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slaves exposed in 1995. She tracks the publicity campaigns launched by Nike, Gap and other corporations, in the face of a growing anti-sweatshop movement on university campuses and elsewhere. Reading the websites designed to assuage consumer guilt, she discerns a recrudescence of the same discourses and images lurking throughout American labor and immigrant history, now “exported” globally. Relocating sweatshops elsewhere brings “American values” to the world.

I wish this book had been better edited so some of the turgid and gummy prose might have been sharpened and some of the vague jargon eliminated. But the economy of 21<sup>st</sup>-century academic publishing works on the same margins as the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century garment industry. Unfortunately, Sweatshops R Us.

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**Jacques Rancière. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. Afterword by Slavoj Žižek. Trans. Gabriel Rockhill. London: Continuum, 2004. 116 pp.**

The publication of *The Politics of Aesthetics* is certainly a great editorial feat, for which the translator should be highly praised. Gabriel Rockhill has provided the English-speaking reader with a rigorous and graceful translation of *Le partage du sensible: Politique et esthétique*, a book which contains some of the most interesting essays by Jacques Rancière. But there is much more to this book than the translation of the original text: the English volume comes with a thorough introduction, added footnotes, an index of names, an extensive and precise “glossary of technical terms,” and the most complete critical bibliography of Rancière’s works that has ever been printed, either in French or in English. The critical apparatus for *The Politics of Aesthetics* is therefore an extremely useful tool for anybody interested in the work of Jacques Rancière. The interest of this volume is also enhanced by two original texts added to the English edition: an interview with Jacques Rancière conducted by Gabriel Rockhill himself and a thoughtful afterword by Slavoj Žižek.

The academic world, in the United States and in Anglophone countries in general, has been increasingly interested in the work of Jacques Rancière, as several of his books and essays dating from the 80s and the 90s have been slowly translated into English during the last 15 years. Rancière finds his place among a few French philosophers who, for quite some time, have been trying to re-vitalize the philosophical discourse of the Left. In this respect, he can be associated, even though cautiously, with other figures belonging to his same generation: Alain Badiou, Étienne Balibar, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, who all share with Rancière many philosophical, political and aesthetic concerns, together with slightly older thinkers, mainly Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida.

A recently retired professor of aesthetics and politics at Paris-VIII, Jacques Rancière started his career as a student and collaborator of Louis Althusser, contributing one essay to a true classic of French Marxist scholarship, *Lire le Capital* (1965). During the events of May ‘68, Rancière was shortly involved with

Maoist circles and slowly started to elaborate a thorough critique of Althusser's theory of ideology and political allegiance to the French Communist party. The process of separation from "structuralist Marxism" ended in the publication of *La Leçon d'Althusser* (1974), and Rancière embarked in a profoundly original philosophical journey, which started with a very peculiar kind of archival research. In order to counter Althusser's definition of ideological domination, which left very little space to the notions of freedom and equality, Rancière went looking for instances of actual and autonomous expression by the lower classes, exploring the journals published in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century by anarchist and socialist French workers. During the 1980s, this archival research resulted in the elaboration in the most original and powerful themes of Rancière's philosophical and political discourse. Studying the poems, the political interventions and the essays by these French workers, and also by women-activists like Jeanne Deroin, Rancière reflected on the political value of the equality of intelligence that manifests itself in the acquisition and the use of human language. This absolute equality is, in theory, at the basis of any political ordering, but it only realizes itself fully when the lower classes actually decide to claim it through writing, artistic expression or political interventions. This affirmation is always fragile, and occurs only intermittently in the historical arena, but it is the only act that can introduce true politics in an order generally dominated by the simple policing implemented by the powers in place. Three works, which are still considered by many the finest examples of Rancière's prose, are particularly representative of this period: *Les nuits des prolétaires* (1981, *The Nights of Labor*, 1989), *Le philosophe et ses pauvres* (1983, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 2004) and *Le Maître Ignorant* (1987, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 1991). A more theoretical exploration of the notions of democracy, politics and equality was then articulated by Rancière in the early 90s in several essays and in the more widely known *La Méésentente* (1995, *Disagreement*, 1999).

*The Distribution of the Sensible*, originally published in 2000, is part of a slightly later phase in Rancière's career, in which he deals with aesthetics in general, and not only with respect to its practice by the subaltern classes. This text is in fact the rewriting of an interview given by Rancière to two young French philosophers and later organized in thematic chapters. As Rancière says himself in his foreword, the interviewers were concerned "with aesthetic acts as configurations of experience that create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivation" (9). In this domain, Rancière had already published several important texts, among which the most widely known are *La Chair des mots: Politiques de l'écriture* (1998, translated as *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing* in 2004) and *L'Inconscient esthétique* (2001). Rancière defines the politics of art as the endless recasting of what is perceptible, understandable and therefore artistically conceivable during a certain "aesthetic regime," defined as the politically determined configuration of knowledge and societal activities associated with a certain historical and political contingency. Rancière establishes a typology of artistic practices, distinguishing three main regimes of the aesthetic.

The first regime, called the "ethical," ties artistic practice to the "ethos" of the community, and "it prevents 'art' from individualizing itself as such" (21). Plato's *Republic* is the perfect example of this relationship to aesthetics, where only certain forms of expression are deemed acceptable within the polis. The

second regime, called “poetic” or “representative,” finds its definition mostly in Aristotelian notions and attributes to art a specific function, which is fundamentally a mimetic one: art “represents the activities of men” (21) and establishes a complex set of rules for the *poiesis*, making of art just another “social occupation,” easily recognizable within the realm of human activities. In both cases, the ties between the aesthetic and the political are essential and indissoluble. According to Rancière, different combinations of these two regimes bring us all the way to the break represented by the French Revolution.

The third regime, which is called the “aesthetic,” is initiated by German Romanticism and variously modified during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This “is the regime that strictly identifies art with the singular and frees it from any specific rule” (23). The anarchy of Romantic and avanguardist practices is therefore intimately connected, according to Rancière, with a certain kind of political insurrectionism. It is thanks to the revindication of a radical democracy that the singular occupies the center stage in Romantic and post-Romantic art, and that the absolute “equality” of subject-matter can be revindicated by artists and political activists alike. Art then finds its vocation in the questioning of the existing political ordering, the affirmation of “another” expressivity and the promise of a revolution, at the very least in the semantic field.

While the specificity of Rancière’s assessments can sometimes lend itself to discussion and even controversy—is he simply a new Romantic anarchist?—it is unquestionable that this book gives the reader ample matter for reflection and more than one good reason to become acquainted with the rest of his work. It should be noted that Rancière’s involvement with contemporary art and political questioning is as important as his historical insights, and that current events and practices are the real motivation behind Rancière’s philosophical and political involvement. Thence his somewhat polemic tone, and his frequent references to contemporary figures and events, which only add to the interest of his works.

As Žižek says at the end of his afterword, “Rancière’s thought is today more actual than ever: in our time of disorientation of the Left, his writings offer one of the few consistent conceptualizations of how we are to continue to resist” (79).

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**Marjorie Perloff.** *21<sup>st</sup>-Century Modernism: The “New” Poetics.* Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002. ix + 222 pp

Filled with the surprising tour-de-force readings of poetry for which its author is famous, Marjorie Perloff’s *21<sup>st</sup>-Century Modernism: The “New” Poetics* is nonetheless a fairly straightforward book. A highly partisan polemic, this manifesto sides with the Language poets, whom Perloff sees as constituting the most challenging and exciting contemporary poetic movement, reading many facets of their poetics back into earlier aspects of modernism. Her reading backward begins with a startling re-evaluation of the “indeterminacy” of T. S. Eliot’s early poetry and then continues with treatments of Gertrude Stein’s “differential syntax,” Marcel Duchamp’s “conceptual poetics,” and the lettrism of Velimir Khlebnikov; it comes full circle by demonstrating these “modernist” poetic virtues in the poetry of Susan Howe, Charles Bernstein, Lyn Hejinian, and