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RANCIÈRE'S THEATROCRACY WITHIN AND BEYOND THE THEATRE

by Nic Fryer

Jacques Rancière's writing over the last fifty years offers a range of ways of reflecting on both the art form of theatre and of performance more broadly. The relationship between spectator and artwork, so central to much performance and theatre theory, has been core to his writing on aesthetics. And although Rancière has engaged directly with theatre less frequently than with other art forms, an interest in theatricality and performativity runs throughout his work to the extent that Peter Hallward (2006) has described his work as proposing a "theatrocracy".

This collection was inspired by the implications of his interest in theatre, but also by the high level of interest many theatre and performance scholars have taken in his work. In this collection, we have sought to incorporate writings covering his work from a range of perspectives. We have sought to consider how the notion of theatrocracy in his work might enhance understanding of the potential and limitations of his wider philosophical project. We have also sought to consider how his ideas might be applied to and illuminate understanding of theatre, both generally as an art form and in relation to specific theatrical examples. Finally, we have sought to consider how specific examples of theatre and performance both within and beyond the theatre might in turn enrich understandings of his writing.

Before discussing the book itself, I begin with a historical event which offers rich opportunities for Rancièrian analysis. On Friday 18th November 2016, two months before Donald Trump was inaugurated as the President of the United States, his running mate Mike Pence attended the celebrated musical *Hamilton* in New York. After a bruising and controversial election campaign, the country was in a state of high emotion. Pence's

attendance drew attention from the audience: as Joanna Walters notes, “patrons did not lose sight of the irony of a strong conservative, with a record of opposition against gay rights, attending a hip-hop musical with a pointedly diverse cast” (2016). The audience both cheered and (more loudly) booed him, and “certain moments in the play (particularly those that celebrated the power and influence of minorities and immigrants) garnered extended applause from the audience” (Gasoi 2017, 41). At the curtain call, the actor Brandon Victor Dixon, who played Aaron Burr in the show, delivered a scripted speech as Mike Pence got up to leave. I quote the speech in full because I want to return to its specifics, particularly its respectful tone, later:

You know, we have a guest in the audience this evening. Vice-President Elect Pence, I see you walking out but I hope you will hear us just a few more moments. There is nothing to boo here, ladies and gentlemen, there is nothing to boo here, we are all here sharing a story of love. We have a bit of a message for you sir, and we hope you will hear us out. And I encourage everyone to pull out your phones and tweet and post because this message needs to be spread far and wide, OK? Vice-President Elect Pence, we welcome you and we truly thank you for joining the audience here at *Hamilton: An American Musical*, we really do. We sir, we are the diverse Americans who are alarmed and anxious that your new administration will not protect us, our planet, our children, our parents; or defend us and uphold our inalienable rights, sir ... But we truly hope that this show has inspired you to uphold our American values and to work on behalf of all of us, all of us. We thank you truly for sharing this show, this wonderful American story, told by a diverse group of men and women of different colours, creeds and orientations.

Pence then left, but Trump leapt to Pence’s defence on Twitter, stating “Our wonderful future V.P. Mike Pence was harassed last night at the theatre by the cast of Hamilton, cameras

blazing. This should not happen!” and in a second tweet stating “The Theater must always be a safe and special place. The cast of Hamilton was very rude last night to a very good man, Mike Pence. Apologize!” Needless to say, Dixon refused, stating “There’s nothing to apologise for. If people are coming to see Hamilton to leave their politics behind, you came to the wrong show” (quoted in Jamieson 2016).

An obvious application of Rancière’s ideas to Dixon’s speech might be to see it as an example of Rancière’s definition of politics. Rancière asserts that politics “stands in direct opposition to the police” (Rancière 2010, 36). He uses the term ‘police’ not only in a literal sense. For him, institutions like the police symbolise authority and convention. They function to support what Rancière calls the ‘distribution of the sensible’. This term reflects the ways in which authority, through the guise of what he calls the ‘sensible order’, “parcels out places and forms of participation in a common world by first establishing the modes of perception within which these are inscribed” (Rockhill 2004, 85). These modes of perception normalise the assigning of social roles and the institution of social norms to the extent that what is actually a culturally specific ‘parcelling out’ process is hidden. This is exemplified for Rancière in the police call to “Move along! There’s nothing to see here!” (Rancière 2010, 37). Politics as Rancière conceives it, on the other hand, disrupts these modes of perception and renders them visible. It “consists in transforming this space of ‘moving-along’ [...and] is the instituting of a dispute over the distribution of the sensible” (2010, 37). Through doing and saying things beyond the normal order of things, the sensible is revealed as contingent, and other possibilities to the sensible are realised: “Politics, before all else, is an intervention in the visible and the sayable” (2010, 37).

Dixon’s action might also be seen as an example of this, with his intervention challenging what it is possible to do/say during the normal, ‘sensible’ theatrical convention of the curtain call. Dixon subverts the convention of the silent actor submitting to the audience

with his subservient, respectful bow. Rather, he functions as an actor articulating a voice beyond his character in the theatrical space, insisting on the silent audience, including the Vice-President, listening to him. Challenges to ‘sensible’ theatrical conventions viewed through a Rancièrian frame also occur in many chapters in this collection. Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink outlines challenges to conventions around bodies on stage, Adrian Kear outlines challenges to representations of community, Jenny Hughes outlines challenges to the spectator-performer relationship, Caoimhe Mader McGuinness outlines challenges to representations of class and gender representation, and Stephen Scott-Bottoms outlines challenges to the conventions of the art gallery. Each instance functions not only as novel, but also as political: shifting the perspective of the spectator’s relationship to what he is seeing.

In a statement that chimes with Hallward’s depiction of Rancièrè as proposing a “theatrocracy”, Rancièrè further suggests that “politics is the constitution of a theatrical and artificial sphere” (quoted in Citton 2009, 130). Dixon’s act does not do away with the artifice of the theatrical relationship, but draws on it to create a different artificial sphere beyond social norms: outside the theatre Pence would probably not listen to someone directly challenging him in silence. In this sphere the outside world intrudes into the theatrical space from which is usually clearly delineated; in this sphere the orator Mike Pence is turned into a listener. This sphere may only be temporary and artificial, but for a moment a different set of possible social relations are glimpsed. It is this breaking of theatrical convention that seems to most bother Trump: “the Theater must always be a safe and special place”, he tweeted, outlining the sensible conception of theatre where normal relations are suspended in favour of the prevailing theatrical event. In contrast, reconstituting the space away from the event is seen as creating a lack of safety, specialness and is, in Trump’s word, “rude”. Yet since the courtesy of Dixon’s speech is palpable both in terms of language and its delivery, it is

arguably the performative breaking of the sensible, usually invisible, rules of theatrical engagement that most offends here. And the offence reveals the challenge that can be laid down when an “intervention in the visible and sayable” occurs.

Perhaps another part of the ‘rudeness’ Trump detects is premised on the passivity of Pence as a seated spectator. On *Hannity*, a programme screened the day after the event by the famously pro-Trump Fox News, the presenter Ainsley Earhardt goes so far as to equate the treatment with bullying: “Imagine sitting and you feel - it's kind of bullying a little bit. Imagine sitting in the audience and everyone is looking at you and booing you and *they're giving you a lecture when you're there to see them*” (quoted in International Wire 2016, emphasis mine). Larry Elder states on the same programme “The man is coming to see a play and an actor gives him a lecture about diversity and about protecting America? Are you kidding me?” (quoted in International Wire, 2016). For Trump and his supporters the poor defenceless Mike Pence, sitting there without power or a voice, is pitted against the angry active liberal mob, “cameras blazing”.

This notion of the passive spectator as a distribution of the sensible is identified by Rancière as common in theatre discourse. In his well known article which explicitly discusses theatre, ‘The Emancipated Spectator’, he suggests that in this conception “to be a spectator is to be separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act” (Rancière 2009a, 2). According to Rancière this has led theatre practitioners such as Brecht and Artaud to try to find ways of involving the audience: as Rancière puts it, theatre “accuses itself of rendering its spectators passive” and “assigns itself the mission of reversing its effects” (2009a, 7). However, Rancière challenges this presumption, suggesting that “we need to recognise the [...] activity peculiar to the spectator” (2009a, 17). In other words, there is no reason to assume that Pence is inevitably passive during Dixon’s speech. Regardless of his own capacity to talk back or walk out, there is an active processing as someone listens to and

watches another, and spectators “play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translation in order to appropriate the ‘story’ and make it their own story” (Rancière 2009a, 22). (Challenges to notions of the passive spectator are also taken up by Jenny Hughes and Will Shüler in the ‘Spectatorship and Participation’ section of this volume).

It is interesting that despite his political allies rushing to his defence, Pence is markedly less bothered by the speech than Trump: he said “I did hear what was said from the stage [...] I can tell you I wasn’t offended by what was said. I will leave to others whether that was the appropriate venue to say it” (quoted in Jamieson 2016). He also claimed he nudged his daughter after hearing the boos and cheers “and I said, remember, Charlotte, that’s what freedom sounds like” (quoted in International Wire 2016). Pence’s uncompromising attitude to abortion and gay rights, amongst many other things, is well documented, but it is notable that here he seems to relish the debate. Perhaps, Rancière might argue, he did not experience passivity in his role as spectator. (One might indeed argue that, rightly or wrongly, Dixon’s deferential tone could have led him to feel respected).

Pence is of course an extremely privileged man used to experiencing power. But for Rancière the notion of the active spectator has political potential for all human beings. For example, he outlines workers recounting their experience of being spectators who stepped outside their sensible role: “By making themselves spectators and visitors, they disrupted the distribution of the sensible which would have it that those who work do not have time to let their steps and gazes roam at random” (2009a, 19). Challenging a deterministic attitude to class consciousness, Rancière rather suggests that an aesthetic sensibility exists in all human beings. He writes about this at length in *Proletarian Nights* (originally published in English as *The Nights of Labour*), a book referred to by both Shulamith Lev-Aladgem and Jenny Hughes in this volume. In the book he outlines occurrences in nineteenth century France

where the working class' capacity to move beyond work, to dream and imagine, can be glimpsed. At one point he says, discussing a documentation of a performance, "it is in the theater, the new temple of popular aspirations, that one can see the labouring class living its true life" (2012, 25). This notion that art can provide a radical space at a remove from the everyday occurs throughout his writing. Like his notion of the political outlined above, artistic events both stand at a distance from the everyday sensible order, and hence have the potential to imagine what might be possible, rather than what is. For him "through the 'free play' of aestheticization" the "field of experience [is] severed from its traditional reference points" (Rancière 2010, 16). As such both politics and aesthetics can articulate the possibility of change.

However it is politics and aesthetics' distinct characters that make this possible, and they should not, he warns, be collapsed into each other. For Rancière, according to Corcoran, "to want to make politics and art disappear as singular processes is to miss the singular effects that they can bring about and to return them to the logic of consensus" (Corcoran 2010, 3). Therefore Rancière is suspicious of the notion of political art. "Art is not, in the first instance, political because of the messages and sentiments it conveys concerning the state of the world. Neither is it political because of the manner in which it might choose to represent society's structures, or social groups, their conflicts or identities. It is political because of the very distance it takes with respect to these functions" (Rancière 2009b, 23). Hence in *The Politics of Aesthetics* it is the "aesthetic regime" of art he valorises, which "strictly identifies art in the singular and frees it from any specific rule [...] The aesthetic regime asserts the absolute singularity of art and at the same time destroys any pragmatic criterion for isolating this singularity" (2004, 23). This 'destroying' of criteria avoids art being sublimated into the sensible. He says, "Police consists in saying: here is the definition of subversive art. Politics, on the other hand, says: no, there is no subversive form of art in

and of itself; there is a sort of permanent guerrilla war being waged” (quoted in Battista 2017, 240). This war exists through the fight to maintain the alterity of art. Such a discussion is taken up by most of the writers in this volume, particularly Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink and Adrian Kear, who both identify the ways in which the performance events that they describe can reveal and/or create things invisible in normal discourse.

Rancière’s notion of the constantly shifting aesthetic regime of art stands in contrast to political theatre that has a more direct intention; where politics are subsumed into the art work. Dixon’s assertion that “if people are coming to see *Hamilton* to leave their politics behind, you came to the wrong show” perhaps suggests a very different conception of politics to Rancière’s. *Hamilton* attempts to deal explicitly with politics through a range of elements: for example, its casting of minorities, its articulation of a female voice at the end of the show, its attempt to challenge conventional engagements with history or race. Rather than an example of the aesthetic regime, *Hamilton* might rather be read as having a well-intentioned desire to deal with “the city’s occupations” in a manner similar to that which Rancière identifies in the ‘ethical’ regime of art (2004, 21). By doing so, it arguably falls into the trap Rancière identifies in political art. For Rancière, by making its politics easily understood and contained, the work loses its power to provoke and question. It ultimately might also be seen as an example of an attempt to construct the spectator outlined in ‘The Emancipated Spectator’: someone who is assumed passive and in need of edification as she receives the parcelled out messages and issues that the performance outlines.

Therefore I think a Rancièrian analysis might be more interested in the moment of Dixon’s speech and its fallout than by the elements of a musical which, however different to other musicals in musical style, ultimately has a relatively clear moral sense and intention. It might be more interested in the ambiguities and tensions created around Dixon’s speech than his obvious attempt to challenge Pence which is clearly supported by a largely complicit

audience. For example, a discussion of ‘safety’ in the theatre such as Trump’s tweet presaged could be seen to destabilise assumptions about this word. How ‘unsafe’ is Dixon’s speech, really? In what ways might a ‘safe’ theatre space be desirable, so that the spectator or participant can recognise a clearly demarcated space where normal relations can be suspended? Or might a ‘safe’ space suggest a lack of exploration or creative potential? How does Dixon’s polite articulation sit at odds with his implicit disagreement with Pence, and does this courtesy destabilise notions that they are only opposed? Is Dixon’s suggestion to Pence that he is a ‘fellow American’ working for ‘all of us’ more destabilising to Pence’s normally divisive rhetoric than an openly hostile speech would have been? When questions such as these arise, certainties begin to be unsettled and ‘truths’ and clear hierarchies become unsettled. Hence this moment is political in the Rancièrian sense not because of its implicit challenge to Pence’s politics but rather because of the *unfamiliarity of the moment*. And such moments occur as theatrical, or at least performative, in their occurrence as alternatives to current reality. In this volume, Caoimhe Mader McGuinness and Stephen Scott-Bottoms outline performances that are not only directly political in content but which are also political in their aesthetic strategies. It is how these performances make things visible through the unfamiliarity of their aesthetic strategies that most evokes the interest of both writers. Indeed, Scott-Bottoms identifies how the activist collective Liberate Tate adapted their aesthetic strategies over time to avoid being coopted by the very gallery they sought to confront. According to Peter Hallward, it is the unfamiliarity of performance and art that contains political potential for Rancière: he suggests that “by refusing to speak in their own name, by acting at a distance from themselves or imitating the action of another, actors and poets threaten the very foundations of authority itself” (Hallward 2006, 113). To apply this to the *Hamilton* speech, Dixon is not only speaking as himself. He is drawing on a rhetorical

device of courtesy within the artificial space of the theatre, developing a mode of speech and identity within a space that are all marked as beyond the everyday.

Eruptions of theatre, theatricality and performativity such as this are therefore at the centre of Rancière's political philosophy. Such occurrences of theatre and performance are specific moments in time and space that cannot be easily planned for or reproduced. However, this has led to Rancière's theatricality being identified as his problem. As Hallward notes, "its effects are unabashedly sporadic and intermittent" (2006, 123). Critics wanting to find a clear programme for political action in Rancière's writing are therefore likely to be disappointed. Indeed, Rancière himself explicitly disavows the likely effectiveness of political action: "I don't think there are rules for good militant organisation [...] All I can define are forms of perception, forms of utterance. As to how these are taken up by organisations, I must admit that I've never been able to endure any of them for very long, but I know I have nothing better to propose" (quoted in Battista 2017, 124-5). This refusal to articulate a clear sense of how his notion of art might be harnessed by politics has led to a great deal of frustration, including from Hallward as well as Janelle Reinelt and Ryan Anthony Hatch in this volume. Rancière offers a vision of sporadic resistance which has been labelled anarchic but ultimately rather limited. He is able to articulate the possibility of change, but not to articulate sustainable solutions. Particularly in the current world climate, one might argue that developing sustainable alternatives is a key priority, not least in terms of environmental concerns. Hence, to answer one of the strands outlined at the outset of this introduction, his teatrocracy is his problem. And theatre itself might want to claim a legacy beyond temporary change.

What remains is a set of writings which remain passionately committed to the possibility of and power of human beings instigating performances of difference to the sensible; to their capacity to provoke and destabilise norms. The example utilised in this

introduction is not a work of theatre but an event which I have called Rancièrian. I have done this not to move away from the art form of theatre but to recognise that the link between theatricality and politics in his work exists beyond as well as within the world of the arts. Despite his desire to place aesthetics as being discrete from politics, politics is always there in the analysis. What is important for him is that politics is not *collapsed into* aesthetics. Indeed, it is the aforementioned aesthetic regime of art which is most of interest to Rancière because it exists in its own irreducible unique space. In *Aisthesis*, for example, he takes a range of works of art that he sees as existing in the shifting aesthetic regime discussed above, and locates them in “the sensible fabric of experience within which they are produced” (Rancière 2013, x). His analysis outlines social and aesthetic conditions of the time, but also analyses the art works as art, existing in their own discrete realm from these social conditions. And it is in the tension between the sensible world of the time and the art work’s potential to offer an alternative to this sensible world that his work remains political, in part at least: “Art is inherently political for him insofar as it acts as a potential meeting ground between a configuration of the sensible world and possible reconfigurations thereof” (Rockhill 2009, 200).

If Rancière’s commitment to committing to political structure remains vague, his commitment to art is much more palpable. Rancière said that his aim would be to speak of art providing “a lightening, an alleviation [...] The problem, first of all, is to create some breathing room” (Battista 2017, 234). This ‘breathing room’ is developed through “aesthetic *separation* or aesthetic strangeness as that which alone can carry the promise of a new sensible world” (Rancière 2009b, 100-1). This separation or strangeness invites the spectator to place themselves in relation to the art work and consider what it might offer. As he puts it, “what interests me in the artworks that catch my attention is the problems they pose, and how they pose them” (Battista 2017, 266). Or: “The aesthetic scene, properly speaking, thus turns

out to be the scene of the irreconcilable” (Rancière 2009b, 103). For him it is in art that one best finds the potential to stimulate thought and debate; to instigate a process of the “poetic labour of translation” (Rancière 2009a, 10) which is open to all human beings as they negotiate the art work and its irreconcilable elements.

This focus on process emphasises the specificity of the live event and the encounter between spectator and artwork so central to theatre and performance studies. Perhaps this desire to interrogate what is happening in the unique moment of each performance, or act, explains the mutual interest between Rancière and theatricality and Rancière and theatre/performance scholars. Throughout this book the chapters throughout reflect an interest in these specifics. Despite the very different works they discuss, throughout there is an engagement with both the politics of theatre and performance and the aesthetics employed in the works and ideas discussed. However, interest in the politics of performance events through a Rancièrian frame are articulated through a consideration of how the aesthetic strategies employed by the artwork provoke a relationship with the viewer, rather than how the artwork might provide an easily digestible reflection on the politics of the world. As such they also challenge the historical mode of theatre studies analysis, where work is there to be decoded and explained. Rather, the role of the critic might be to consider what the difficulty of decoding the performance creates in the spectator, how that which cannot easily be defined or contained is articulated, and what is created as a result of this articulation.

The importance of politics and its relationship to aesthetics therefore seemed to us to be a logical starting point for this collection, hence the first section **Aesthetics and Politics, Politics and Aesthetics**. Here, writers seek to address some of the questions posed in this introduction about the relationship between politics and aesthetics, particularly Rancière’s simultaneous insistence on both their independence and the ways in which politics ‘has its own specific politics [...and] aesthetics itself has its own specific politics’ (2009b, 46). The

first chapter, Ryan Anthony Hatch's 'The Politics of Aesthetics, in a State of Disruption', poses a challenge to Rancière: Hatch suggests that Rancière's valorising of the politically disruptive character of his aesthetic regime of art needs rethinking. He questions any notion that art is radical simply by virtue of its being art, and suggests the need for a more complex analysis of the relationship between politics and aesthetics. He suggests that aesthetic disruption is often typical of contemporary capitalism rather than being a challenge to it, and instead asserts a need to 'think the politics of art beyond the spectacular logic of rupture'. Indeed, he suggests, politically there lies 'the difficult and mostly *unspectacular* work of formalization, the exigency of imagining and constructing a new order', which may be the most crucial job of politics in a fragmented dissonant world.

Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink's chapter 'Soft Shivers, Sweaty Politics: Dramaturgy, Politics of Perception and the Pensive Body' also seeks to develop Rancière's notion of the politics of aesthetics. Noting Rancière's preference to 'analyse ideas or texts *about* the theatre rather than considering the embodied and experiential components that are also constitutive of the theatre event', she draws on analyses of three performance works which challenge neoliberal and rational notions of the body through a foregrounding of the corporeality of what she calls 'counter-bodies'. She suggests that an aesthetics which attends to such alternative corporealities provides space for the spectator through the difficulty of them finding a familiar reference point, and sees in such an aesthetics a development of Rancière's notion of the 'pensive image', where pensiveness goes hand in hand with the physical sensation and experience of sharing time and space with such bodies.

The second section, **The Role of Theatre and Performance**, brings the notion of theatre and performance themselves to the fore, considering how theatre and performance function in Rancière's writing as well as offering some specific examples of performances which seem to reflect some of Rancière's ideas. Shulamith Lev-Aladgem's 'Performing

Philosophy: Rancière as Playwright, Director and Performer in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*' draws on Mackenzie and Porter's notion of 'dramatization' to analyse the rhetorical devices Rancière uses in this early text. The book functions, she suggests, as an exemplar of his move from conventional political philosophy towards art and, specifically, performance; politically 'from criticism to activism'. She suggests that the book 'strives to appear as if it were an oral text – a live performance facilitated by a storyteller who is also playwright, director, and performer'.

Taking Rancière's own notion of 'staging the people' as a starting point, Adrian Kear's 'Staging the People: Performance, Presence and Representation' looks at the impossibility of theatre ever fully representing any notion of 'the people'. Not only is such a task ontologically impossible, because it cannot contain all the variety within any notion of 'the people', the apparatus of staging itself further obfuscates any attempt. Yet embedded within any attempt to articulate the people exists real individuals and collective groups. The works Kear cites reflect this tension, drawing 'attention to the apparatus of representation as that which produces absence even as it claims presence as its effect'. The people remain staged, but not fully represented.

My own chapter 'Apart, we are together. Together, we are apart': Rancière's Community of Translators in Theory and Theatre' also seeks to suggest the complexity of community in theatrical representation and in the theatrical relationship between spectator and performer. Applying Rancière's ideas to a production of Duncan Macmillan's *People, Places and Things*, I suggest how the production I saw revealed a desire to collectivise whilst retaining autonomy in the stage action, but also invited an individual response in the spectator within the community of the audience. In so doing I seek to identify the importance of community and collectivity alongside an emphasis on individuality and rupture in Rancière's writing.

Arguably one of the most important contributions of Rancière's thought to theatre and performance studies has been his thoughts on how we view art work, particularly theatre, and what any notion of 'participation' in art work might mean. The third section of the book, **Spectatorship and Participation**, addresses this element of Rancière's writing. Jenny Hughes' 'Nights of Theatrical Labour in the Victorian Workhouse' looks at a theatrical entertainment given by a company of music hall performers from Collins' Music Hall to an audience of paupers in Islington workhouse in London in 1891. She outlines her intent to emphasise the paupers, 'silent witnesses' who were the spectators, as part of an attempt to develop a 'dissensual historiographical practice'. As a means to 'hear' the workhouse spectators, Hughes draws on historical accounts alongside Rancière's *The Philosopher and His Poor*, which outlined the limiting ways in which the working class were categorised and defined, and *The Nights of Labour*, in which he sought to outline the range of ways in which the working class participated in artistic activities. She uses Rancière's ideas to speculate on how this entertainment both attempted to control the poor of the workhouse in its content whilst also offering dissensual elements that disrupted their everyday life: as she puts it, "the performance provided a counter to the repressive context in which it occurred, whilst also subjecting both performers and audience to disciplining forms of performative social work".

Will Shüler's chapter 'The Emancipated Educator: Chance, Will, and Equality in Higher Education Role-Immersion Pedagogies', takes Rancière's book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, and its theory of universal education, as a starting point to interrogate Shüler's own experiments with a role-immersion game approach in the classroom. In this approach, the teacher 'works to subvert or dissolve the classroom and institutional hierarchies which create distance between teachers/students' by facilitating creative play where students take on specific subject positions in a fictional scenario. Drawing on theories of play, he suggests that the open-ended nature of such activities and the opportunity for students to engage in

‘reasoning between equals’ creates strong engagement and an understanding of a range of perspectives.

The final section, **Performance as Political Disruption**, offers three responses to Rancière’s provocation that politics is “the constitution of a theatrical and artificial sphere” (quoted in Citton 2009, 130). The section. The first, Janelle Reinelt’s ‘Resisting Rancière’, argues for a need to theorise politics beyond temporary theatrical/performative moments. Drawing on several contemporary real world examples, she identifies a need for more nuance in politics than Rancière’s binaries (such as dissensus/consensus or politics/police) offer. Doing so, she argues, could recognise the need to move beyond disruption towards the building of meaningful real world change. Similarly, she sees a need for greater nuance from Rancière’s theatrical acolytes who fear art being subsumed into political didacticism. She argues that it is perfectly possible for theatre to address politics in a range of varied ways, forming ‘political affinities among diverse constituencies through performances that illuminate injustice, push back against power, and evoke a political ‘we’’, without ‘descending into ‘overly didactic messages directed at supposed ignorant spectators by presumptuous producers’.

Such an example might be seen in Caoimhe Mader McGuinness’ ‘Dissensual Reproductions in You Should See The Other Guy’s *Land Of The Three Towers*’. She discusses a protest by mothers in Stratford, London who occupied a ‘half-emptied housing estate’ in protest at the local council’s housing policy. She argues that their protest functioned as a realisation of Rancièrian dissensus. She sees their protest, and open mic nights and theatrical work developed in collaboration with the campaign, as manifestations of the kind of artistic labour Rancière outlines in *The Nights of Labour*: revealing the capacity of people normally considered absent from the artistic sphere. In this case, she argues, the

campaign and its associated theatrical work made visible the often unseen nature of working class women and their socially reproductive labour.

Stephen Scott-Bottoms' 'The Paradoxes of Performing Activism: Art, Oil and Liberate Tate' also outlines several performances/works which made visible what was previously hidden: in the case of the activist group Liberate Tate, the complicity between the Tate Gallery and the oil giant BP. Documenting their work over several years, he notes transitions in the aesthetic strategies employed in their work over time, and maps this on to the categories outlined by Rancière in 'The Paradoxes of Political Art'. Both drawing on and challenging different elements of Rancière's thought, he notes both the difficulty in claiming a direct political efficacy to their work whilst also making a claim for the political resonances that their work offers. Ultimately, in his conclusion, whilst avoiding any claim of direct causality between Liberate Tate's actions and the Tate's decision to stop their relationship with BP, he articulates the possibility of a relationship between politics and performance that is fruitful. The creation of a theatrical and artificial sphere here is indeed political – but not in a direct sense. It is the autonomy of the theatrical and artificial sphere that has political potency.

We hope that this collection embraces a range of varied and sometimes conflicting perspectives on Rancière's relationship to performance. With Rancière's own celebration of dissensus, any Rancièrian approach would arguably embrace such heterogeneity. Hallward's description of Rancière's work as proposing a 'theatrocracy' draws on Plato, for whom the term (according to Hallward) imagines 'a regime of unlicensed ignorance and disorder that has its source in a 'universal confusion of musical forms' initiated by irresponsible artists' (Hallward 2006, 112). We might not go that far in our claims for this book (for good or ill). Nonetheless, in addition to the range of perspectives offered here, something common emerges across the chapters: a shared sense that theatre and performance, which in their very

essence exist in space marked as beyond or separate from the everyday, can offer a stage when all sorts of new possibilities can be glimpsed. Such possibilities may only be temporary, inadequate or unhelpful, whether onstage or off. Yet the possibility of change will persist as what theatre and performance offer keeps shifting, continuously constructing what Rancière defined in relation to the politics of art as “sensible landscapes and the formation of modes of seeing that deconstruct consensus while forging new possibilities and capacities’ (Rancière quoted in Battista 2017, 246).

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