotle is the forerunner of this logic, Rancière identifies Arendt as its contemporary exemplar.

This reading of Arendt’s politics as parapolitics is substantiated by the rigidity of the boundaries that she establishes, particularly in *The Human Condition*, between the distinct spheres of human activity, i.e., the public and the private, the political and the social. In Arendt’s account of the Periclean *polis*, she describes the law that divided the public from the private realm as “quite literally a wall, without which there might have been an agglomeration of houses, a town (*asty*), but not a city, a political community. This wall-like law was sacred, but only the inclosure was political.” (HC 64) Within this ‘inclosure’, in which place alone politics, as intersubjectively validated appearances, is possible, the political ideals of equality and freedom are realized, while outside inequality and servitude prevail. “The *polis*,” explains Arendt, “was distinguished from the household in that it knew only ‘equals’... To be sure, this equality of the political realm has very little in common with our concept of equality; it meant to live among and to have to deal only with one’s peers. And it presupposed the existence of ‘unequals’ who, as a matter of fact, were always the majority of the population in a city-state.” (HC 32) It is exactly this ‘polis,’ however, that becomes the ‘police’ in Rancière’s thought: “The police is, essentially, the law, generally implicit, that defines a party’s share or lack of it.” (DA 29) The ‘police law’ is the force that divides private from public, and that seeks to preserve this division by rendering its contestation or dispute quite literally senseless. “It

is police law, for example, that traditionally turns the workplace into a private space not regulated by the ways of seeing and saying proper to what is called the public domain, where the worker's *having a part* is strictly defined by the remuneration of his work."

(DA 29)

This rigorous division of spheres is intimately connected with the difficulty Arendt has in theorizing the insertion of marginalized and oppressed peoples into the community of equals that is the public realm. As Ingram points out, "Arendt follows Aristotle and the whole tradition of political philosophy in restricting politics to an elite. She is open about this: participation in public affairs, whether in the Greek polis or the Roman republic, was always based on the exclusion of women, slaves, workers, foreigners, etc. If politics for her is participation in the common, only some participate." (SPR 238) While Arendt argues that the political realm is one of equality and freedom, this equality and freedom is reserved for those who are already participants in it. The process of *becoming* equal or *becoming* free is prevented by the purity of the public realm, and this is exactly how the logic of parapolitics functions.

By confining political interlocution to the normative strictures of common sense, to judgments that draw on the examples and concepts of inherited wisdom that inhere in and determine what and who can appear in the public realm, Arendt renders the attempts by excluded peoples to articulate themselves into the public realm, to *politicize* their inequality, senseless in advance, leaving only the possibility of mere noise. In this way Arendt reinscribes, at the heart of politics a distinction, originally made by Aristotle in his description of slaves and women, between beings who possess *phoné* and those that possess *logos*. The voices of those on whom the light of the public realm does not shine

are reduced to outbursts of sound which announce pain and suffering, but not reasoned arguments on justice, or any matter of 'public' concern. This "is not to say that their voices simply do not register audibly but that they register only in an unrecognizable modality." (Wolfe, "FPA", 1)

In any case, if these figures are to assume a place in public affairs, if it is conceivable for them to make an appearance and to communicate in the light of the *polis*, the transition from a being (perceived as) possessing *phoné* to one (perceived as) possessing *logos*, that is, from a part of the those without part to a constituted actor and speaker, must be thinkable. Such transitions require a recasting of the sensible and the transformation of common sense, and it is precisely this transition that Rancière's conception of politics as a process of 'dissensus' is concerned with.

2.7 Rancière and the Politics of Dissensus

Rancière's conception of politics is not reducible to the moments of disagreement (*mésentente*) that I discussed above. In order for such disagreements to become adequately political, they must be developed into a process of 'dissensus'. Although I have introduced this term in several places throughout this chapter, it is necessary to examine it in greater detail. Dissensus "is not a designation of conflict as such, but is a specific type thereof." ("PPA" 139) If consensus consists in an "agreement between sense and sense, in other words between a mode of sensory presentation and a regime of meaning, ("PPA" 145) then dissensus marks "a conflict between *sense* and *sense*,"

("PPA" 139) between what is perceived and the meanings imparted on it. Under the title of dissensus, Rancière articulates a concept of emancipation that points to the possibility of rendering mobile the borders that separate the private realm from the public realm, the political from the social, by challenging the order of (common) sense that underwrites them. To this end, I agree with James Ingram's claim that Rancière does not have to be read simply as opposing Arendt's political theory—though at times it is clear that he believes himself to be doing so—but rather as 'emending' or 'radicalizing' it. (Ingram, "SPR" 237) 'Dissensus', 'emancipation', and 'subjectivization' can be understood as providing the resources to render Arendt's account of politics less stringent and more egalitarian by politicizing those "unequals" on whom the illumination of the public sphere does not fall, without compromising the integrity of her distinctions.⁷

Central to the manner in which Rancière conceives dissensus, is his claim that "the specificity of political dissensus is that its partners are no more constituted than is the object or stage of discussion itself." ("TTP" 38) Dissensus, far from comprising an act or actions by publically recognizable subjects in a pre-constituted public space, is the about the presentation of new subjects and the construction of such spaces. "Dissensus," explains Davide Panagia, "refers to the emergence of a heterology extraneous to a common world of perceiving," (*PLS* 42) by which he means the appearance of what had previously eluded or was excluded in the established realm of appearance. This is why Rancière calls dissensus a process of subjectification. In this process of subjectification,

⁷Rancière does not, in principle, reject Arendt's distinctions between public and private. While he certainly does not endorse them, he appears throughout his work to be interested, not in refuting or replacing them, but in showing how the lines or partition that define them might be traversed, opened, and reconfigured.

those who are invisible and inaudible within the distribution of the sensible ('the part of those who have no part') creatively manifest themselves as equal members of the community of speaking and thinking beings, constituting themselves as actors who did not previously exist. In this respect, subjectivization is not unlike the Arendtian notion of natality, albeit it a radicalization of it that seeks to account for the insertion of unequals into the sphere of equality *viz.* the public realm.

Throughout his work, Rancière frequently makes reference to the example of the Roman plebeians on the Aventine, who were both materially and symbolically excluded from the Roman social order, who attempted to resist patrician domination, not by means of physical violence or revolt, but by the *staging* of their capacity to speak. Concerning their deplorable condition, Rancière asks:

Faced with this, what do the plebs gathered on the Aventine do? They do not set up a fortified camp in the manner of the Scythian slaves. They do what would have been unthinkable to the latter: they establish another order, another partition of the perceptible, by constituting themselves not as warriors equal to other warriors but as speaking beings sharing the same properties as those who deny them these. They thereby execute a series of speech acts that mimic those of the patricians: they pronounce imprecations and apotheoses; they delegate one of their number to go and consult *their* oracles; they give themselves representatives by rebaptizing them... Through transgression, they find that they too, just like speaking beings, are endowed with speech that does not simply express want, suffering, or rage, but intelligence. They write... a place in the symbolic order of the community of speaking beings..." (DA 24-25)

Dissensual subjectification is the very process of *becoming-subject*, of making a subject heard and seen before the ears and eyes of the existing *sensus communis* by demonstrating that they are more than beings of *phoné*, that they are capable of those words and deeds that compose the public realm from which they are shunned. In this way "the plebians have actually violated the order of the city". (DA 25) Rather than remaining

anonymous and nameless, “they have given themselves names.” (DA 25) Rather than resisting by physical force accompanied by moans of hunger and rage, confirming that they are nothing but mute bodies, they “carried out a series of speech acts linking the life of their bodies to words and word use.” (DA 25) Such acts can never, for Rancière, be simply accommodated by the existing space of politics, but requires the politicization of those beings that have been relegated to a position outside of the political.

Thus, although subjectification is central to it, dissensus is not solely about subjects. It concerns the whole *dispositif of a priori* forms of experience that “determine what presents itself to sense experience” (PA 13), and in what way. It is as much about introducing foreign *objects* as it is about constituting foreign *subjects*, about making new and illicit connections between words and things, subjects and places, activities and the times in which they unfold.

The notion of dissensus thus means the following: politics is comprised of a surplus of subjects that introduce, within the saturated order of the police, a surplus of *objects*. These subjects do not have the consistency of coherent social groups united by common property or a common birth, etc. *They exist entirely within the act*, and their actions are the manifestation of a dissensus; that is, *the making contentious of the givens of a particular situation*. The subjects of politics make visible that which is not perceivable, that which, under the optics of a given perceptive field, did not possess a *raison d'être*, that which did not have a name. [italics added] (“Dissenting Words”)

It is an entire recasting of the givens sensible experience, of the *sensus communis* as the aesthetic fabric of the common, that is ultimately at stake in dissensus. This recasting involves the association of subjects and objects that, under the conditions of the police distribution of the sensible, normally occupy heterogeneous fields of experience, such as that of the private world and that of the public. Redrawing the boundaries between public

and private, dissensus “asks if labor or maternity, for example, is a private or a social matter, if this social function is a public function or not.” (DA 40)⁸

In his essay “The Use of Distinctions”, Rancière states: “I take as my explicit target Arendt’s notion of ‘political life’...I object that it is precisely an anti-political logic, the logic of the *police*, that marks off a specific realm for political acts in this way... As I understand it, politics is, on the contrary, an activity that retraces the line, that introduces cases of universality and the capacities for the formulation of the common, into a universe that was considered private, domestic, or social.” (“UD” 206-207)

The consequences for a rethinking of Arendtian politics are manifest here. In response to Badiou’s critique of Arendt’s politics of judgment, which by indexing all speech and action to the coordinates of the public realm forecloses the possibility of radically ‘modifying’ this realm, Rancière’s concept of dissensual subjectification accounts for the politicization of words and deeds that do not conform to these coordinates. In Arendt’s public realm, where “communicability” is the “touchstone” (LKP 73) of their political worth, such words and deeds risk being dismissed or going unnoticed because they do not conform to the shared imaginary that makes some things communicable and others not. In this way, Rancière does not subordinate heterogeneity

⁸ In her seminal *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir demonstrated that what sustained the oppression of women was not simply that they were perceived as inferior, but rather the notion that they were destined for private life, and lacked that capacity for thought and speech on issues of universal or public significance. Women’s emancipation, she argued, meant precisely the ‘transcendence’ of the private world into the public, claiming the capacity to speak and act – in short, to *appear* – on issues of universal importance. See “Introduction” to *The Second Sex*.

and difference to the sameness and persisting identity of the given world, “but rather is ‘the production, within a determined, sensible world, of a given that is heterogeneous to it’.” (PLS 42) As Rancière explains in the *Emancipated Spectator*, “Dissensus brings back into play both the obviousness of what can be perceived, thought and done, and the distribution of those who are capable of perceiving, thinking and altering the coordinates of the shared world. This is what a process of political subjectivation consists in: in the action of uncounted capacities that crack open the unity of the given and the obviousness of the visible, in order to sketch a new topography of the possible.” (ES 49)

2.7.1 The Debate Over Human Rights

Rancière’s insistence that politics does not, in the first instance, concern the inner workings and happenings of the public realm, but in the way that this realm and its *dispositif* of appearance is reconfigured, is most salient in his 2006 essay “Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?”. Here, he takes issue with Arendt’s analysis of stateless and rightless people, whom he sees as condemned to a ‘bare life’ without hope of emancipation.

While it is certainly legible throughout the entirety of Arendt’s *oeuvre*, the radicality of her distinction between those inside political community and those without is perhaps most salient in her critique of notion of the ‘Rights of Man *and* of the Citizen’ in her early *Origins of Totalitarianism*. Based on her experience as one of the mass of stateless people that resulted from the Second World War, Arendt famously claims that there is no such thing as the rights of man *qua* man; only citizens have rights, which

produces the tautological conclusion that only those who have rights have rights, namely, citizens. As Arendt explains, during the Second World War,

...the concept of human rights, based upon the assumed existence of a human being as such, broke down at the very moment when those who professed to believe in it were for the first time confronted with people who had indeed lost all other qualities and specific relationships – except that they were still human. The world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human. (OT 299)

The condition of those who are stateless—those who, as Arendt describes, have been deprived of polity—is one of bare life. Aside from the obvious material deprivation (poverty, poor working conditions, no access to social benefits etc.) implied by such a condition, what is truly privative about the absence of citizenship and polity is the impossibility of appearing, in the distinct Arendtian sense comprising action, speech and judgment:

...the fundamental deprivation of human rights is manifested first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world in which opinions are significant and actions effective... This extremity, and nothing else, is the situation of people deprived of human rights. They are deprived, not of the right to freedom, but of the right to action; not of the right to think whatever they please, but of the right to opinion. (OT 296)

Arendt refers to those deprived of the capacity for opinion, and action, of judgment and speech, as “beyond oppressed.” “Slavery’s fundamental offence against human rights,” she argues, “was not that it took liberty away... but that it excluded a certain category of people even of the possibility of fighting for freedom.” (OT 297)

Rancière takes issue with this characterization, and sees it as symptomatic of the public/private distinction at the heart of Arendt's thought. "The notion of a 'state beyond oppression'," he argues, "relates less to reality and more to Arendt's rigid opposition between the realm of the political and the realm of private life—what in the same chapter she calls 'the dark background of mere givenness'." (WSR 61) What the positing of this state does to the expropriated and dispossessed, Rancière continues, is "enable a way of placing them in sphere of exceptionality that was no longer political but of an anthropological sacredness situated beyond political dissensus." (WSR 64) In this way, according to Rancière, the attempt to preserve distinct spheres of human activity "depopulates the political stage by sweeping aside its always ambiguous actors," (WSR 67) *viz.* those actors who do belong to the public sphere but who are attempting to stage their appearance there.

Rancière's point is that human rights cannot be understood as a determinate property of subjects without falling into an 'anthropological sacredness' that prevents the opening of 'intervals' or 'passages' from bare life to a constituted political actor, with the attendant rights and capacities. For Rancière, conversely, "The Rights of Man are the rights of those who make something of that inscription." (WSR 68) If, in his view, these rights are taken as polemical, as perpetually subject to dispute as to who possesses them and who does not, then the problem Arendt runs into can be circumvented. "The Declaration of Rights states that all men are born free and equal, and thus raises a question about the sphere of implementation of these predicates. Answering, like Arendt, that this sphere is that of citizenship, of a political life separated from that of private life, resolves the problem in advance. For the issue is to know precisely where to draw the line

separating one life from the other. Politics concerns that border, an activity that constantly places it in question.” (WSR 68)

Andrew Schapp’s recent essay “Enacting the Right to Have Rights: Jacques Rancière’s Critique of Hannah Arendt”, sheds light on the difference between the approaches of Arendt and Rancière to the question of human rights. Although Arendt does defend stateless peoples by claiming that they have ‘the right to have rights’, he argues in this paper that her conception of politics does not have the resources to account for how such rights might be *enacted*, and that a turn to Rancière can ultimately provide such an account. For Arendt, he argues, “outwith the polity, the subject of human rights is, by definition, without politics. Deprived of the rights of citizenship, she has no means of redress, no basis on which she might claim ‘the right to have rights’. For Rancière, however, the aporia of human rights that Arendt diagnoses is more a product of the ontological presuppositions on which her analysis relies than it is a defining aspect of statelessness. (ER 2)

Shapp points to the political movement of the *sans papiers* in France (immigrant workers without citizenship and rights) to exemplify Rancière’s polemical conception of the Rights of Man. It is their very inequality, their very lack of citizenship, that they turn into a decisively political issue: “The *sans papiers* enact the right to have rights when they speak *as if* they had the same rights as the French nationals they address. They occupy a church to draw attention to their economic participation within French society rather than remaining unseen and unheard on threat of deportation. Instead of hiding from the police they turn up to police head quarters and say ‘we are the *sans papiers* of Saint-Bernard and we have business in this building’.” (Schapp, 2010) This is precisely what

political subjectification, as constitutive of dissensus, aims at: the sensible presentation of a dispute, which renders perceptible what was invisible and audible the pronouncements of those previously mute.

2.7.2 Is Emancipation Political or Social?

Rancière's assertion that Arendt's conception of politics as proper to a rigidly defined sphere tends to depoliticize the emancipation of those not admitted into it, I would argue, is corroborated by her characterization of poverty and the historical struggles for liberation from it. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt draws attention to what she perceives as "[t]he danger that the modern age's emancipation of labor will not only fail to usher in an age of freedom for all but will result, on the contrary, in forcing all mankind for the first time under the yoke of necessity..." (HC 130) Because poverty, "which puts men under the absolute dictate of their bodies," (OR 60) is by definition opposed to that free activity of speaking and acting that is the essence of Arendtian politics, Arendt suggests that the politicization of poverty could mark the ruin of politics altogether. The political, she maintains, is strictly divorced from problems pertaining to human necessity: "freedom is exclusively located in the political realm...[and] necessity is primarily a prepolitical phenomenon." (HC 31) With regard to the labour movements of the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries, she therefore claims, "the point is not that for the first time in history laborers were admitted and given equal rights in the public realm, but that we have almost succeeded in leveling all human activities to the common

denominator of securing the necessities of life and providing for their abundance.” (HC 126) It is thus not surprising that in her *On Revolution* (1963), Arendt is weary of attempts to make out of the problem of poverty—what she refers to as the ‘social question’—the orientation of political praxis. To this end, she faults Marx with the “transformation of the social question into a political force.” (OR 62)

If what Rancière theorizes under the title of emancipation (dissensus, subjectification) were reducible to social movements and the alleviation of poverty, we might see this as a mere deviation from Arendt’s account of politics. But emancipation, in Rancière’s use of the term, is *not* about social identities or material necessity. “La méésentente tient au fait que les sujets de la politique *ne sont pas des parties d’un group social*. Elle tient au fond au partage initial entre police et politique, à la position même d’un part des sans-part.” (“Xenophobie et Politique” 194) Dissensus is instituted by the part of those who have no part, who are not defined by their particular identity characteristics, but by the way they negatively interrupt the distribution of identities and the sensible order that supports them. “Politics exists insofar as the people is not identified with a race or a population, nor the poor with a particular disadvantaged sector, nor the proletariat with a group of industrial workers, etc., but insofar as these latter are identified with subjects that inscribe, in the form of a supplement to every count of the parts of the society, a specific figure of the count of the uncounted or the part of those without part.” (“TTP” 35) Identities are enforced by consensus *qua* police order. If dissensus were simply about the adjustment of the existing distribution of goods to their own benefit, this would not be a challenge to consensus, but merely an attempt to become greater beneficiaries within the existing order, without radically challenging it.

Dissensus, then, is not about the particular demands—for fairer treatment, equal pay, suffrage etc.—that political subjects may make at a given time. Certainly, it does not exclude such demands, but what it aims at, beyond them, is the construction of a subject who could assume the position as an interlocutor in discussions of the issues they raise. Dissensus is at once singular, local, and subjective, yet by virtue of the fact that it brings to light the logic and the contradictions of the world to which it is addressed, it has universal, public significance. To challenge the condition of *sans-part* is, by its very nature, to place in question the entire order that makes such a condition possible.

2.8 Rancière's 'Immanent Transcendental' and its Dissensual Transformation

If Arendt's failure to provide a satisfying account of the *political* (rather than the merely social) import of emancipatory politics is, as I have been suggesting, symptomatic of the particular manner that she conceives aesthetic community, then I argue that Rancière's ability to provide such an account is equally a result of the way he conceives aesthetic community. I would therefore like to return to this account, which I outlined at the beginning of this chapter, in order to better shed light on the consequences for politics inherent in the different ways that Arendt and Rancière understand the relation between aesthetic and political community.

In order to understand why Rancière argues that the kind of shifts effected by dissensus are possible, and to substantiate his account of *how* these shifts take place, it is

necessary to delve deeper into his notion of aesthetics as the *a priori* constitution of our collective forms of experience, and how his declared Foucauldian reading of Kant informs this notion. Although little has been said in the scholarship on Rancière about this connection, I argue that it is integral to the way he is able to justify his notion of the *sensus communis* as a sensory fabric of community that can be transformed in moments of political intervention.

What prevents this transformation in Arendt's political thought, I maintained in the previous chapter, is that she elevates aesthetic conditions of community *qua* inherited wisdom and social imaginary to a quasi-sacred status. In doing so, she compromised the immanence of the *sensus communis*, its radical susceptibility to rupture and reconfiguration. I argue that Rancière's ability to think the contestation of the aesthetic parameters of community, i.e., its operative consensus or *sensus communis*, is rooted in his uniquely immanent transcendental aesthetic. This notion of the transcendental supports his account of dissensus as making illicit connections between words and things, activities and the spaces they occupy or ought to occupy.

In an often overlooked part of the interview with Gabriel Rockhill included in the English edition of *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Rancière addresses the problem of the transcendental directly. "As for the *transcendental*," he explains there, "it is necessary to see what this word can mean. The transcendental...can either bring the transcendent back into the immanent or, on the contrary, make it take flight once again into the transcendent." (PA 50) Kant's transcendental, which conditions a field of experience but is itself rooted in a subject that remains independent from it, constitutes what could be called a transcendent-transcendental. Because the forms of intuition and the categories of

cognition organize the space, time, and logic of empirical experience, but are nonetheless spatiotemporally invariant, Kant's "takes flight" into the transcendent. The *a priori* conditioning of (collective) experience theorized by both Arendt and Rancière, however, is situated squarely within the immanence of the world. By bringing the forms of common experience into the temporal and spatial situatedness of the historical world, they bring the transcendent (transcendental) back into the immanent.

Rancière's unique attempt to conceive of the *sensus communis* as historically contingent differs from Arendt's, however, in that it takes immanence of the transcendental to its furthest conclusion, theorizing those dissensual interventions that themselves act in a radically transformative way on these historically determined fields. At work in this conception, he reveals, is an awareness of Foucault's archaeological project, which sought to rethink the relationship between the transcendental and the historical. In particular, it is the notion of the 'historical *a priori*'—alluded to in Rancière's claim that he conceives of aesthetics as *a priori* after Foucault—that seeks to explain how the *a priori* conditions of experience are constituted, not in the mind of a constituent subject, but in the discursive configuration of given historical moment.

Foucault conceived his 'historical *a priori*' as the particular configuration of 'knowledge' that enables the connection of statements, constitutes the visibility of certain objects, and regulates how they are seen, judged, and spoken about. But knowledge, here, does not simply mean scientific knowledge, and as Gilles Deleuze explains in his book *Foucault*, knowledge "cannot be separated from the various thresholds in which it is caught up including even the experience of perception, the values of the imagination, the prevailing ideas or commonly held beliefs." (F 51) While it is not within the scope of our

inquiry to provide an exhaustive account of Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*, what is significant here is the manner in which Foucault tries to render these *a priori*, transcendental configurations of knowledge *immanent* to the very things they configure. Unlike the universal conception of 'mind' constitutive of the Kantian *a priori*, "this *a priori* does not elude historicity: it does not constitute, above events, and in an unmoving heaven, an atemporal structure; it is defined as the group of rules that characterize a discursive practice; but these rules are not imposed from the outside on the elements they connect; they are caught up in the very things they connect." (Foucault, *AK* 144) In Foucault's archaeological work, Kevin Robinson points out, these transcendental "conditions are not ahistorical and universal rules that determine in advance what could be given or said but are rather the historically changing rules of what is actually given and said. And these rules are themselves a '*transformable* group' since they do not sit above events like an 'atemporal structure' in some unmoveable heaven' but are caught up 'in the very things they connect'." (Robinson, "IT" 2007)

Returning to Rockhill's interview, it is clear that Rancière's conception of the transcendental aesthetic of community—*sensus communis*—is closely related to Foucault's immanent transcendental. I quote: "I would say that my approach is a bit similar to Foucault's. It retains the principle of the Kantian transcendental that replaces the dogmatism of truth with the search for conditions of possibility. At the same time, these are not conditions for thought in general, but rather conditions *immanent* in a particular system of thought, a particular system of expression. [italics added] (*PA* 50) But I would also argue that Rancière takes Foucault's insight to its logical conclusion, one that Foucault did not draw in his own work. "I differ from Foucault insofar as his archaeology

seems to me to follow a schema of historical necessity according to which, beyond a certain chasm, something is no longer thinkable, can no longer be formulated... *I thus try at one and the same to historicize the transcendental and de-historicize these systems of conditions of possibility.*" [italics added] (PA 50)

While Arendt did historicize the transcendental—demonstrating that the conditioning of the common sensible world is wrapped up with historical examples, narratives, and forms of expression—she failed to *de-historicize* this common sense, that is, to integrate into her conception of the political those mechanisms that radically challenge the historically contingent *sensus communis*. Arendt is certainly right to argue that the exemplary ‘schemas’ that organize our common perception (*sensus communis*) of subjects and objects in the world are rooted in the historical *milieus* we inhabit. These perceptual organizations, for example, ensure that a ‘worker’ appears as a man who humbly labours; a ‘woman’ as one who occupies a domestic space and goes about her business; a young Arab inhabitant of the *banlieue* as one who appears as delinquent; in short, their very mode of appearance—whether as public or private, political or social—will be determined in advance by these ‘schemas’ of imagination, politics must consist of those processes of introducing *different* schemas of ‘worker’ and ‘women’, ‘Arab’ and ‘delinquent’. Different schemas mean different perceptions, new ways of imparting meaning on the common world, in short, a new field of imagined possibilities.

In *Dis-agreement*, Rancière proposes something of this sort. He describes dissensus as “an operator that connects and disconnects different areas, regions, identities, functions, and capacities existing in the configuration of a given experience.” (DA 40) Rancière’s notion of dissensus reveals that a politics of aesthetics treats the

aesthetic organization of community—the *sensus communis*—as immanent to the ways speaking and perceiving that inhere in it, and by doing so avoids elevating them to a world-historical transcendence. Because they are ‘transformable’, politics ought not to restrict itself to that which happens *within* and *according* to the ‘world as it is’, but ought also be concerned with contesting, over-writing, and recasting it. “If,” for Rancière, “there is such a thing as an ‘aesthetics of politics’, it lies in a re-configuration of the common experience of the sensible.” (“PPA” 140)

This is what Rancière accomplishes with his notion of dissensus. Dissensus provokes illicit associations between words and things (for example ‘migrants’, and the rights of citizens), bodies and the spaces they can occupy (for example, women and the public space of appearances), and in doing so frames a different common sense. And if “a common sense can be described as a form of being together relying on a certain community between things and words,” then dissensus changes our very modes of being together, our modes of sensing-with (*inter-est*). (“PPA” 141)

The criteria of evaluation, the historically constituted ‘taste’ that determines what is capable of appearing in the public realm and in what way, undergoes a transformation at the hands of dissensus, and the perceptual and logical ‘givens’ that were supposed to be permanent. “A dissensus is not a conflict of interests, opinions or values; it is a division inserted in ‘common sense’: a dispute over what is given and about the frame within which we see something as given.” (“WSR” 69) To this end Politics “re-frames the given by inventing new ways of making sense of the sensible.” (“PPA” 139) With these alterations come new possibilities for the appearance of subjects and new criteria for what is publically comprehensible. The speech, action, and judgments that registered

as dissonant within the given world can *appear*, find ears and eyes before which they are recognized as actors.

2.9 Conclusion

Far from being restricted to the 'givens' of the shared world, as the normative force of common sense dictates, Rancièrian "politics breaks with the sensory self-evidence of the 'natural' order that destines specific groups of people to occupy positions of rule or of being ruled, assigning them to private or public lives, pinning them down to a certain time and space, to specific bodies, that is, to specific ways of being, seeing and saying." ("PPA" 139) Rancièr's work reveals that while political community, which separates the public from the private, relies on a partitioning of the sensible world, i.e, on the distribution of the sensible, this very partition supports forms of domination whose contestation requires submitting the *sensus communis* to acts of dissensus by those excluded from publicity. Such acts differ from judgments because they do not seek impartial agreement with the public *inter-est*, but stage dis-agreements with the very aesthetic coordinates that make publically comprehensible judgments possible. The possibility of political subjectification, I have argued, through which the *sans-parts* can come to claim a place in the public realm, relies on the transformability of the *a priori* sensible coordinates of aesthetic community, a transformability that is not radically enough pursued in Arendt's account of the *sensus communis*.

3 Ch. 4: Emancipation: Is the Sublime Political?

Several recent commentators on Rancière's work have suggested that his concept of dissensus can be understood in terms of the Kantian experience of the sublime,⁹ and this chapter questions the appropriateness of this association. Although Rancière opposes the sedimentation of consensus and the reification of forms of sociability, and tries account for the insertion of radical difference in the public realm, he does not, for all that, succumb to the depoliticizing aporias of the unrepresentable. While it might appear that the sublime, like dissensus, constitutes "a break between sense and sense," in which the 'sense' of sensible intuition does not accord with the conceptual sense-making of the understanding, the sublime is *a break with sensibility altogether*. Dissensus, does not break with sensibility, so much as engender collisions between alternate modes of sensing-with.

In his recent writing, Rancière has engaged polemically with theories that link politics to the 'ethico-religious' thematics of the radically 'Other', which he links to the Kantian sublime. He has accused thinkers from Lyotard to Agamben, from Lacan to Derrida, of abandoning the immanence of political dissensus for an 'infinite' of alterity and 'absolutizing' of wrong, or injustice. Whether in the form of the 'differend' or the 'state of exception', the 'Real' or the 'to come', the creative and productive dimension of political dissensus is foreclosed in the name of ethical transcendence.

⁹ Katherine Wolfe, "From Aesthetics to Politics: Rancière, Kant, and Deleuze." (2006) Davide Panagia, *The Potetics of Political Thinking*. (2006)

The temptation to link political dissensus to the sublime is an understandable one. If Arendt cultivates a consensualist vision out of the sociability at the heart of Kant's theory of the beautiful, as I argued in the previous chapter, might we not conclude that she overlooks that the moment 'antisocial' disruption present in the Analytic of the Sublime? Beginning with an examination of the attempts to make out of dissensus a politics of the Kantian sublime, this chapter ultimately argues that dissensus is more appropriately understood in terms of Kant's Analytic of the Beautiful, albeit in a moment therein that Arendt failed to take up. In this way, we return to the link that Arendt makes between politics and aesthetic sociability from a different angle, one that treats sociability as transformable by those who are not included in it. Dissensus turns out to be a source of heterogeneity that does not require taking flight from the sensible world into the supersensible or unrepresentable, but folds back on the realm of sociability and alters the coordinates of the *sensus communis*. Drawing from some of Rancière's writings over the last several years I, finally, attempt to show that Rancière's concept of dissensus has greater affinities with the feeling of 'disinterest', constitutive of the Kantian experience of the beautiful, than it does with the sublime.

In Arendt's appropriation of Kant's 'Analytic of the Beautiful', impartiality and disinterest play complimentary roles, and are at times even treated as the same: "Impartiality in Kant is called disinterestedness." (LKP 70) Against this complementarity, I point to several places in Rancière's recent work that suggest that he dissociates disinterest and impartiality, drawing attention to a *negative* moment in aesthetic experience found in the *neither...nor* structure of disinterest (neither the concepts of the understanding nor the supersensible Ideas of morality). I argue that this moment of

dissensus at the core of Kantian aesthetics both accounts for the ruptures in common experience (*dis-inter-est*), and avoids falling into an ethico-messianism of the sublime Event. In spite of the emphasis that I have put thus far on those features of Rancière's thought that are to be sharply distinguished from Arendt's, my hope is to facilitate an understanding of Arendt and Rancière as united in their pursuit of a politics entirely immanent to the sensible world, a pursuit, moreover, that rigorously separates politics from the thematics of unrepresentable alterity.

3.1 Dissensus as the Kantian Sublime?

In her essay "From Aesthetics to Politics: Rancière, Kant, Deleuze", Katherine Wolfe points to a number of affinities between Rancière's 'aesthetics of politics' and Kant's critical philosophy, dealing with both the first and third *Critiques*. She suggests that "Rancière's attention to the eruption of voices, of sights, of people, and more, unsanctioned by any historical partitioning of the sensible—in other words, Rancière's insistence that politics can and does happen—may not be unlike Kant's encounter with a distinct aesthetics *via* the sublime in the *Critique of Judgment*. (Wolfe, "FPA" 1) Wolfe interprets the 'discord' or non-agreement of the faculties (of imagination and understanding) in the Kantian sublime precisely as a disruption of common sense: "to posit something that can be thought but not imagined is to encounter a moment of discord between the faculties. This moment of discord would be a moment of experience outside the dominion of common sense." (Wolfe, "FPA" 1)

Likewise, David Panagia, in his *Poetics of Political Thinking* (2005), sees the aesthetics at the heart of Rancière's politics as an aesthetics of the sublime. In his view, "Rancière articulates the emergence of democratic politics in terms of sublime dissonance." (PPT 88) He continues to claim that "Rancière treats the sublime as the *sine qua non* of political action, precisely because of its divisive nature." (PPT 88) The experience of the sublime, in Kant, does not carry with it the promise of being accommodated by the imagination and the *sensus communis*, as the experience of the beautiful does. "[N]atural beauty," explains Kant,

carries with it a purposiveness in its form, through which the object seems as it were to be predetermined for our power of judgment, whereas that which, without any rationalizing, merely in apprehension, excites in us the feeling of the sublime may to be sure appear in its form to be contrapurposive for our power of judgment, unsuitable for our faculty of presentation, and as it were doing violence to the imagination. (CPJ 129)

This is what Panagia has in mind when he asserts that "the sublime is antisocial, then, because it is dissociative: it disorients our minds to such a degree that we find ourselves in a state of indiscernability that not only disrupts our mental faculties (most noticeably our capacity to judge) but also interrupts society as an organic and historical force." (PPT 86) Panagia is correct that "the separation from all society" is, for Kant, "regarded as something sublime if it looks to ideas that rest beyond all sensible interest." (CPJ 157) Nevertheless, as I shall attempt to illustrate, it is a mistake to interpret Rancière's political dissensus as 'anti-social'. Dissensus is concerned neither with the withdrawal from sociability nor with the departure from the sensible. Rather, as we have seen, it generates different forms of sociability and reconfigurations of the sensible by twisting the

immanent forms of common sensibility. It introduces a heterogeneous *sensorium* that carries with it the promise of becoming sensible in an altered *partage*.

Without doubt, the attempt to make out of the Kantian sublime a definitive model of dissensual political activity is bolstered by the obvious affinities between Rancière's concept of dis-agreement and Lyotard's concept of the 'differend' (*différend*). Lyotard's differend draws heavily from the Kantian sublime as the encounter with the unrepresentable, and signifies the impossibility of 'phrasing' a wrong for which a common sense, as the guarantor of communication, is lacking. Such encounters announce the limits of the existing representational frameworks, in a similar manner to political disagreements, in Rancière's sense:

In the differend, something 'asks' to be put into phrases, and suffers from the wrong of not being able to be put into phrases right away. This is when the human beings who thought they could use language as an instrument of communication learn through the feeling of pain which accompanies silence... that they are summoned by language, not to augment to their profit the quantity of information communicable through existing idioms, but to recognize that what remains to be phrased exceeds what they can presently phrase, and that they must be allowed to institute idioms which do not yet exist. (DFD 13)

The notion of the differend evokes the dissonant, divisive interruptions of communication reminiscent of Kant's 'Analytic of the Sublime', which unlike the experience of the beautiful, cannot appeal to the existing resources of judgment with which it is not commensurate. "Born from a wrong and is signaled by a silence," it announces a tear in the seamless fabric of the consensual community. (DFD 57)

The fact that Lyotard's emphasis on the moments in which communication is

rendered impossible has led some to construct a similar tension between his and Arendt's work to the one that I have been constructing between her work and Rancière's. Andrew Cutrofello, in this regard, contrasts Arendt's universal communicability of taste with Lyotard's emphasis on the 'incommensurability' of idioms or 'phrase universes'.¹⁰

Where Arendt likens political opinions to Kantian judgments about the beautiful, Lyotard compares political expressions to judgments about the sublime... The difference is that the feeling of sublimity is itself an experience of conflict, of disharmony, of that which interrupts our usual practices and ways of thinking. By likening political discourse to a discourse about the sublime, Lyotard stresses the elements of heterogeneity and conflict that are as much a part of the telos of politics as its means. (Cutrofello, "IHR" 276)

I do not dispute that Lyotard's 'differend' contrasts with Arendt's thoroughly communicative, even consensual conception of political interlocution. However, the choice between the absence of radical difference, and a difference so radical it cannot be communicated, presupposes the immobility of the parameters of political community *qua* common sense.

In any case, despite definite similarities, Rancière's project must be differentiated from that of Lyotard. Jean-Louis Déotte's 2004 essay, "The Difference Between Rancière's *Mésentente* and Lyotard's *Différend*" underlines the nature of Rancière's departure from Lyotard. Like Wolfe and Panagia, Déotte recognizes the divisive, negative moment constitutive of Rancière's politics: "Based on a system of sensibility apparently founded in nature (the police and its partitioning of the sensible), political appearances consist of a de-localization, a displacement, a dis-identification, almost an

¹⁰ Andrew Cutrofello, David Ingram.

uprooting, so that wrong can be exposed.” (Déotte, “DJR” 84) But Déotte also differs from them in acknowledging that the divisive function in Rancière’s politics is only one of its two constitutive moments¹¹. At the same time that political subjects upset the existing world, in Rancière’s thought, “they invent a new world, new territories, and thus a new sensitivity (*aisthesis*), i.e., a different division of the sensible.” (Déotte, “DJR” 84) While Lyotard does insist on the need to ‘institute idioms which do not yet exist’, in which the unsayable and the senseless can be said and come to make sense, and suggests that this may be the task of politics, he fails to provide the mechanisms that could adequately account for such institutions. Without a systematic account of the processes capable of bringing the silent wrong into communication with the existing situation, Lyotard’s differend risks absolutizing heterogeneity and difference. And “in contrast to Lyotard, Rancière assumes that every voice is potentially articulable, and thus that the wrong that exists because of the difference between voice and speech can be transformed into litigation.” (Déotte, “DJR” 80)

This inability on the part of Lyotard may be symptomatic of his modeling of the differend on the Kantian sublime, which treats the limits of the sensible and the understandable as transcendental and unchangeable. Kant’s very recourse to the *supersensible* suggests that the experience of the sublime rests on the presupposition that the existing common sense—the *contingent* limits of representation—cannot be transformed

¹¹ Not temporal, but structural moments – that is, moments that coincide.

to accommodate something so radically other, and must therefore be overcome.¹² The recourse to an “abstract presentation, which becomes *entirely negative in regard to the sensible*,” and that effects “the elimination of the limits of sensibility,” signals a departure from, and not a transformation of the limits of the sensible. (CPJ 156) Such transformations, however, are the essence of Rancière’s concept of dissensus. And as Nancy Fraser argues—in defense of Arendt, it is worth noting—“an idea...that resists *all possible* representation has an air of surplus paradox suited better to religion than to politics.” (CPJ 169)

3.2 Why the Sublime is not Political for Rancière

What is important, for Rancière, is that in Kant the sublime “signaled the passage from the aesthetic to the moral sphere.” (AD 127) Given that the aesthetic and the political are coextensive, in his view, this passage also marks a departure from the political to the non-political, from the properly political realm of the sensible and common sense to the extra-political, moral realm of the supersensible, “where reason,” as Kant says, “must exercise dominion over sensibility.” (CPJ 151) In the experience of the sublime, it is the power of the imagination which is ‘sacrificed’ for the ‘enlargement’ and ‘power’ of moral Ideas. (CPJ 152) Dissensus, however, does not ‘sacrifice’ the power of

¹² Such a presupposition leads Kant to link the sublime to the Judaic ban on representation: “Perhaps there is no more sublime passage in the Jewish Book of the Law than the commandment: Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image, nor any likeness either of that which is in heaven, or on the earth, or yet under the earth etc.” (CPJ 156)

the same time emphasizing the point at which he departs from them. With regard to the attempt to think the interruption of radical heterogeneity into the reigning consensus or mode of being-with, Rancière explains the following:

My attempt is distinguished from that of certain others with similar historical experiences and proximate problems and formulations by a difference in conceiving the heterogeneous, by a way of conceiving it that does not ascribe it another ontological power. I have tried to conceive heterogenesis through a type of activity that produces shocks between worlds, but shocks between worlds *in the same world*: re-distributions, re-compositions, and re-configuration of elements. [italics added] ("UD" 212)

Although his conception of politics pivots around certain breaks in the sensible and disruptions of the aesthetic support of communicative rationality, "nevertheless, for Rancière the specificity of politics springs from communicational stakes." (DJR 79) The re-distribution of the historical *a priori* elements that compose and organize collective experience is first and foremost an *action*, a *practice*, and a *construction*. Dissensus is not a strictly negative political force, but only negates, divides, and interrupts as part of a new creation.

To this end, Rancière finds himself much closer to Arendt than he may be willing to admit. Politics, in spite of being a disruptive force, always folds back on the sensible world, on creation, and the beginning of something new, albeit with the caveat that the conditions for the emergence of the new and for creative action are radicalized to comprise interruptions of common sense and the public realm, rather than its preservation and enrichment. Arendt and Rancière are, as I have attempted to demonstrate, united in dismissing the sublime as a model of politics, and in placing the political squarely in the

realm of (common) sensibility, which has no need of deferring to, or being concerned with the supersensible.

3.3 Democracy and Dissensus: Revolution Beyond the Sublime

The tension between Rancière's politics and the politics of the unrepresentable Other is perhaps most legible in his effort to re-conceptualize democracy. He is emphatic about the rigorous distinction between democracy as it is normally conceived, namely, its alignment with consensus, and his own conception of democracy as the subjectification or becoming subject of the *demos*. "Consensus," he explains, "is thus not another manner of exercising democracy, less heroic and more pragmatic: one does not 'practice' democracy except under the form of these *mises-en-scenes* that reconfigure the relations of the visible and the sayable, that create new subjects and supplementary objects. Consensus, thus understood, is the negation of the democratic basis for politics: it desires to have well-identifiable groups with specific interests, aspirations, values, and 'culture'." ("DW" 125) Unlike the broadly 'liberal' conceptions of democracy, the 'people' or *demos* on behalf of whom Rancièrian democracy is practiced do not pre-exist their appearance in the public world. Moreover, they do not 'discuss' and 'debate' existing matters of public concern, but introduce new objects and new issues that were previously not pertinent to public life. Rather than taking place *within* the reigning 'givens' of the public sphere, "democracy is a form for constructing dissensus over 'the given' of public life." (DA 56) Rancière thereby links democracy with "the existence of a public place that is never definitively established." (Déotte, "DJR" 73)

But just as democracy is not, for Rancière, the order and preservation of consensus—with its attendant disagreements over interests and values—neither is it the explosive eruption of the masses, the Event of revolution, or the ‘messianism without a messiah’ of Derrida’s democracy ‘to come’. In a recent essay, Rancière has addressed the question of the relationship between democracy and the ‘ethics of the Other’ directly, which deals largely with the difference between Derrida’s and his own conceptions of democracy. In relation to the concept of democracy, Rancière explains the following: “The main issue, in my view, is whether it will be conceptualized in political or ‘ethical’ terms. If we conceptualize it politically, then the ‘infinite respect for the other’ cannot take the form of an infinite wait for the Event or the Messiah, but instead the democratic shape of an otherness that has a multiplicity of forms of inscription and of forms of alteration or dissensus.” (“DDM” 61) We should not be misled, therefore, into concluding that Rancière conceives of politics as impervious to radical alterity. Rather, the very importance of democracy for his project lies in his conception of the *demos*, not as the totality of constituted actors within a given polity, but as the becoming-seen and becoming-heard of other subjects, along with their proper objects of concern. For Rancière, “there is not *one* infinite openness to the otherness, but instead many ways of inscribing the part of the other. In my own work,” he explains, “I have tried to conceptualize democratic practice as the inscription of the part of those who have no part...such an inscription is made by subjects who are ‘newcomers’, who allow new objects to appear as common concerns, and new voices to appear and be heard.” (“DDM” 60)

3.3.1 Dissensus and Dis-inter-est

Returning to the main issue at hand, namely, the different conceptions of politics and ethics that emerge from the first half of Kant's third *Critique*, I would like to draw attention to Rancière's interpretation of the 'Analytic of the Beautiful'. As I have attempted to demonstrate in the first and second chapters, Arendt's appropriation Kant's 'Analytic' finds in it the seeds of consensus; not in the sense of everyone agreeing and argument no longer taking place, but in the sense that the judgments of the beautiful reveal a common sense or *sensus communis* that constitutes an *a priori* consensus on the communicable and incommunicable. But is Kant's 'Analytic', with its emphasis on communicability and *sensus communis*, limited to this interpretation? Interestingly, Rancière points precisely to *it* for an elementary articulation of the nature, not of consensus, but of dissensus. Perhaps surprisingly, Rancière argues that "Dissensus, i.e., the rupture of a certain agreement between thought and the sensible, already lies at the core of aesthetic agreement and repose." (AD 98)

What is important for Rancière is that with regard both to 'the law of the understanding' and 'the law of sensation', Kantian "aesthetic experience suspends both laws at the same time. It therefore suspends the power relations which usually structure the experience of the knowing, acting and desiring subject." (AD 97) Rancière calls this double suspension the '*neither-nor*' of aesthetic beauty. It is the detachment or separation from the normal modes of understanding and evaluating that defines the 'disinterest' proper to the experience of the beautiful in Kant. Far from seeing it as the root of a consensus, "the 'free agreement' between understanding and the imagination is in itself

already a disagreement or dissensus. It is not necessary to go looking in the sublime experience of size, power or fear to discern a disagreement between thought and the sensible.” (AD 97) The ‘free-play’ of the faculties is initiated, on Rancière’s reading, precisely by the negation of their normal functioning.

Rancière overtly opposes ‘political’ revolutions to the revolution in the forms of sensibilities that he sees at work in Kantian aesthetic free-play. “The *neither... nor ...* specific to the aesthetic state... announces a wholly new revolution: a revolution in the forms of sensory existence, instead of a simple upheaval of the forms of the state; a revolution that is no mere displacement of powers, but a neutralization of the very forms by which power is exercised... Aesthetic free play – or neutralization – defines a novel mode of experience that bears within it a new form of ‘sensible’ universality and equality.” (AD 99) This is why Rancière calls “Lyotard’s reading of Kant... is most certainly an attempt to efface a first political reading of aesthetic experience.” (AD 104)

What Rancière’s reading of Kantian aesthetics brings to light is that dissensus is most certainly *not* the presentation of the non-, or supersensible in front of which the schemas of the imagination or *sensus communis* are destined to inadequacy. Rather, it is the weaving of another *sensorium*, heterogeneous to the existing distribution of the sensible, which works of art and political subjectification share. The aesthetics of politics lies in the construction of *another* common sense, and not simply in the negative rupture of the existing one. In the process of dissensus, “assemblage of data and the intertwining of contradictory relations are intended to produce *a new sense of community*,” a new communal sense. (ER 58)

To this end, it is noteworthy that, in his more recent *Political Life of Sensation* (2009), Panagia has reevaluated his understanding the relationship between Kant's aesthetics and Rancière's politics. It would appear that he has abandoned his identification of the sublime with political dissensus, and developed on a concept of 'indistinction' (grounded in the experience of disinterest), which signifies the sensible presentation of something foreign to the normal coordinates of sensory experience within a given *sensus communis*. Panagia, in this text, sees the Kantian experience of the beautiful as

a disjunctive moment when we are unable to make the kinds of distinctions necessary to establish an interest in an object, including any antecedent relation like tradition, context, function. Indeed, Kant's commitment to *disinterest* goes so far as to assert that we must be indifferent to the existence of the object, and though Kant readily admits that we exist within a substratum of sensorial affinities that organize our world according to norms and practices of sense making, aesthetic experience is such that it interrupts those networks of relation by creating a temporal and temporary state of indistinction. [italics added] (PLS 29)

If Arendt's analysis focuses on impartiality, on the indexing of particular judgments to the *positive* configuration of public sensibility, Rancière focuses on dis-interest, detachment, the *neither-nor*, i.e., the *negative* moment of aesthetic judgment. But *negative* here does not mean 'outside' or 'beyond' the sensible, but a sensible presentation that does not *agree* with the existing one. It is as a *sensation*, as Panagia describes 'indistinction', a sensible presentation of something 'other' than what we are used to experiencing, that dissensus interrupts the normal, indeed, normative sensory coordinates of community.

Crucially, the ‘*neither... nor*’ of aesthetic experience, the same one in which Arendt discovered the immanence of the political to the sociability constituted through the aesthetic, is, for Rancière, “what enables the mediation specific to Kantian common sense to be turned into the positive principle of a new form of existence.” (AD 99) For Arendt, disinterest revealed a ‘publicness’ at the core of the experience of judgment, which is purified both of private and idiosyncratic ‘agreeableness’ and universal, moral ‘interests’ alike. This purification of interests reveals a sociability, a public *inter-est* at the core of human experience. But, as we have seen, this perhaps overlooks a disjunctive moment in that very same experience, the ramifications of which she is not concerned in drawing out. Disinterest, I have contended, is also a *dis-inter-est*, a break with the self-evident knowledge of the ‘objective’ sensory givens and objects of public perception that bind community as an *inter-est*; a break that opens sensory community for the introduction of foreign subjects and objects. As Rancière explains, aesthetics “has been conceptualized by Kant... in terms of disconnection: there is something that escapes the normal conditions of sensory experience. That is what was at stake in emancipation: getting out of the ordinary ways of sensory experience.” (Rancière, “AGE”, 71) Witnessing an act like the plebian secession from the Aventine, or seizing of commercial and public space by the *sans-papiers* in France, Rancière shows, shares with the experience of exceptional works of art the quality of a disconnection from our normal, common sense ways of perceiving and imparting meaning on the world around us. To the extent that such disconnections open up a new sense of what is collectively possible, they are the very stakes of politics.

Rancière's refusal to identify his politics with the aesthetics of the sublime is an important one, and it is one that commentators on his work seem to neglect. It reveals a proximity to Arendt and her commitment to the immanence of politics to the sensible world. Politics, for Rancière, does not merely break with the existing forms of experience constituted by common sense, announcing the 'superpower' of the Event or the Messiah. Rather, "politics creates a new form, as it were, of *dissensual* commonsense." ("PPA" 139) The stakes of Rancière's politics remain bound to sensible to community and what can be immanently produced therein. Granted, this immanence is not *saturated* in the way that Arendt's is, in so far as it is characterized by decisive points of rupture and radical re-configuration, which tear at the sensory fabric of community. But this should not mislead us into overemphasizing the difference between the two thinkers. As is manifest in their readings of Kant's aesthetics, they simply pick up on two different moments constitutive of the same phenomenon: the aesthetic founding (Arendt) and re-founding (Rancière) of political community.

3.4 Conclusion

Badiou accuses Rancière of being overly 'historicist' for not positing the aleatory emergence of an Event or a Derridean 'to come'. (Badiou, *MP* 116) This may be true, but as I tried to explain in the second chapter of this work, Rancière's historicism relies on a conception of history that, while constituting the aesthetic coordinates of the shared sensible world, can be 're-constituted', transformed, and altered. This conception of history, not as monolithic and all-conditioning, but as mobile and susceptible to

intervention (albeit rare) by political subjects, does not need to appeal the Event to conceptualize the manner in which otherness can transform and come to be inscribed in the historical world. Aesthetico-political processes engage in such inscriptions wherever they arise: on the Aventine in ancient Rome, in the *banlieu* of Paris, in the households of women confined to private space.

Recourse to the 'ethico-religious' is not necessary if the coordinates of the intelligible, the 'schemas' of imagination, are susceptible to alteration. The problem with the feeling of the sublime as model of politics is that the very experience of the sublime, as theorized by Kant, is already a concession of the transcendence and ahistoricity of the forms of sensible experience. It is accompanied by a 'pain' at not being able to synthesize and comprehend what is being apprehended, but a pain that calls the subject to higher purpose, namely the thinking of the unrepresentable. But this recourse to a 'higher calling', the calling of an ethics of Other, presupposes that it is not possible to bring that which lies beyond the *current* community of sensation, into communication with a *new* one. This is the presupposition that Rancière rejects, and that, in my view, qualifies his thought as properly *political*.

4 Conclusion

This thesis has sought to unfold the consequences of the insight, provided by both Arendt and Rancière, that politics is always and inherently bound up with the aesthetic, with shared modalities of sensing the 'given' world. These modalities determine what can

be communicated and what cannot, and shape the coordinates of the visible, the audible, and thus the possible. Throughout, I have tried to show how Rancière enables the articulation of a conception of politics that consists, not only of what unfolds *inside* the communicative space opened up by the sharing of a *sensus communis*, but of those processes capable of contesting and transforming it. Left *uncontested*, I have argued, ‘common sense’ risks reifying into a sense of a world whose self-evident ‘givens’ are beyond dispute. This is a world whose constituted participants and determinate objects of concern acquire a quasi-transcendent status that, by ‘policing’ the border between the perceptible and the imperceptible, forecloses the appearance of new subjects – of ‘newcomers’, as Rancière calls them.

Dissensus, which involves a process of subjectification that constitutes previously non-existent subjects (according to the perceptual framework of the existing public realm), relies on the ability to bend, twist, and rend aesthetic community. I have shown that Arendt’s aesthetics of the public realm does not enable such processes, while Rancière’s historically situated, yet simultaneously *non-historicized* account of the *sensus communis* produces borders of aesthetico-political community that are mobile and transformable. But I have also tried to cast Arendt and Rancière as united against the contemporary tendency to subordinate politics to problematics that are fundamentally ethical. Perhaps no other two thinkers have shown an equal concern for the preservation of the integrity politics, as distinct from those phenomena, in both theory practice, with which it is all too often confused.

Work Cited

- Adorno, Theodore. *Aesthetic Theory*. Trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1997.
- Arendt, Hannah. *Between Past and Future*. New York: Viking, 1961.
- . *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the banality of evil*. New York: Penguin, 2006.
- . *Essays on Understanding*. New York: Harcourt, 1994.
- . *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. Ed. Ronald Beiner. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1998.
- . *The Human Condition*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1998.
- . *On Revolution*. New York: Viking, 1963.
- . *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York, Harcourt 1973.
- . *The Portable Hannah Arendt*. Ed. Peter Baehr. New York: Penguin, 2003.
- . *The Promise of Politics*. New York: Random House, 2005.
- . *Responsibility and Judgment*. Ed. Jerome Kohn. New York: Schocken, 2003.
- Badiou, Alain. *Metapolitics*. Trans. Jason Barker. New York: Verso, 2005.
- Cascardi, Anthony J. "Communication and Transformation: Aesthetics and Politics in Kant and Arendt". *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*. Ed. Craig Calhoun & John McGowan. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1997.
- Cutrofello, Andrew. "Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing?". *Human Studies*. Vol. 25, 2002. 269-279
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Foucault*. Trans. Sean Hand. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1998.
- Déotte, Jean-Louis. "The Differences between Rancière's *Mésentente* (Political Disagreement) and Lyotard's *Différend*". *Substance*. Vol. 33, No. 1, Issue 103. Pp. 77-90. Madison, WI: Wisconsin UP, 2004.
- Disch, Lisa. "'Please Sit Down, But Don't Make Yourself at Home': Arendtian 'Visiting' and the Prefigurative Politics of Consciousness-Raising." *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*. Ed. Craig Calhoun & John McGowan. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1997.

- Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Fraser, Nancy. "Communication, Transformation, and Consciousness Raising". *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*. Ed. Craig Calhoun & John McGowan. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1997.
- Gottsegen, Michael G. *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.
- Herzog, Annabel. "Hannah Arendt's Concept of Responsibility". *Studies in Social and Political Thought*. Vol. 10, 2004. 39-56
- Ingram, James. "The Subject of the Politics of Recognition: Hannah Arendt and Jacques Rancière". *Socialité et reconnaissance. Grammaires de l'humain*. ed. Georg Bertram, Robin Celikates, Christoph Laudou, and David Lauer. Paris: l'Harmattan, 2006.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Trans. Paul Guyer. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Liotard, Jean-François. *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*. Trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1988.
- Panagia, Davide. *The Poetics of Political Thinking*. Durham: Duke UP. 2004
- . *The Political Life of Sensation*. Durham: Duke UP, 2009.
- Rancière, Jacques. "Art is Going Elsewhere, and Politics has to Catch It." *Krisis*. Issue 1. 2008
- . *Dis-Agreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Trans. Julie Rose. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2009.
- . "Dissenting Words: A conversation with Jacques Rancière" (interview with Davide Panagia). *Diacritics*, 30:2 (2000). pp. 113-126. Pg. 120.
- . "Does Democracy Mean Something?". *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. ed. & Trans. Steve Corcoran. New York: Continuum, 2010. 45-61
- . *The Emancipated Spectator*. Trans. Gregory Elliot. London: Verso, 2009.
- . *Hatred of Democracy*. Trans. Steve Corcoran. London: Verso, 2009.
- . "Les démocraties contre la démocratie". *Démocratie dans quel état?*. Paris: La fabrique éditions, 2009.

- . *On the Shores of Politics*. Trans. Liz Heron. New York: Verso, 2007
- . "The Paradoxes of Political Art". *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. ed. & Trans. Steve Corcoran. New York: Continuum, 2010. 134-151
- . *The Politics of Aesthetics*. Trans. Gabriel Rockhill. New York: Continuum, 2004.
- . "Ten Theses on Politics". *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. ed. & Trans. Steve Corcoran. New York: Continuum, 2010. 27-44
- . "The Use of Distinctions". *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. ed. & Trans. Steve Corcoran. New York: Continuum, 2010. 205-218
- . "What Makes an Image Unacceptable". *PNCA+FIVE Idea Studio Featuring Jacques Rancière*. Recorded Lecture: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-ULbgFkNZs>. Accessed Feb. 24th 2010.
- . "Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man". *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Ed. & Trans. Steve Corcoran. New York: Continuum, 2010. 62-75
- . "Xénophobie et politique". *Et tant pi spur les gens fatigué: entretiens*. Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2009. 191-206
- Robinson, Keith. "An Immanent Transcendental: Foucault, Kant and Critical Philosophy". Issue 141, 2007.
- Schaap, Andrew. "Enacting the Right to Have Rights: Jacques Rancière's Critique of Hannah Arendt". *European Journal of Political Theory*. 10 (1) 2011.
- Schapiro, Michael J. "After Kant: Re-thinking Hermeneutics and Aesthetics". *The Good Society* Vol 15., No.1, 2006. 7-10
- Tønder, Lars. "Inessential Commonality: Immanence, Transcendence, Abundance". *Radical Democracy: Politics Between Abundance and Lack*. Ed. Lars Tønder. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2005.
- Wolfe, Katherine. "From Aesthetics to Politics: Rancière, Kant, Deleuze". *Contemporary Aesthetics*. Vol. 4, 2006. Online.