

CHAPTER FOUR

Rancière's Democratic Realism

THE AMBITION of this final chapter is to elucidate how amorphous form occupies temporalities as well as spatialities in Rancière's oeuvre. Rancière's account of emancipated participation imagines an unauthorized partaking of indistinct and interchangeable parts by anyone or anything whatsoever. Another way of stating this is that for Rancière, political action has an amorphous form. This is his realism. It is a realism that takes for actuality the fact that political action has no ideal content, shape, gait, or orbit, that anything can comingle with anything else, and that there are no relational forces preassigned to specific qualities of persons, of rank, and of things. Hence dissensus as a force of dissidence that dissents from the hierarchies of decorum's dispositional arrangements.¹ Such dissent is what Rancière understands by the terms *emancipation* and *equality*, which are per se not simply concepts and certainly not prescriptions; these are political relations that involve an improper—or unauthorized—partaking in/of something that the established hierarchies of a social order denies.

An example already visited is of those nineteenth-century workers recounted in *Proletarian Nights* who took the time of night as a time of leisure for writing rather than sleeping and recovering from the day's labors. Rancière shows that the workers reconfigured the night from a time of purposive restoration to one of unpurposive reverie. Such moments of un-

authorized partaking are legion and “aim to create and recreate bonds between individuals, to give rise to new modes of confrontation and participation.”² At stake in what Rancière otherwise describes as reality’s “mixed character” is nothing less than the reunion of emancipation and dreaming that twentieth-century critical theory, especially in its critically denunciatory, high modernist, or scientific Marxist mode, did much to impugn.³ Reappropriating the temporality of reverie—that is, partaking in what Rancière refers to, citing Rousseau’s *Nouvelle Héloïse*, as the “*farniente* of reverie”⁴—is the task of his democratic realism. The very possibility of supposing a world where words, phrases, vistas, and sounds do not belong together drives his democratic realism, a world, that is, where words, phrases, vistas, and sounds *do no-thing*—they don’t even make sense. This “do no-thing” is quite literally the *farniente* of reverie that stands within Rancière’s lexicology as the temporality of partaking by that interstitial force of radical mediation he calls “the part of those who have no-part.”⁵

As we’ve seen throughout, when dealing with someone committed to distancing himself from the privilege of analytic arguments as the form of political theorizing, as in the case of Rancière’s polemical contrarianism, it is important to note the extent to which the epistemic attitude and its expectations of decorum are consistently troubled. I’ve shown that one of the things at stake in Rancière’s sentiments is a resistance, to the point of disregard or even rejection, of the sacrosanct epistemic-political relation. An implicit commitment in his aesthetics and politics is to emancipate political thinking from the *sensus communis* of the epistemic as *the form* of political theorizing in order to afford emancipatory politics the possibility of reverie. To enact such an affordance, Rancière turns to two important resources that, though distinct, are intimately related: (1) the literarity of *style indirect libre* as an amorphous form of democratic prose and (2) aesthetic realism. I discussed the first point in the previous chapter; in this chapter I’ll focus on the latter. Some preliminary remarks, then, on this term *realism*.

For Rancière, realism is not representational, nor is it prescriptive. That is, his realism is not concerned with “the way the social, economic, political, etc., institutions actually operate in some society at some given time, and what really does move human beings to act in given circumstances,” as Raymond Geuss would have it.⁶ Crudely put, Rancière’s democratic realism does not correspond to an actuality, either current or past. Rather it is a site of contest regarding the nature of the actual. Realism in this instance

attends to the practices of ensemble formation, as well as to the ways arrangements of words and signification, of workers and sleep, of films and fables are untethered and disjoined. Such disjunctive relations exist in a state of perpetual unbelonging as the excessive element of any *mélange* resists the urge to consolidation. Here is Michel de Certeau explaining this point in a different, though related context: “Rather than representing a return to the real, ‘realism’ expresses the release of a population of words that until now had been attached to well-defined facts and that, from this point on, become useful for the production of legends or fictions.”⁷ Such emancipations from assigned relations and allotments motivate Rancière’s sense of realism and its affective pragmatics.

Rancière’s aesthetics of politics is committed to two fundamental and related goals: to develop a critical disposition not invested in the intelligibility of things and to develop a project of political participation committed to the aesthetic claim of disinterest.⁸ To consider his aesthetics of politics is thus to think the possibility of an unpurposive politics of unintelligibility, where the critical task is, as counterintuitive as this may seem, to *not* understand. This is what he refers to as “a scandal in thinking proper to the exercise of politics.”⁹ Scandalous political thinking comes with the realization that understanding is not political and that there is a pluripotential domain of political action and experience—the amorphous domain of the *farniente* of reverie—where people and things do nothing. This is why, as I noted in chapter 3, the title of Rancière’s book *La mésentente: Politique et philosophie* does not translate well as “Disagreement” but is better read as a treatise on misunderstanding or “missed understandings.” To make misunderstanding central to political thinking through an interplay of aesthetic disinterest means refusing the social scientific and hermeneutic ideal that all labor, including intellectual labor, must be oriented to a specific instrumental ideal. Another way of stating this is that for Rancière, the category of ignorance does not indicate an intellectual deficit but instead an account of the nature of interplay.

In this final chapter I return to *Aisthesis*, and more specifically to the prelude and scene 14 entitled “The Cruel Radiance of What Is,” so as to explore the dynamics of Rancière’s democratic realism. Each of the scenes in that work displays a temporality of reverie as a scene of missed understanding, where something political is happening but where the faculty of understanding has no purchase on either justifying or legitimating the hap-

pening. In other words, the faculty of understanding is helpless in determining the affective pragmatics of play developed in the scenes of *Aisthesis*. For here reverie is shown to be a kind of playful indulgence that rearranges conditions for relating to the world as it may have been previously conceived. Take Loïe Fuller's serpentine dance that, for Rancière, "illustrates a certain idea of the body and what makes for its aesthetic potential: the curved line."¹⁰ The idea of the serpentine line had already been introduced in eighteenth-century England by Hogarth to challenge linear perspective, or the line of sight of the representative regime of the sensible. And, as Rancière notes, Edmund Burke showed that the serpentine line stood for "the rejection of the classical model of beauty."¹¹ Fuller's dance ultimately gives the geometric line serpentine movement and puts on display its potential for "perpetual variation of the line whose accidents endlessly merge."¹² It's a kind of suspended animation, which, in the case of this specific scene, is the nature of reverie's *farniente*.

I spend some time in this chapter reviewing the operation of emancipation via indistinction and indifference discussed earlier in the book that I claim is at the heart of Rancière's democratic realism. The aesthetic practices that procure indistinction blur the dividing lines that structure any social order, rendering them serpentine, if you will. In short, indistinction or indifference is the operation of curving that makes the realism of reverie possible. I then show the connection between realism and reverie at work in Rancière's oeuvre, where reverie is a state of temporal suspension that emerges from a condition of disinterest that itself arises out of the inability, in that moment and in that state of missed understandings, to attribute the qualification of interest to any one thing. A sensibility that runs throughout Rancière's oeuvre is thus the following: the realism of reverie emancipates action from purposiveness by insisting that action not be scripted. Thus it is not a matter of learning what action is but of occupying a suspended temporality in the everyday world of the *farniente*, which is not a utopia (or no-place) but a time that belongs to no one.

PART 1: An Affective Pragmatics of Disinterest

As we've seen, the police line is a dispositional arrangement that assumes an innate relation of cause and effect implicit in all actions and relations. It thus refers to two operations at the same time: the privileging of linearity

as a mode of relating and the representation of all relations *as* linear. A crucial element of the police line is its ability to make participation purposive by requiring that action align with specific effects, that it be productive. If the only relations that count are causal and linear, then no form of participation can take place other than a purposive one. Or, better put, any other supplementary form of partaking is illegitimate. And so already we begin to see the extent to which, for Rancière, the police line is a sensibility of time and movement as well as order and arrangement. The police line administers the totality of relations and inclusions; it assigns movement and trajectory as well as orbit and influence. It is, in every sense of the word, a disposition intended to confine forms of participation.

Equality arises when necessity is rendered indistinct, that is, when the dividing line that distinguishes swerves. Hence democracy as that form of association crafting without qualifications. The assumption here is a sentimental one: pace Aristotle, the *demos* is not constituted on the basis of a natural relation that determines the conditions for community. On the contrary, the feature that enables the incipience of a *demos* is disinterest toward the necessity of any formal constituent arrangement. Without interest or qualification there can be no prescriptive force for the constitution of a collectivity because indifference “destroys all of the hierarchies of representation and also establishes a community of readers as a community without legitimacy, a community formed only by the random circulation of the written word.”¹³ Once we acknowledge the fact that relations are not innate or natural, the only thing left is to admit that anything can come along with anything else, that no relation is illegitimate because legitimacy is not a quality of relationality. And this admission is the work of aesthetic experience that “frees the sensory events from the links of identity and usefulness.”¹⁴

Let us pause for an example that Rancière’s work invites, given what we have seen as his commitment to cinematic montage as an aesthetico-political practice. “Godard,” Rancière states, “clearly makes his point by dissociating things that are indissociable.”¹⁵ The phrase is ironic: How does one make a point by dissociating things? It is ironic also because the phrase points to a practice in Godard of dissociating the commonsense relation between image and plot in cinema. Consider in this regard Anna Karina’s character Odile in Godard’s caper classic *Bande à part*, who, when told it is time to plan the caper, breaks the fourth wall and turns to the camera (and audience) to ask “Un plan? Pourquoi?” (figure 4.1).



FIG. 4.1 — A scene from *Bande à part*, directed by Jean-Luc Godard, 1964. Screenshot from Criterion Collection DVD.

“A plan? What for?” This, as if to declare that the film itself has no plan but is simply a series of recorded movements and gestures assembled in a plan-like way. (*Plan* is the French word for the cinematic shot that, Ronald Bogue notes, “has its origin in the early silent cinema, when filmmakers spoke of establishing continuity between planes of action in succeeding scenes.”)¹⁶ Such moments of dissociative acknowledgment arrest because they render serpentine the elements of the film, elements that possess no inherent logic of movement and arrangement. The title of the film suggests this: *Band à part* (noun) refers to the trio that is the thieving collective, but *Band à part* (verb) also refers to the act of theft which is a loosening of binds (i.e., a banding apart) that displaces things from one place to another. The fact of association is not bound to a necessary logic or justification; participation is *unreasonable*, if you will. Hence the force of Godard’s montage that “decomposes the assembly of gestures and images and returns them to their basic elements. The universality of his art is that it establishes the most basic elements, and assembles thereof, that make a discourse and a practice intelligible by making them comparable to other

discourses and practices, by, for instance, making a political discourse and union comparable to a declaration of love and a love affair.¹⁷

Rancière elicits other scenarios in *Aisthesis* to emphasize his practice of emancipation as the partaking of aesthetic indistinction. In reality, for him emancipation means blurring, “the blurring of the boundary between those who act and those who look; between individuals and members of a collective body.”¹⁸ Thus instead of answering the question of what is beautiful or what is art or what is useful in art for politics (all questions he is uninterested in answering), he occupies his works with minor scenes of aesthetic disinterest to underscore how aesthetic experience blurs the given relations within any existing configuration. And this occurs because aesthetic experience renders things indistinct from, indifferent to, or impersonal toward one another in the manner in which Godard will render indistinct, indifferent, or impersonal the relation of image and plot. These three terms — indistinct, indifferent, and impersonal — are used interchangeably by Rancière to designate the reality of nonnecessity; the reality that there is no proper to politics. We can thus begin to sense that his realism is a kind of thwarted realism because it is not invested in a fidelity of correspondence to an actual world but to the felt experience of a dissolution or betrayal of that correspondence.

PART 2: Reverie, or, the Time of Disinterest

Reverie is the suspended temporality of the measureless *mélange*, suspended in the sense that it has no definitive direction. It is at once impersonal and improper to the extent that within this mixed state the certainties of property and propriety do not hold. The idea of reverie is crucial to Rancière’s elaboration of democratic politics not because reverie promises an emancipatory imaginary or a politics of the imagination. On the contrary, the state of reverie is the actual state of democracy — it is democracy’s real, if you will — that is persistently threatened by diverse modes of denunciation that come in those authoritative judgments that affirm the perpetuity of partition. But the serpentine line generates a state of reverie, a state of animated suspension where things simply stop operating as they had as the result of the occupation of past practice by new forms of partaking. Reverie is thus the name Rancière gives to the time of unauthorized partaking in leisure activities that generate a serpentine doing.

The discovery of the *farniente* of reverie requires Rancière to abandon the expectations of both explanation and prediction as viable modes of social science research. “To account for the subversive power of their work,” he writes of the worker-poets, “I was forced to break with the habits of social science, for which these personal accounts, fictions, or discourses are no more than the confused products of a process that social science alone is in a position to understand. These words had to be removed from their status as evidence or symptoms of a social reality to show them as writing and thinking at work on the construction of a different social world.”¹⁹ The science of the social as the science of the purposive statement has no time for reverie. And yet here is an entire *an*-archive, a “heap of broken images” as Miriam Bratu Hansen calls it,²⁰ of political and aesthetic material that registers the unpurposive real of an assembly of participants whose activities are politically subversive not because of their outcomes but in and of themselves, as activities for the perpetual variation of the divisions of time and space. And they do so not as a result of a political program or on the basis of institutional requirements but simply because they are enacted.

There is thus no doubt that such moments occurred, and they are not an exception to the status quo, though they remain inexplicable to a common science of the understanding. But the problem is how to account for the lost time of reverie within a science of politics that articulates purposeful action as timeless deeds. What of those acts that are not deeds but that nonetheless mark a doing that is happening, even if that doing is no-thing? The task at hand for Rancière becomes one of abandoning a purposive social science and the actuarial ambitions of evidentiary accountability so as to give research space and textual time to the *farniente* of reverie.

The status of irrelevance attributed to unpurposive acts is a sustained site in Rancière’s writings that allows him to affirm the realism of reverie for democratic politics. Such reverie, as I’ve suggested, is not the reverie of an imagination with a purpose but refers to activities without necessary or planned effects; it refers to a mode of action that is unusable and hence un-prescribable. In contrast to those modes of theoretical engagement that expect heroic virtue (and thus political relevance) of exceptional events in history, Rancière turns his political, aesthetic, and scholarly attention to everyday practices that are amorphous to the criteria of relevance. In doing so he puts pressure on the anxiety to specify the relevance of any one activity. In short, what Rancière’s turn to the *farniente* of reverie points to is a

refusal of those modes of critical judgment that easily assign qualifications of relevance to actions so as to determine the nature of right action for emancipatory politics. Like the aesthetic object that, on its own, is neither relevant nor irrelevant because its value is undeterminable, the activities of the *farniente* trouble, to the point of dissolving, the expectations of purpose. The result is a serpentine dissuasion of action from purpose that renders any action or activity whatsoever dissonant. The *farniente* of reverie thus restores the actuality of an accursed share of emancipatory politics.²¹ But to accept this—that is, to accept reverie’s *farniente* as a political temporality, and specifically as a transformative time—requires a troubling (for some) corollary: the unpurposiveness of reverie puts pressure on our inherited dogmatism about the centrality of judgment as a political faculty. For what the forces of measurelessness, unpurposiveness, indistinction, and reverie all point to is the refusal to privilege a theory of judgment as necessary to politics. Rancière’s democratic realism involves a disregard for judgment since crucial to judgments are determinations that are unavailable in the measureless *mélange* of reverie’s *farniente*.

PART 3: Rancière’s Serpentine Scenographies

To be sure, Rancière does not affirm the irrelevance of judgment. There is no implied synonym between unpurposiveness and irrelevance. Rather the matter at hand is to show the transformative powers of aesthesis regardless of judgment’s expectations and ambitions. It is with this emphasis on transformations in mind that we can begin to see how the project of *Aisthesis* is, as he says in the prelude to that book, a companion to *Proletarian Nights*. What do I mean by this? Simply put, in order to discard the model of judgment that Rancière identifies as the dogmatic drive of critique that emphasizes the right knowledge for politics and identifies a hierarchy of purposeful acts, he will have to introduce a series of literary and aesthetic substitutions that take the place of (in the sense of occupying the space of and thus taking the part of) the established epistemophilia. In *Aisthesis* he will thus explore fourteen scenes of sensorial transformation (properly put, these are instances of a demotic modernism) that exemplify the availability of an emancipated movement that “does not succeed in reintegrating the strategic patterns of causes and effects, ends and means.”²²

There are fourteen scenes in *Aisthesis*. Each is autonomous in relation to

the others. And though they are laid out in chronological order, that chronology does not imply any kind of lexical priority or necessary rank. Each of the scenes, then, presents a passage in a work as a singular autonomous thing, an object with its own support. The scenes are arranged as indistinct to one another and thus are relatable to one another, though their manner of relating remains unassigned. The formal layout of *Aisthesis* is paratactic. It creates the opportunity of a serpentine line by insisting on the absence of a beginning, middle, or end. The book has a project, no doubt, but it doesn't have a plan (recall Odile: "Un plan? Pourquoi?"), and the reader is free to start at any point in the book and move about freely. *Aisthesis* is a book of aesthetic and political theory that, in composition and layout, comes perilously close to transcribing the aesthetic features of filmic montage.²³ It is a book with no depth, a glass surface. It is a work that at once announces the insufficiency of a hermeneutics of suspicion for political criticism, denies the strategic effectiveness of a symptomatic reading, and performs the sinewy movement of reverie's farniente it seeks to put on display. Given its subject matter, it is a book curiously devoid of judgments or explanations, despite the fact that it begins and ends with one great castigation: the denunciation of expert judgment via its denunciation of innate relations as embodied in the Marxist avant-garde ambition of "rigor" when analyzing capitalism and art, politics and aesthetics, avant-garde and kitsch.²⁴ But that denunciation is less a judgment than a polemical assertion of a wrong that queers the relationship between rigorous analysis and relevant evidence by introducing the idea that when all is said and done, anyone has the capacity to do no-thing. And *Aisthesis* will show us fourteen scenes of such good-for-no-thing-ness. Indeed the conceit of *Aisthesis* is that democracy itself is a practice of mediation that transforms the arrangements of the broken pieces or found objects he calls "the part of those who have no-part."

As there is no lexical priority, rhyme, or reason built into the exposition and elaboration of *Aisthesis's* scenes, I will focus on the one that strikes me most vividly: scene 14, "The Cruel Radiance of What Is." The scene begins, as they all do, with a passage; this one is a partial description taken from James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. As with all the other scenes in the book, Rancière does not explain the words or the vistas he cites but lets them appear on their own so as to make available the transformations of the sensible fabric therein. His style favors description over explanation.

The Agee-Evans collaboration bespeaks a *farniente* at two levels: the first is the *farniente* of the image-text relation in journalism, and the second is the *farniente* of propriety of tone by, as Rancière says, seeming “to transpose Balzacian descriptions of bourgeois interiors to the setting of poor life.”²⁵ The Agee-Evans collaboration began as an established genre with a mission: *Fortune* magazine, at the time specializing in long-form photojournalism, sent Agee to Alabama to document the lives of sharecroppers during the height of the Dust Bowl, and Agee enlisted Evans’s help. “But,” Rancière notes, “the two friends soon took a decision that lent their cooperation unique allure: each one of them would work alone. Text and photographs would be independent. No photograph, indeed, would show the reader the cracks in the bureau or the family of china dogs. Photos would bear no captions. And no reporter’s text would explain the circumstances in which the photographer gathered certain members of one of the three families.”²⁶ Herein lies the crux of the *farniente* scene, its reconfiguration of the sensible: the scene marks a collaboration without union or unity wherein each participant (Agee and Evans) and each object (word and photo) is a do-nothing with the other. Like Winckelmann’s *Belvedere Torso*, what we have here is a singular break with the representative regime through Agee and Evans’s decision of having nothing to do (i.e., *farniente*) with one another. The effect is the creation of a scene where words have no-part with images, and images no-part with words, and each no-part does nothing. Words and images will thus operate as ready-mades in this scene of broken relations and reconfigured conventions. By deciding to band apart, Agee and Evans dance the serpentine line between journalism, photography, and realism. It is true that the representational regime in photojournalism would ask its practitioners to supplement words with images, and images with words, so as to present an accurate account. And no doubt this is what the *Fortune* editor expected of Agee: an accurate and unembellished narrative. After all, Agee was known for having written that kind of realism before. No one would have predicted that he and Evans would break with the expectations of mimesis, an expectation defined “by the champions of a certain modernism” that “opposes the carefully chosen elements of art to the vulgar inventories of ‘universal reportage.’”²⁷

And so we have a reconfiguration of (at least) two different sensorial plateaus: the transformation of the relation between word and image, which transforms (or dismisses) the necessity of each having to provide explana-

tions of what there is to be seen and known; and the transformation of the expectations of representation itself that, like the Belvedere Torso, requires a reconfiguration of the hierarchies of criteria that assign the qualities of stature and decorum to objects. “The champions of a certain modernism,” as Rancière identifies those judges without naming them, refers to that category of decorous criticism that presumes that the sensibility of taste possesses innate qualities. It is those same judges and critics who identify the coincidence of taste with rank, and judgment with capacity. But the reverie or interruption or blurring or dissensus—in short, the serpentine dance—that the Agee-Evans collaboration enacts dissonates the common measure that assures the equivalences which a certain modernism wishes to uphold. And the result? An indistinction of things, place, and order that ignores qualification by occupying the pages of their collaboration with an excess of the trivial—to wit, a demotic modernism. This is, ultimately, the power of a democratic realism that admits of the measurelessness of the *mélange* and thus of the insufficiency of sound judgment as a marker of social and political privilege and, especially, direction for action. Here is Rancière on Agee-Evans one final time:

The “frivolous” or “pathological” count of singlets, clothespins, rusted nails, espadrille eyelets, broken buttons, and lone socks or gloves in the Gudger house is a way of making these objects useless for any account of the situation of poor farmers given to the—traditional, reformist or revolutionary—doctors of society. This is precisely, says Agee, the only *serious* attitude, the attitude of the gaze and speech that are not grounded on any authority and do not ground any; the entire state of consciousness that refuses specialization for itself and must also refuse every right to select what suits its point of view in the surroundings of the destitute sharecroppers, to concentrate instead on the essential fact that each one of these things is part of an existence that is entirely actual, inevitable, and unrepeatable. The “frivolous” inventory of the drawers only fully renders a minute portion of the elements that are gathered in the infinite and unrepeatable intertwining relations between human beings, an environment, events, and things that ends up in the actuality of these few lives.²⁸

To acknowledge the actuality of these lives means having to embrace triviality and frivolousness, those markers of *farniente* that specialization

at once refuses and denies. And this occurs in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* not simply at the level of presentation but also at the point when Agee and Evans's collaboration is enacted in the mode of the no-part ("each one would work alone"), enabling the photos to bear no caption and the words to bear no illustration. It is, like Flaubert's page, a collaboration without support, overpopulated by an excess of ornamental detail.²⁹ The result is a complete reconfiguration of the genre of journalism, and with it, a reconfiguration of how words and images can and may relate—that is, as indistinct to one another.

Only by appreciating the actuality of indistinction can we appreciate the force of Rancière's democratic realism. Through his scenographic practice of staging elements as indistinct from one another he is able to make explicit in the scenes he selects how the worlds depicted are sinewy inventories that bear the weight of the actual. The risk is to romanticize the poor, the downtrodden, the sharecroppers whose lives bespeak a "cruel radiance," and the consequence of this risk is to disregard them. Romanticization singles them out as a distinct lot whose places and times have been apportioned. But Rancière will refuse that strategy. For "the cruel radiance of what is" doesn't come from a celebration of the sharecropper's condition, as if the task is to single out the true hero of life's randomness. It is quite the opposite: the task of the scenography is to isolate the weight of an art of living that arises when the representational order of words and images can no longer bear the weight of common measure.

What Rancière wants to do with this scene isn't to celebrate the genius of two artists who accurately depict the suffering of others. On the contrary, he wants to attend to the aesthetic arrangements curated by the sharecroppers on their own terms and put on display how Agee and Evans's attention to such an ornamental aesthetics does not come from an indexical act of representation that wants to pinpoint a true reality. Rather, by denying journalism's genre convention of using images to supplement text and text to explain pictures Agee and Evans allow the fact of living to emerge from their elision of a "right disposition of things."³⁰ They distort the common conceit that the purpose of words and images is to explain reality.

In discussing Dziga Vertov in another of *Aisthesis's* scenes, Rancière says this: "A film is not a matter of putting a story into images meant to move the hearts or to satisfy the artistic sense. It is primarily a thing, and a thing made with materials that are worthwhile on their own. This is the principle

Vertov adopts . . . only cinema of the fact.”³¹ This cinema of the fact is not a realist documentary. It is the realism of a doing no-thing, of rearranging things that are already there. “Vertov does not simply want to film facts. He wants to organize them into a film-thing that itself contributes to constructing the fact of the new life.”³² Something similar can be said (and will be said) of Agee and Evans as well as of Chaplin and Winckelmann and all the other scenographers in *Aisthesis*. Why scenes? And why this scenographic *mélange*? Simply put, *Aisthesis* puts on display, in both content and form, Rancière’s democratic realism that centers on the fact of mediation in everyday life. Politics is participation in forms of doing against those acts of judgment that affirm the uselessness of the *farniente*. “How useless it is for sharecroppers to have decorations! Rather than dedicating their time and effort to ornament, they should spend their time working harder so they can lift themselves from their misery.” And yet, Rancière wants to say, it is precisely in those micro moments of do-no-thing-ness that we uncover new worlds and novel forms of participation dissident from the common sense of decorum. Such serpentine acts construct the fact of new lives. In short, the realism of democratic reverie dissents from a mimetic realism that imagines the work of political thinking as the procedure of justification for the right disposition of things.

Throughout his career of writing and research on the aesthetics of politics one of the things that Rancière’s explorations of the *farniente* of reverie make clear is that the expectation of the accountability of time is a constant site of political inequality. As we have seen throughout these pages the *farniente* of reverie is a time of leisure, a luxurious moment of the frivolous passing of time when minutes, if not hours, happen without scope or aim. Not just anyone is entitled to time’s passing. Such leisurely luxuries are reserved for industrious people of any age whose heroic acts of bravery save the economy or make history. These *auctors* are the ones entitled to do nothing because their lives are otherwise occupied with purposeful, authoritative acts. Rancière’s democratic realism disrupts this sensible fabric of temporal causes and effects, of means and ends, of acting as doing, in order to set the stage for a radically egalitarian democratic partaking. What the *farniente* of reverie does, in other words, is discharge action with the burden of having to matter, of having to achieve, of having to produce, so that any act whatsoever may have a radiance of what is.