

A New Way to Suffer

Girard, Rancière, and Political Subjectification

Iwona Janicka

University of Warwick

INTRODUCTION

The question of politics is underdeveloped in René Girard's mimetic theory. This can be fairly easily accounted for. First, mimesis is essentially an ethical mechanism. In Girard, it pertains both to a set of moral prescriptions and to an *ethos*, understood here as a way of being that exchanges harmful repetitions for favorable ones.¹ Throughout his work, Girard advances an ethics of generosity that steers clear of reciprocity, which, in his framework, would lead to violence.² Second, Girard concentrates on social structures and religious institutions that have been developed over the ages to deal with mimetic crises. These structures of containment protect communities from an all-consuming outbreak of violence by channeling the destructive impetus toward a scapegoat and subsequently bringing peace to the group. Third, in Girard there is no specific mode of mimesis that is characteristic of politics. There is one universal mechanism of how mimetic desire is produced and this procedure operates across all forms of human behavior. This means that, at a fundamental level, there is no specifically political form of mimesis that could

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be elaborated. Even though Girard frequently provides a mimetic reading of various political events, his emphasis is on mimetic *logic*, rather than a *politics* of mimesis. Equally, political forms of individuation generated through mimesis are of little interest to Girard.

Some scholars have attempted to fill in this gap in Girard's theory. Notably, Nathan Colborne, Roberto Farneti, and Wolfgang Palaver have shed new light on political practice, political theory, and political conflict, respectively, by offering a mimetic perspective.³ At the same time, they open mimetic theory toward politics. This double opening—of politics to mimesis and mimesis to politics—is important because Girard's theory can yield valuable interpretations of contemporary political forms. Elsewhere, I argue that Girard's work can provide a productive conceptual framework for elucidating radical left-wing political projects—such as housing cooperatives, co-op farms, and autonomous zones—that are happening in activist milieus today.⁴ Mimetic theory is useful in this context because it allows us to interpret these projects in terms of the mimetic training its participants undertake in order to bring about social change. Members of such cooperatives surround themselves with models whose habits they wish to take up, and in this way they exchange their bad repetitions for good ones. They orient their mimesis in an endeavor both to become better versions of themselves and to spread their chosen mimetic model to others in a positive contagion. These projects constructively manage the imitative disposition of human beings by specifically directing their members' habits in daily practices. And this is how ethics (in the sense of *ethos*) overlaps in this context with political practice. In this contribution, however, I would like to focus on the possibility of developing political subjectification within a mimetic framework. And more broadly, I want to consider the place of mimesis within politics.

For this purpose, I turn to the work of contemporary French philosopher Jacques Rancière. In his early work on nineteenth-century workers' movements, Rancière argues that it is not suffering itself but a different form of suffering that leads people toward emancipation. In his archival work on the French proletariat, he demonstrates that workers learned a new way to suffer through the literature they studied in their spare time. The impulse for emancipatory political action did not come from the fact of enduring hunger, low wages, and poverty; rather, such an impulse emerged from learning a new, bourgeois form of experience through reading certain types of literature, like Chateaubriand's *René*. In his later work on literature, Rancière turns to characters in nineteenth-century French novels, in particular characters who decide to follow the example of other characters encountered in books. For instance, he considers

Balzac's *The Village Rector* (*Le Curé de village*) and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, where these so-called "lost children of the letter" ("enfants perdus de la lettre") cross the boundaries of their usual experience to become different subjects and, as a consequence, pay a high price for this radical displacement.

Rancière's insights on the process of subjectification bear a striking resemblance to Girard's theory of mimetic desire. Indeed, we could go so far as to say that Rancière gives a detailed exploration of a mimetic mode of subjectification, and provides Girardian scholars with material for thinking about political subjectification in a mimetic framework. Yet Rancière never refers to Girard's work or to his theory. Instead, his conceptual points of departure are Plato and Aristotle. Rancière discusses mimesis in the sense of rules that govern representation in art, which only loosely correspond with Girard's claims. Despite this divergence in their usage of the term, we can still trace in Rancière a Girardian understanding of mimesis, and this is the main focus of this article. Conversely, Girard's insights can be of use to Rancière, as he provides a possible answer to Axel Honneth's critique of Rancière's idea of political subjectification. According to Honneth, the motivational force of proletarians to end their domination is unclear if it is not suffering that makes them want to overcome their situation. Mimetic contagion could be one possible response to such criticism. This contribution explores mimetic aspects of Rancière's thought and engages with its potential for developing the political aspects of Girard's theory. My aim here is to demonstrate one form of political subjectification that could be developed within a mimetic framework.

GIRARD AND ONTOLOGICAL SICKNESS

In order to appreciate the closeness of Rancière and Girard's understanding of subjectification, let us begin with a brief recapitulation of Girard's non-acquisitive or external mimesis, since this will be crucial in setting out the argument and demonstrating the convergence of some of their ideas. The theory of triangular desire postulates that all desire comes from others: There is no original or spontaneous desire that an individual could initiate herself. For Girard, imitative desire is "a desire for being"⁵ and "a desire to be Another."⁶ It is not only entirely dependent on others, but also aims at appropriating the truth and the essence of the other. In this sense, Girard speaks of desire as an "ontological sickness" (*mal ontologique*) in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*. What is crucial for an individual in this context is to discern the right model for imitation.⁷ The choice of a model, however, is not entirely straightforward, for while it is possible for

someone to wittingly select a model for imitation in order to pursue a non-rivalrous mimetic training, most mimetic imitation is picked up unwittingly through cultural immersion. This is because a human being is introduced into culture and society through mimesis: “There is nothing, or next to nothing, in human behaviour that is not learned, and all learning is based on imitation. If human beings suddenly ceased imitating, all forms of culture would vanish.”⁸ All processes of education and adaptation are based on this mechanism. In contrast to acquisitive (internal) mimesis, which leads to mimetic rivalry and violence, non-acquisitive (external) mimesis describes a process through which one imitates another who poses no threat of becoming a rival.⁹ In the latter case, the model and the imitator operate in different existential spheres, so the distance between them is too great to provoke a direct conflict. Girard provides examples of non-acquisitive mimesis, which include Jesus as an external model for Christians; Amadis as a mediator for Don Quixote; and romantic heroines whom Emma Bovary finds in novels.¹⁰ The world in which these entities act do not overlap, meaning that models cannot become rivals to imitators.

Girard’s mimetic framework does little to flesh out the process of subjectification. It is discussed on a case-by-case basis in his engagements with literature, but the main emphasis of his analyses is on an acquisitive mimesis and the consequences of mimetic rivalry. That said, it is possible to develop Girard’s ideas on subjectification by building on the claims he makes of non-acquisitive mimesis, which are scattered throughout his work. Imitative desire is a basis for the formation of identities. As Girard claims: “Only mimetic desire can be . . . human desire, because it *must* choose a model more than the object itself. Mimetic desire is what makes us human, what makes possible for us the breakout from routinely animalistic appetites, and constructs our own, albeit inevitably unstable, identities.”¹¹ This is possible because humans can lock on a certain identity—for instance, gender or another social identity—and mimetically incorporate it through a continual repetition of gestures constitutive of this identity in their bodily performances. Such a mimetic training aims at the automatization of corporal gestures and behaviors that, as a result, establish the impression of an essence (female, proletarian, etc.). In this context, identity can be seen as an effect of mimesis because it is acquired through continual bodily repetition, channeled and oriented in a given direction, which effectuates identity through sedimentation.¹² According to Girard, in order to become an “effective imitator” in non-acquisitive mimesis, one has to openly admire the model one is imitating and acknowledge one’s imitation.¹³ This explicit recognition of the superiority of the model from whom one wishes to learn facilitates identification with others. Girard calls this process “positive undifferentiation”

because the subject is becoming increasingly similar to her model.¹⁴ As shown in the following, the question of identification and subjectification is vital for Rancière's ideas on political emancipation, and this allows the development of Girardian insights and transposing them into the realm of politics.

POLITICS AS A DESIRE TO BE ANOTHER

In his recent engagement with Axel Honneth, Jacques Rancière clarifies his position on suffering and its importance for political subjectification. In response to Honneth's claim that hardship is the key catalyst for political action, Rancière argues that "a political subject is not a suffering subject."¹⁵ It is not possible for Rancière to draw a direct connection between the misery of individuals and the construction of a political subject:

It's not necessarily because people are suffering that they act politically; acting politically, very often, comes because some forms of ruptures appear possible. I think it is a matter of reconfiguration of the field of the possible. It is very rare that suffering produces politics by itself.¹⁶

Rancière does not entirely reject suffering as a motivational force for political action. Instead, he claims that individuals need to invent other ways of being, including other ways of suffering, in order to become political subjects: "a subject is first of all a process of alteration."¹⁷ This is because, for Rancière, the core of politics and emancipation is bound to the construction of different worlds, which is made possible by encounters with entities who think and feel differently: "The path of emancipation . . . appears as passing by way of the capacity to become different: not by becoming conscious, but by dizziness and loss of identity. Hence the irreplaceable role of the encounter with the Other."¹⁸ The perspective of the Other on the world is that which allows us to "access the truth of the world."¹⁹ This is where art, and specifically literature as "the invention of another kind of suffering," has a considerable importance in Rancière's conception of political subjectification.²⁰ Through inspiration, or, in Girardian terms, through positive mimetic contagion, literature induces a subject to incorporate another way of seeing and interacting with the world. Let us take some concrete examples given by Rancière in support of his claims: one from literature, and one from his archival work.

Both Rancière's and Girard's theories are borne out of a close engagement with literature. Rancière's claim that humans are able to be reoriented by words

(“un animal détourné par les mots”²¹) converges with a Girardian insight from *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* on literary characters who are launched into repeating a different set of behaviors inspired by literary examples. In his work on the nineteenth-century French novel, Rancière turns to the victims of the book. In *Dissensus*, he discusses Balzac’s *The Village Rector*, in which “the intrusion of a book in the life of someone who should never have entered the world of writing”²² causes a tragedy. The main character—a young, unworldly girl, Veronique—is brought up in a religious household of old-iron dealers in a small provincial town. She receives minimal education from a nun who “taught Veronique to read and write; she also taught her the history of the people of God, the catechism, the Old and the New Testaments, and a very little arithmetic. That was all; the worthy sister thought it enough; it was in fact too much.”²³ One day, Veronique goes for a walk with her parents. At a bookseller’s stall, she notices a book with a beautiful engraving. It is a copy of *Paul et Virginie* by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. She buys the book and passes the night reading it. And this is where the tragedy begins:

To this lonely girl, buried in that old house, brought up by simple, half rustic parents, who had never heard an unfit word, whose pure unsullied mind had never known the slightest evil thought . . . the life of womanhood, came from the hand of genius through one sweet book. To any other mind the book would have offered no danger; to her it was worse in its effects than an obscene tale.²⁴

She was led by the sweet and noble achievement of its author to the worship of the Ideal, that fatal human religion! She dreamed of a lover like Paul. Her thoughts caressed the voluptuous image of that balmy isle.²⁵

Veronique spends her days at the window, looking at artisans pass by, “accustomed, of course, to the idea of eventually marrying a man of the people.”²⁶ However, not only does she dream “of a lover like Paul”; she also wishes to inspire a common man to share the same lofty ideals: “She clasped the idea . . . of ennobling one of those men, and of raising him to the height where her own dreams led her.”²⁷ Veronique finally meets a man with whom she can share this other world—a porcelain workman, Jean-François Tascheron. In order to be with her, Tascheron commits robbery and inadvertently kills two people. He is sentenced to death, but he never reveals the name of the woman for whom he has committed the crimes. Veronique spends the rest of her life in penance and dies confessing to her part in the crime.

Rancière’s interpretation of this novel is that Veronique is a victim of “an anarchic circulation of writing” (“la circulation anarchique de l’écriture”²⁸).

According to Rancière, the democratic nature of the nineteenth-century novel consisted in breaking down the correlation between a system of representation and the subject matter. As a medium, the novel could describe all kinds of characters and had the potential to reach anybody; as such, it could remove barriers between worlds.²⁹ The purpose of the novel was to requalify a collective worldview (“la requalification . . . du tissu perceptif commun”³⁰) and to provide material for new figures of subjectification to emerge. For Rancière, therefore, the “labor of fiction” is not about constituting a collective; it is rather a matter of reframing the real in order for new identities to appear: “Fiction is a way of changing existing modes of sensory presentations and forms of enunciation; of varying frames, scales and rhythms; and of building new relationships between reality and appearance, the individual and collective.”³¹ In *The Village Rector*, the readers learn from the novel about “the misfortunes of those who read novels” (“les malheurs de celui ou celle qui lit des romans”³²). Veronique trespasses by becoming illegitimately involved in the world of thought. Such a fate is not unique to Veronique; it befalls other similar characters, too, whom Girard also describes in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*: for example, Madame Bovary, Don Quixote, or Julien from *The Red and the Black*. They all suffer punishment for their transgression into a world that is not their own. Rancière never considers the moral—and, in a Rancièrian sense, ultimately anti-political—lessons conveyed to readers through exemplary cases like that of Veronique. All these characters pay a high price both for removing themselves single-handedly from their assigned place within society, and for becoming subjects. As Balzac, Flaubert, and Stendhal teach us here: There is no mercy for the intruders.

However, *The Village Rector* is not just a warning of the dangers of an “errant letter” that has the potential to reach anybody; it is also about mimetic desire. Veronique says: “I had formed that soul, trained that mind, enlarged that heart.”³³ Furthermore, her wish to influence Tascheron is clearly stated: “she has loved this man to form him, to develop him.”³⁴

She must have put into her passion something of the genius that inspires the work of artists and poets, the creative force which exists in woman under another form; for it is her mission to create men, not things. Our works are our children; our children are the pictures, books, and statues of our lives. Are we not artists in their earliest education?³⁵

And Tascheron, in turn, was “guilty of too much devotion to an idol.”³⁶ *The Village Rector* reveals not only the emergence of a new world, as Rancière insightfully notes, but also Veronique’s sudden conversion into a new subject through

a mimetic desire. It is a story about the defenselessness of a person who is not prepared to deal with a powerful model. It also warns of the consequences of letting oneself be mimetically inhabited by the Other. But how does this relate to political subjectification?

Rancière demonstrates that political activism originates in an illegitimate crossing over into the world of the Other in order to become the Other. It is an effort on the part of a subject to be displaced in relation to herself so as to become a living example of the ideas encountered in writing.³⁷ Rancière proceeds to argue that this shift to an alternative world is enabled by means of literature. We might say that literature is a repository of radically different mimetic models for imitation, and that it catapults its readers into different worlds. In his early work in the archives, Rancière turns to the texts of nineteenth-century French workers in the movements for emancipation in order to analyze the construction of proletarian identity. Against Althusser, and later Bourdieu, Rancière argues, in *Proletarian Nights: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, that it was not knowledge of the mechanisms of domination that the proletarians were lacking in order to end their exploitation. Rather, they had no alternative image of themselves as entities capable of leading a different kind of life, one that was not permeated by exploitation.³⁸ As such, in Rancière's reading, the workers' movement in France was chiefly an intellectual movement of proletarians who attempted to change their traditional position within society. Rancière considers the case of Gabriel Gauny, a joiner and a worker-poet, who aptly illustrates the process of political subjectification in Rancière's theoretical framework, and exhibits strong mimetic aspects in the process. In a letter to a ragpicker friend, Gauny explains the necessity of another world:

Plunge into terrible readings. That will awaken passions in your wretched existence, and the labourer needs them to stand tall in the face of that which is ready to devour him. So, from the *Imitation* to *Lélia*, explore the enigma of the mysterious and formidable chagrin at work in those with sublime concepts.³⁹

At this point, let us note three key features. First, passions are necessary for any process of emancipation. As Rancière remarks, referencing Plato, passions are a balance of pleasure and pain, and in writing and reading, proletarians have access to a new way of feeling pleasure and pain that is not their own.⁴⁰ From a mimetic perspective, we could add that such novel passions aroused in proletarians act as a "motivational force" that can drive them to overcome their situation. Second, Gauny does not recommend books on the evils of capitalism, but rather suggests works of great Romantic writers.⁴¹ Considering the mimetic

tendency of human beings, one could claim that literary texts are more powerful than political treatises. The mere presentation of facts that explain the reasons behind extant exploitation is far less effective, since they do not offer models for imitation. They contain less potential for mimetic contagion through inspiration. Third, “the mysterious and formidable *chagrin*” in literary works is a form of “exchanging one’s pain for another’s pain,”⁴² and it offers training in a new way of suffering—a noble mode of suffering—that is reserved for the privileged class.

The process of deidentification through an engagement with “terrible readings” is at the heart of Rancière’s understanding of political subjectification. The proletarians had to construct a new gaze by borrowing a perspective—in both visual and linguistic terms—from masters and artists. This could only happen through an exposure to models for non-acquisitive imitation. They needed to cross the boundaries that separated different forms of experience attached to their social status. Such transgressions were enabled by entering into a world of literary characters that was not addressed to the proletarian. Gauny writes in one of his articles:

Childe-Harold, Obermann, René, reveal to us the perfume of your anxieties. Answer! Weren’t you happy in your beautiful melancholies? . . . Sublime wretches! You do not know the greatest of pains, the vulgar pain of a lion caught in a trap, the pain of a plebeian in the grip of horrible shift in a workshop . . . Ah! Old Dante, you have never travelled in the *real hell*, in the *hell without poetry*.⁴³

Here, the truest sorrow of a proletarian as an “apprentice of the world of thought” is to remain attached to the brute suffering of a working individual while being denied the luxury of Romantic melancholia.⁴⁴ What the worker needs to discover for himself is not the secret of the commodity, but the secret of others; to become a political subject, the worker must appropriate not their property, but their suffering:

What [a proletarian] lacks and needs is a knowledge of self that reveals to him a being dedicated to something else besides exploitation, a revelation of self that comes circuitously by way of the secret of others: that is, those intellectuals and bourgeois people with whom [proletarians] will later say . . . they want to have nothing to do.⁴⁵

Yet the worker-poets could challenge their position within the social order not just by borrowing noble feelings, but also by taking possession of the language

of the bourgeois, novelists, poets, and scholars. Their subversion derived from a refusal to use the language that was deemed appropriate for a proletarian: They refused to compose poems about work and songs for entertainment, and instead turned to lofty sentiments in sophisticated poetic forms.⁴⁶ By crossing the boundaries of language use—between Romantic literature and everyday experience in a workshop—they were able to create new modes of reading the world, which allowed them to displace their body and their gaze. Gauny describes in his piece “*Les prisons du travail*” (“*The Prisons of Work*”) such a shift in his perception, from a worker laying the floor to a master enjoying his view:

Believing himself at home, he loves the arrangement of a room so long as he has not finished laying the floor. If the window opens out on a garden or commands a view of a picturesque horizon, he stops his arms a moment and glides in imagination toward the spacious view to enjoy it better than the neighboring residences.⁴⁷

The act of dislocating one’s perspective aims at rupturing the traditional organization of space. It tips “the balance of equality and inequality” that is operative in every situation.⁴⁸ A new identity is constructed by filtering the world through newly discovered sensibilities and incorporating this perspective into one’s daily life. However, this process is heavily dependent on the availability of spare time. Hence, at the heart of workers’ emancipation was the need to transform the usual allocation of their time. According to a traditional social order, the workers were supposed to work during the day, sleep at night, and have no time left for intellectual pursuits. Gauny laments this lack of spare time in a letter written, notably, at midnight: “We are poor in free time. The night is mind-numbing and cries for sleep, the work progresses only to wreck us. If only we were free like the Bohemians. We are tiny islands.”⁴⁹ And also:

Our physical tiredness has an intellectual tiredness that destroys our intelligence in the little free time that we have to defend ourselves and to think. In the evening, a sleep of a beast of burden robs us of the feeling of dignity and surrenders us to mind-numbing torpor.⁵⁰

Worker-poets like Gauny decide to fight against this physical tiredness and to not spend the night sleeping. This is because it would be intolerable to lose the newly acquired power to see and think differently.⁵¹ They choose to dedicate what time they have to the world of writing and thinking that is not meant for them.⁵² The struggle against stolen time in order to practice newly discovered

sensibilities is an important part of political emancipation. Gauny regrets most of all not being able to enjoy the “languor of the upper class” that would allow him to freely decide on the use of his time.⁵³

This enforced distribution of time and the symbolic partition of society into two distinct groups—those capable of noble feelings and those who only feel brute pain—were first proffered by Plato and Aristotle. The golden rule of the Platonic republic was that the souls of iron, that is, the proletarians, “must not get involved in common affairs and in the realm of thought.”⁵⁴ This is because their main function was reproductive: According to the legal terminology of Ancient Rome, a “proletarian” was the term used for those who only produce children.⁵⁵ The patrician occupation was to *act*, “to pursue grand designs in which their own success is identified with the destiny of vast communities,” whereas proletarians were supposed to *do*—“to make useful objects and provide material services to meet the needs of their individual survival.”⁵⁶ Both *acting* and *doing nothing* were forbidden to a plebeian.⁵⁷ Aristotle founded his politics on the capacity of speaking beings to discuss the just and the unjust (*logos*), in opposition to animals, which only make indiscriminate noises by way of expressing pain or pleasure. Therefore, in this partition of society, there are those destined to govern and those destined to work. Rancière terms such traditional allocation of social roles a distribution of the sensible (*le partage du sensible*), and he defines politics as a moment when this distribution is ruptured, giving rise to a new social partition. He explains that the phrase “distribution of the sensible”

refers to the implicit law governing the sensible order that parcels out places and forms of participation in a common world by first establishing the modes of perception within which these are inscribed. The distribution of the sensible thus produces a system of self-evident facts of perception based on the set of horizons and modalities of what is visible and audible as well as what can be said, thought, made, or done. Strictly speaking, “distribution” therefore refers both to forms of inclusion and to forms of exclusion. The “sensible,” of course, does not refer to what shows good sense or judgement but to what is *aistheton* or capable of being apprehended by the senses.⁵⁸

For Rancière, a human is a political animal not because she speaks, as Aristotle would have it, but because she is a literary animal. This means two things. First, humans are political beings because they have the ability to circulate *supplementary* words—words that they do not need, words in excess of a simple description of things or words that do not fit into a speaker’s social status. Second, this

ability of *any* person, such as a proletarian, to produce words in excess and so illegitimately cross over into the world of the Other is constantly undermined by the privileged, and this leads to conflict. Politics, for Rancière, is “not made up of power relationships;” rather, “it is made up of relationships between worlds.”⁵⁹ One could go so far as to say that politics is a war between modes of perception. It is, by definition, in conflict with the established distribution of the sensible: “Politics only exists in intermittent acts of implementation that lack any overall principle or law, and whose only common characteristic is an empty operator: dissensus,” a disagreement.⁶⁰ Therefore, “the essence of politics consists in interrupting the distribution of the sensible by supplementing it with those who have no part in the perceptual coordinates of the community, thereby modifying the very aesthetico-political field of possibility.”⁶¹ Hence, a political subjectification is first and foremost a reconfiguration of the distribution of the sensible.⁶² It is a “process by which a political subject extracts itself from the dominant categories of identification and classification.”⁶³ This is made possible “through a series of actions of a body” that produces a new identification as part of “the reconfiguration of the field of experience.”⁶⁴ A new subject emerges simultaneously with a new set of practices that construct a new world. Hence, for Rancière, “a political subject is not a group that ‘becomes aware’ of itself, finds its voice, imposes its weight on society.” Rather, “it is an operator that connects and disconnects different areas, regions, identities, functions, and capacities existing in the configuration of a given experience.”⁶⁵ Such a force creating a different universe can only happen through a dissensus, through a battle of the worlds, where one social order is confronted with another. By drawing our attention to worker-poets who imitate the melancholy of Romantic characters encountered in books, Rancière shows how proletarians gain the power of the *logos* by taking possession of the logic of the Other. By reading the same type of literature, they assume their intellectual equality with their superiors. In this way, they disrupt the established social order and in so doing they become political subjects. As I have tried to demonstrate, mimesis is the *sine qua non* of this process.

CONCLUSION

Rancière and Girard share the insight that human relations contain conflicts that cannot be resolved by rational means. For Rancière, it is a clash between worlds over what constitutes the common world, while for Girard, it is a mimetic push and pull that throws humans inadvertently into confrontations

with one another. Both Rancière and Girard speak of an appropriation of the truth of the Other—for Rancière, this is definitive of politics,⁶⁶ while for Girard, it is symptomatic of ontological sickness. For both thinkers, the process is very similar: A person is exposed to a new universe—in this case, through literature. But with Girard we can actually explain how and why this process of truth appropriation happens, namely, via mimesis. If we define ethics as a bodily orientation in which we need to distinguish between good and bad repetitions, between models to imitate, then with a Girardian reading of Rancière, we can trace the place of ethics in politics. What is more, if politics is a desire to be Another, then the role of mimesis in building alternative worlds is crucial.⁶⁷ There is an important confluence of interests between Girard and Rancière on the mechanics of subjectification. The contagious nature of mimesis, in which an entity selects a model, wittingly or unwittingly, and passes it on in her new set of bodily repetitions, enables the emergence of a new subject. If this subject, through its illegitimate crossing from one world into another, brings about a new distribution of the sensible that questions the traditional partition of a society, then it becomes a political subject. Therefore, the added value of this combination is that Rancière offers ideas on how to think about mimesis as an inherently political phenomenon. However, the deeply mimetic nature of Rancière's concept of political subjectification allows us to pose some difficult questions to him. Although, for Rancière, dissensus over the common world is central to his conception of politics—and something that needs to happen in a society to make the world equally livable to all—he never engages with the question of violence that is inextricably connected to conflict over different mimetic models. Nor does he discuss mechanisms of conflict resolution. If we accept with Girard that all conflict is mimetic in nature, then the next step would be to consider how we are to deal with violence between perceptive universes in a Rancièrian framework.

NOTES

1. On this mimetic definition of ethics, see Peter Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2013).
2. On the ethics of generosity versus the ethics of the gift, see René Girard, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture*, with Pierpaolo Antonello and João Cezar de Castro Rocha (London: Continuum, 2007), 253.
3. Nathan Colborne, "Violence and Resistance: Towards a Politics Without a Scapegoat," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 29, no. 1 (2013): 111–23; Roberto Farneti, *Mimetic Politics*:

- Dyadic Patterns in Global Politics* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015); Wolfgang Palaver, “War and Politics: Clausewitz and Schmitt in the Light of Girard’s Mimetic Theory,” *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 24 (2017): 101–17.
4. Iwona Janicka, *Theorizing Contemporary Anarchism: Solidarity, Mimesis and Radical Social Change* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).
 5. René Girard, *When These Things Begin: Conversations with Michel Treguer*, trans. Trevor Cribben Merrill (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 12.
 6. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 83.
 7. See René Girard, *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*, trans. Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010), 133.
 8. René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, research undertaken in collaboration with Jean-Michel Oughourlian and Guy Lefort, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Leigh Metteer (London: Athlone, 1987), 7.
 9. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 290.
 10. See Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 4–5.
 11. Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 58.
 12. See Iwona Janicka, “Queering Girard—De-Freuding Butler. A Theoretical Encounter Between Judith Butler’s Gender Performativity and René Girard’s Mimetic Theory,” *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 22 (2015): 43–64.
 13. See Girard, *When These Things Begin*, 44.
 14. See Girard, *Battling to the End*, 131.
 15. Jacques Rancière and Axel Honneth, *Recognition or Disagreement: A Critical Encounter on the Politics of Freedom, Equality and Identity*, ed. Katia Genel and Jean-Philippe Deranty (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 123.
 16. Rancière and Honneth, *Recognition and Disagreement*, 126.
 17. Rancière and Honneth, *Recognition and Disagreement*, 120.
 18. Jacques Rancière, *Staging the People: The Proletarian and His Double*, trans. David Fernbach (London and New York: Verso, 2011), 26.
 19. Cf. Jacques Rancière, *Courts voyages au pays du peuple* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1990), 140.
 20. Rancière and Honneth, *Recognition and Disagreement*, 127.
 21. Jacques Rancière, *Et tant pis pour les gens fatigués. Entretiens* (Paris: Editions Amsterdam, 2009), 175.
 22. Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steve Corcoran (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 158.
 23. Honoré de Balzac, *The Village Rector*, trans. Katharine Prescott Wormeley, ed. John Bickers et al. (Project Gutenberg Ebook, 2016), 26.
 24. Balzac, *The Village Rector*, 44–45.

25. Balzac, *The Village Rector*, 45.
26. Balzac, *The Village Rector*, 46.
27. Balzac, *The Village Rector*, 46.
28. Rancière, *Et tant pis*, 143.
29. For Rancière, the novel is anti-mimetic in a non-Girardian way because Rancière does not define mimesis as a relationship between a copy and a model. Instead, “*mimesis* is not resemblance but a certain regime of resemblance” (Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott [London and New York: Verso, 2007], 73). It is synonymous with rules governing the system of representation in art: tragedy for the nobles dealing with serious themes, “comedy for the people of meagre means” focusing on human weaknesses: Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 27. Mimesis is therefore “a way of making resemblances function within a set of relations between ways of making, modes of speech, forms of visibility, and protocols of intelligibility” (Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 73).
30. Rancière, *Et tant pis*, 431.
31. Rancière, *Dissensus*, 141.
32. Rancière, *Et tant pis*, 143.
33. Balzac, *The Village Rector*, 615.
34. Balzac, *The Village Rector*, 151.
35. Balzac, *The Village Rector*, 150–51.
36. Balzac, *The Village Rector*, 614.
37. See Bernard Aspe, *Partage de la nuit. Deux études sur Jacques Rancière* (Caen: Nous, 2015), 22–23.
38. Cf. Rancière, *Et tant pis*, 116.
39. Jacques Rancière, *Proletarian Nights: The Workers’ Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, trans. John Drury (London and New York: Verso, 2012), 19. “Jette-toi dans les lectures terribles, cela éveillera dans ta malheureuse existence des passions; et le prolétaire en a besoin pour se dresser contre ce qui s’apprête à le dévorer. Ainsi depuis *l’Imitation* jusqu’à *Lélia*, cherche l’énigme de ce mystérieux et formidable chagrin qui travaille dans de sublimes concepteurs”: Jacques Rancière, *La Nuit des prolétaires. Archives du rêve ouvrier* (Paris: Fayard, 1981), 31.
40. See Rancière and Honneth, *Recognition and Disagreement*, 144.
41. See Rancière and Honneth, *Recognition and Disagreement*, 144.
42. See Rancière and Honneth, *Recognition and Disagreement*, 145.
43. “Childe-Harold, Obermann, René, avouez-nous franchement le parfum de vos angoisses. Répondez! n’étiez-vous pas heureux dans vos belles mélancolies? . . . sublimes malheureux! Vous n’avez point connu la douleur des douleurs, la douleur vulgaire, celle du lion pris au piège, celle du plébéien en proie aux horribles séances de l’atelier. . . . Ah! vieux Dante, tu n’as point voyagé dans *l’Enfer réel*, dans *l’Enfer sans poésie*”: Gabriel Gauny, *Le philosophe plébéien*, ed. Jacques Rancière (Paris: La Fabrique éditions, 2017), 51.

44. Jacques Rancière, *Mute Speech: Literature, Critical Theory and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 92.
45. Rancière, *Proletarian Nights*, 20. "Ce n'est pas la connaissance de l'exploitation qui lui manque, c'est une connaissance de soi qui lui révèle un être voué à autre chose que l'exploitation: révélation de soi qui passe par le détour du secret des autres, ces intellectuels et ces bourgeois avec lesquels ils diront plus tard . . . qu'ils ne veulent rien avoir à faire" (Rancière, *La Nuit des prolétaires*, 32).
46. Cf. Rancière, *Et tant pis*, 76; Rancière and Honneth, *Recognition and Disagreement*, 127.
47. Rancière, *Proletarian Nights*, 81; "Se croyant chez lui, tant qu'il n'a pas achevé la pièce qu'il parqué, il en aime l'ordonnance; si la fenêtre s'ouvre sur un jardin où domine un horizon pittoresque, un instant il arrête ses bras et plane en idée vers la spacieuse perspective pour en jouir mieux que les possesseurs des habitations voisines" (Gauny, *Le philosophe*, 61).
48. Rancière and Honneth, *Recognition and Disagreement*, 148.
49. "Nous sommes pauvres de temps libre. La nuit est abrutissante de sommeil, le travail s'avance pour nous saccager. Ah! si seulement nous étions désenchaînés à la manière des Bohémiens? Nous sommes des ilotes" (Gauny, *Le philosophe*, 216).
50. "Nos fatigues physiques ont des fatigues intellectuelles qui désolent notre intelligence par le peu de temps libre qui nous reste pour nous défendre et pour penser. Le soir, un sommeil de bête de somme nous ôte le sentiment de notre dignité, en nous livrant à d'abrutissantes torpeurs" (Gauny, *Le philosophe*, 52).
51. Cf. Jacques Rancière, *Courts voyages au pays du peuple* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1990), 140.
52. See Rancière, *Et tant pis*, 151.
53. See Rancière, *Proletarian Nights*, 16–17.
54. Rancière, *Mute Speech*, 54.
55. Cf. Rancière, *Et tant pis*, 314.
56. Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, trans. Zakir Paul (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 46.
57. Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 52.
58. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 89.
59. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 42.
60. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 95.
61. Gabriel Rockhill, "Editor's Introduction. Jacques Rancière's Politics of Perception," in Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), xiii.
62. Rancière, *Et tant pis*, 384.
63. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 97.
64. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 35.

65. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 40.
66. On this point, see also Aspe, *Partage de la nuit*, 18.
67. On this question, see also Janicka, *Theorizing Contemporary Anarchism*.

IWONA JANICKA is Early Career Innovation Fellow with the Institute of Advanced Study at the University of Warwick, UK. She was British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow with Warwick (2015–18) and held visiting fellowships with the Hannover Institute for Philosophical Research (Germany) and the Post-human Aesthetics research group at Aarhus University (Denmark). As Gates Scholar she completed her PhD in French at the University of Cambridge, Trinity Hall, in 2014. Her monograph, *Theorizing Contemporary Anarchism. Solidarity, Mimesis and Radical Social Change* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), deals with the concept of universality and social transformation in most recent philosophical thought.

