



The Political Life of Sensation

Davide Panagia

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The taste of chocolate, the noise of a crowd, the visual impressions of filmic images—such sensory perceptions are rarely if ever discussed in relation to democratic theory. In response, Davide Panagia argues that by overlooking sensation political theorists ignore a crucial dimension of political life. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze's and Jacques Rancière's readings of Kantian aesthetics, Panagia posits sensation as a radical democratic moment of aesthetic judgment. He contends that sensory experience interrupts our perceptual givens, creating occasions to suspend authority and reconfigure the arrangement of a political order.

Panagia claims that the rule of narrative governs our inherited notions of political subjectivity and agency, such that reading and writing are the established modes of political deliberation. Yet the contemporary citizen-subject is a viewing subject, influenced by film, photos, and other perceptual stimuli as much as by text. Challenging the rule of narrative, Panagia analyzes diverse sites of cultural engagement including the visual dynamics portrayed in the film *The Ring*, the growth of festival culture in late-fifteenth-century Florence, the practices of convivium espoused by the Slow Food movement, and the architectural design of public newsstands. He then ties these occasions for sensation to notable moments in the history of political thought and shows the political potential of a dislocated subjectivity therein. Democratic politics, Panagia concludes, involves a taking part in those everyday practices that interrupt our common modes of sensing and afford us an awareness of what had previously been insensible.



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