

**‘The Subaltern Can Speak’: Reflections On Voice Through The Lens
Of The Politics Of Jacques Rancière**

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

**LLD
(Doctor Legum)**

**In the Faculty of Law,
University of Pretoria**

August 2015

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SUMMARY

The aim of the research is to reflect on the notion of political voice through the lens of the politics of Jacques Rancière. This reflection takes place against the background of the difficulty and complexity of issues surrounding the political voice of many South African women. The motivation behind the reflection on political voice arose out of concerns regarding the contradiction between the exemplary formal position of South African women and their lived realities as it pertains to the contexts of poverty and sexual violence that many women face and live in.

Since South Africa's transition to democracy, many activists and scholars have engaged with notions of gender equality along the lines of constitutional discourse, substantive equality and transformative constitutionalism. This research seeks an alternative understanding. I turn to the work of theorist, Jacques Rancière in order to consider possible alternatives and ways of thinking about the notion of voice. I explore his unique formulation of politics as well as other theoretical engagements in order to open up questions around the frameworks that determine the possibilities of political voicing and/or silencing.

The reflection also entails an exploration of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak". I analyse Spivak's essay along the lines of Jacques Rancière's formulation of politics in order to further make sense of what it means to have a political voice. I also read instances of political statements and historical and literary figures from the perspective of Rancière's politics. The aim is to contest and question current meanings of voice and to suggest that Jacques Rancière's postulations can provide valuable insight on issues of political voicing, silence, politics and equality.

This thesis is dedicated to my mother and father,
Estelle Audrey Jooste and Willem Gerhard Jooste

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The one who belongs to the demos, who speaks when he is not to speak, is the one who partakes in what he has no part in.¹

But the question is, who has the power of speech and who has only voice?²

In order to enter into political exchange, it becomes necessary to invent the scene upon which spoken words may be audible, in which objects become visible, and individuals themselves may be recognised. It is in this respect that we may speak of a poetics of politics.³

1.1 Research problem

What does it mean to speak politically and what does it mean to be heard? Conceptions of politics have always revolved around questions of speaking and being heard. Domination and oppression are usually theorised along the lines of political subjectivity, political agency and having a voice. Political participation is usually conditioned upon the possibility of intelligibility and being qualified to speak and participate in a specific framework or context. Within the framework of political participation, people can be described as struggling for a greater say, for inclusion and for greater representation. These processes represent continuous negotiation, contestation and confrontation. Depending on the framework, the speech of certain people is rendered intelligible, whilst others are denied authoritative voice and are for the most part politically invisible or silenced in certain circumstances. The idea of having a voice and how it is politically expressed is a complex question and is one that is extraordinarily diverse. People express their views differently, on different levels and platforms of society and from within the context of multiple influences and discourses. This project revolves around making sense of what it means to have a voice and it is around the notion of voice that the work of French theorist Jacques Rancière becomes

¹ Rancière J *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (2010) 32.

² Rancière J *Malaise Dans L'esthétique* (2004) 37.

³ Rancière J in Panagia D "Dissenting words: A conversation With Jacques Rancière" *Diacritics* (2001) 115.

important. Rancière's work on politics can be summarised by the phrase "ce que parler veut dire"- what it means to speak, or what speaking means.⁴ The thesis is a reflection on the notion of voice through the lens of the politics of Jacques Rancière. This contemplation takes place against the background of what I perceive to be specific difficulties of voice pertaining to many women within the post-apartheid South African context. I contend that in this regard Jacques Rancière's work on politics can provide a valuable theoretical lens through which to approach and imagine the notion of political voice. Rancière's descriptions of politics are a continuous effort to make sense of and dismantle the various obstacles that confront exercises of thought, speech and political voicing and I argue that his formulations informed by his intellectual background, can shed significant light on issues of speaking politically.

1.2 Background and Context

The motivation for this research arose out of real concerns regarding the difficulty, precariousness and complexity of issues of political voice regarding many women within post-apartheid South Africa. South Africa has one of the most progressive constitutions in the world and post-apartheid policy is dedicated towards enabling a socio-political environment that is governed by principles of equality and social justice for all.⁵ Women have enjoyed equal rights since the transition from apartheid's authoritarian rule to South African democracy. Specific policy and legislative directives aimed at gender equality have been the focus of

⁴ See Pelletier C "Rancière and the poetics of the social sciences" *International Journal of Research and Method in Education* (2009) 253-248. Published online 10 November 2009 available at Taylor and Francis Online www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17437270903259741?journalCode=cwse20 (accessed 07/12/2014).

⁵ The new democratic South Africa was established in 1994 after extended negotiations between the African National Congress and the National Party. The final constitution was promulgated in 1996. The South African constitution has the familiar features of a liberal democracy, but also envisions a more substantive vision of democratic inclusion, participation and accountability. It further strives to transform our society from one deeply divided by the legacy of a racist and unequal past to one based on democracy, social justice, freedom and equality.

governmental projects and initiatives.⁶ Yet, there are two pressing and persisting issues that face South African women. As will be explained below, the country is known as one of the most unequal in terms of race, class and gender in the world and as one of the most violent for women and girls. South African women live with continuous sexual violence perpetrated against them and the socio-economic deprivation of the majority of the country results in black women remaining the poorest of the poor.

The problem can be sketched in the following way: Firstly, as mentioned, South African democracy has established the basis for progressive policy frameworks aimed at eradicating gender inequality.⁷ These efforts have included legislation that facilitates the inclusion of women in different public, economic and governmental sectors. As Lynn Snodgrass highlights, on paper South African women enjoy the highest status globally.⁸ When judged against global benchmarks, women in South Africa have surpassed expectations in terms of

⁶ See for example The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000, The South African Constitution, 1996 which specifically prohibits unfair discrimination on the grounds of sex and gender, The Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 that introduced affirmative action for “designated groups” which includes black women, women of all races and people with disabilities and the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill [B50B-2013] presented in 2014 which makes provision for at least 50% of decision-making posts to be filled by women. It also aims to improve women’s access to education, training and skills development and it seeks to protect women’s reproductive health as well as to eliminate discrimination and gender-based violence.

⁷ When the apartheid regime ended, the hope was that the deep conservatism with regards to women’s rights would also end. The new South African government committed to non-racism and non-sexism took the place of authoritarian rule. Walsh explains that the new government brought 111 diverse women into parliament. See Walsh D *Women’s Rights in Democratizing States: Just Debate and Gender Justice in the Public Sphere* (2011) 185-186. A core group of talented MP’s working with an array of women’s organisations in civil society helped pass a series of laws that included the gender equality clause in the final constitution, the right to abortion, domestic violence legislation, affirmative action programs that targeted black women, a new maintenance act, and customary marriage reform. As Walsh further explains, the state support for gender justice on the scale that occurred in South Africa since the establishment of democracy is rare. See Walsh D (2011) 185. For a detailed and more comprehensive discussion of the initiatives and processes surrounding South Africa’s transformation on gender issues see Walsh D (2011) 185-216.

⁸ See Snodgrass L “South Africa: A dangerous place to be poor, black and a woman” *The Conversation*. Published online 11 September 2015 and available at <http://theconversation.com/south-africa-a-dangerous-place-to-be-poor-black-and-a-woman-47287> (accessed on 13/01/2016).

solid representation in state-decision-making structures, extensive legal and constitutional mechanisms protecting the rights of women and girls and groundbreaking laws safeguarding the interests of women.⁹ Many, from within a variety of different contexts, celebrated the South African achievements around women and the related notions of gender equality.¹⁰ South Africa celebrates women's day and an entire month once a year is dedicated to programs that aim to transform gender relations. Anti-discrimination campaigns and notions of social justice for all have almost become cliché.¹¹ Therefore, in general the goal on different levels of society has been the transformation of highly patriarchal cultures and traditions that render women politically marginalised. When it comes to the continuous sexual violence perpetrated against women, civil society, activists and government have participated and are continuously participating in drawing attention to the high levels of rape in the country. However, as Snodgrass further mentions, formal recognition has not translated into fundamental freedoms of dignity, safety and security in practice.¹² Many South African women live in contexts comprising of extreme violence and as Snodgrass rightly states, "the impressive national machinery belies the realities of most women, especially black women".¹³ Although South Africa does not have accurate statistics on gender-based violence because of the fact that there are no reliable governmental databases, Du Toit notes that there is wide consensus with regards to the fact that the country has one of the highest rates of rape in the world.¹⁴ Sexual violence also remains under-reported.¹⁵ The Medical Research Council

⁹ As above.

¹⁰ See for example Ruiters G (ed.) *Gender Activism: Perspectives on the South African Transition, Institutional Culture and Everyday Life* (2008).

¹¹ As above.

¹² Snodgrass L *The Conversation* (2015).

¹³ As above. Snodgrass also mentions that black women bear the brunt of humiliation, deprivation and discrimination because of the way in which racism and sexism intersects. She refers to the deep disconnect between the political elites, such as women who have risen to power in government, and ordinary South African women. Despite the African National Congress Women's League's impeccable struggle credentials, it has not been able to tackle controversial gender issues. See Snodgrass L *The Conversation* (2015).

¹⁴ Du Toit L *A Philosophical Investigation of Rape: The Making and the Unmaking of the Feminine Self* (2009) 2.

¹⁵ Snodgrass L *The Conversation* (2015).

estimates that only one in nine rapes are reported to the police.¹⁶ It is further estimated that one in four men admitted to raping a woman and that three women per day are killed by an intimate partner.¹⁷ Violence against women is partly the result of factors such as poverty, patriarchy, inequality, high rates of unemployment and low levels of education.¹⁸ Although these factors exist in many post-colonial African countries, Snodgrass states that they cannot fully account for the “extraordinary savagery” of South African rapes and femicide.¹⁹ The violence against women and girls is often sexual, whilst involving debasement and humiliation and in some cases even torture and dehumanising deaths.²⁰ For Snodgrass this cannot easily be explained by patriarchal dominance or socio-economic conditions (such as poverty, unemployment and substance abuse). Rather she refers to “rape as a weapon of war [...] the war against South African women”.²¹

Secondly, and related to the discussion above, when it comes to the socio-economic conditions of women, many South African lives are constructed as disposable. The majority of the nation is left to occupy zones of impoverished invisibility.²²

¹⁶ As above.

¹⁷ As above.

¹⁸ As above.

¹⁹ As above. It should be mentioned here that Snodgrass further notes that deep humiliation is part of South Africa’s history. It has been fuelled by the symbiotic ideologies of apartheid and patriarchy characterised by institutionalised violence, which rendered whole groups of people inferior. The effect of deep-rooted historical, social and psychological factors therefore also plays a role in the on-going sexual violence that characterises the South African landscape.

²⁰ As above. One of the most notable cases in this regard is the 2013 rape and murder of Bredasdorp resident, Anene Booysen. The teenager was out with friends at a local pub. In the early hours of the morning she was seen walking home with a man whom she knew. This person was subsequently convicted of her murder. She was raped and mutilated and left for dead at a housing construction site. Booysen had been brutally raped and disemboweled by having her abdomen slit open and she sustained other numerous injuries all over her body. The crime was described as a senseless and savage act and it mobilised citizens and government to prioritise the war against rape.

²¹ As above.

²² See Selmeczi A “Dis/placing political illiteracy: The politics of intellectual equality in a South African shack-dweller’s movement” *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* (2014) 230-265.

This construction partly rests on the inherited geography of apartheid displacements that see many people still occupying spaces on the margins of national cities with poverty taking on a racialised and gendered logic. Although election campaigns are conceptualised along the lines of alleviating poverty and transforming the conditions of the poor, the economic power dynamics have largely stayed the same over the last twenty-one years of democracy.²³

What is more is that the prevailing political discourse at times labels the struggles and protests of poor people as less than political. This discourse sometimes views most protests and demonstrations by the poor through the lens of notions such as the idea that all protest is related to the pace of service delivery, that protestors are violent and that their protests are illegitimate because of the fact that proper local governmental procedures with regard to claims were not followed.²⁴ In some instances demonstrators and protestors are described as not being able to understand the complicated mechanisms of government, the time that developmental projects take and the difficult issues facing the state. In worse cases the state is perceived as justified in exercising illegal evictions and violently

²³ The South African Constitution envisions the redistribution of the country's resources and benefits, socio-economic reparation as well as the reconstruction of the society along egalitarian lines. After 20 years of democracy however, there still remains an unacceptable socio-economic gulf between black and white South Africans. As Madlingozi explains, the gravest legacy that apartheid bequeathed to South Africa is one of systematic poverty, structural unemployment and socio-economic inequality and the politics of redistribution still remains a problematic topic within the country. See for example Madlingozi T "Good victim, bad victim: Apartheid's beneficiaries, victims and the struggle for social justice" in Le Roux W & Van Marle K (eds.) *Memory and the Legacy of Apartheid: Ten Years After AZAPO v President of South Africa* 107.

²⁴ See Selmeczi A "Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements (2014) 230.

crushing protest and dissent.²⁵ Therefore, when the poor attempt to make their voices heard or protest against their circumstances, certain discourses frame their protests as illegal or illogical, rather than political. Further, the majority of the black population who live under the poverty line is female.²⁶ The lived realities of black women therefore not only comprises of extreme violence, but also grinding poverty. The socio-economic conditions of many women also make them particularly vulnerable to sexual violence as they have fewer resources to seek justice or escape contexts of domestic violence.²⁷

It would appear that although there are frameworks of consensual activism and awareness, specialised policy and legislation and notions of the socio-economic transformation of the country, it still remains difficult for women, as a group and/or individually, to meaningfully appear as political subjects. In South Africa, on different levels of society, we are aware and continuously made aware of the epidemic numbers of rapes and of the fact that the majority of the nation lives impoverished lives (with black women being the most impoverished). Therefore, the consensually perceived “plight of women” has had a converse effect: localised forms of action and individual or specific instances of voice do not appear to be politically understood, relevant and to a certain extent some issues cannot even be politically formulated. When thought of along the lines of political speech, a paradox emerges. It seems as if women’s issues and broader gender challenges are within the public realm, but that they themselves as bodies and

²⁵ The most notable example of the violent crushing of protest was the events at Marikana near Rustenburg in 2012. A strike occurred at a mine owned by Lonmin Mining Company. The event was marked by a series of violent incidents between the South African Police Service, Lonmin Security, the leadership of the National Union of Mine Workers and the strikers themselves. The strike resulted in the death of 44 strikers whilst 78 were injured. The majority of the strikers were killed on the 16th of August. The strike resulted in the single most lethal use of force by the South African Police Service against civilians since the 1960’s and the late 1980’s, the era at the end of Apartheid. The incident caused much controversy, especially when it was discovered that majority of the victims were shot far from police lines and some were even shot in the back. The controversy resulted in President Jacob Zuma commissioning an inquiry into the shooting. See for example D’Abdon R (ed.) *Marikana: A Moment in Time* (2012).

²⁶ Snodgrass L *The Conversation* (2015).

²⁷ As above.

beings are somehow beyond the realm of care- living in constant fear of sexual violence and living in abject poverty. The issues of socio-economic marginalisation and sexual violence perpetrated against women are therefore in the realm of public visibility, but these issues do not politically appear or they are not politically formulated in such a way that would result in the transformation of the material and concrete contexts of many women.²⁸ These pressing problems take on complicated forms and cannot be easily answered. The aim of the study is by no means to solve these problems or to suggest concrete ways in which to address them. Rather, my aim is to theoretically reflect on what it means to have a voice in order to understand questions surrounding political speech better. It is therefore an attempt to contemplate voice against the background of these complicated occurrences of not being heard or becoming politically relevant to the extent of significant transformation occurring. Along these lines the study, rather than focusing on concepts such as political agency, subjectivity and programs of participation, focuses on the larger frameworks that define and delineate possibilities of political agency, subjectivity and participation. The research therefore consists of a broader theoretical contemplation than merely the ability to express ones views and interests in an effort to influence policy and decision-making directives. As mentioned, the position of and issues surrounding women were and are put central in the conceptualisation of formal policy and legislative directives. As such, the study has a different aim. In an attempt to make sense of the notion of voice, the research takes place along the more general lines of sight and forms of speech that demarcate who and what can be seen and heard in what places, times and circumstances. It is my contention that considering the disconnect between the efforts of government, the campaigns of civil society as

²⁸ In this regard it should be mentioned that the transformation of the material contexts of women in South Africa is a complex and difficult struggle. As Snodgrass accurately notes, “[g]ender equality is up against a powerful enemy in societies with strong patriarchal traditions (such as South Africa), where women, of all races and cultures have been oppressed, exploited and kept in positions of subservience for generations. Patriarchy, premised on women’s humiliation and subjugation, is resilient and adapts to changing social and political contexts, aided and abetted by complicity and silence”. See Snodgrass L *The Conversation* (2015).

well as the general awareness of the most important issues that women face; and the problematic everyday material contexts of many South African women as it pertains to ongoing poverty and sexual violence, it becomes necessary to engage with the larger frameworks that determine who has voice and who has not.

To be clear, the background sketched above and the specific relationship between sexual violence, poverty, women within the South African context and conceptions of voice and political speech, can be addressed and analysed in a number of different ways. For the purposes of my analysis here, I locate the need to theoretically reflect on the notion of voice because of the disconnect between governmental and societal mechanisms and frameworks that attempt to empower women and to alleviate poverty and sexual violence AND the concrete contexts of many South African women. A contradiction comes into play when considering the public-political efforts of the South African government and society and the ongoing number of rapes, violence against women in general and contexts of poverty. My motivation therefore arose from this specific background. In essence, my reading of the background sketched above highlights the difficulty, precariousness, fragility and complexity of questions surrounding voice and speaking politically and being heard. The issue of voice is therefore laid bare when considering the disconnect or contradiction between the exemplary formal position and recognition of women and their everyday lives. It is therefore the detection of this disconnect and the complexities of where and if political voice can be located or formulated within these frameworks that leads me to explore the concept of voice. As mentioned, the issues of socio-economic marginalisation and sexual violence perpetrated against women are in the realm of public visibility, but these issues do not politically appear or they are not politically formulated or voiced in such a way that would result in the transformation of the material and concrete contexts of many women. It is within and from the perspective of this problematic that I discern the need to theoretically explore and think through the question of having a political voice. The study is an exercise in thinking about voice and its specific definition in Jacques Rancière's work on politics. The aim is to show that Rancière's work on

politics can provide alternative languages and frameworks of understanding from within which to think about political voicing.

Apart from outlining my specific reading of the position of women in South Africa, it also becomes necessary to outline two distinct lines of thinking or discourses surrounding issues regarding women and political speaking. These lines of thinking or discourses are in no way the only theorising or thinking surrounding women and political voicing in the South African context. There are many and diverse theoretical engagements in this regard.²⁹ However, these represent two important lines of thought when it comes to women and voice within the South African context. I outline them below in order to further contextualise the study.

The first line of thinking is closely related to the background sketched above. Since South Africa's transition to democracy, many activists and scholars have engaged with notions of gender equality along the lines of constitutional discourse, substantive equality and transformative constitutionalism.³⁰ These

²⁹ There are a variety of different discourses and strands of engagement within the context of post-apartheid jurisprudential thought. These include engagements from postmodern, post-structuralist and postcolonial perspectives. See for example Van Marle K "Lives of action, thinking and revolt: A feminist call for politics and becoming in post-apartheid South Africa" *South African Public Law* (2004) 605, Bohler-Muller N "Other possibilities? Postmodern feminist legal theory in South Africa" *South African Journal on Human Rights* (2002) 614, Du Toit L "Feminism and the Ethics of Reconciliation" in Veitch S (ed.) *Law and the Politics of Reconciliation* (2007) 185-214.

³⁰ The South African constitution has a general commitment to achieving substantive equality. The type of equality that it envisions involves large-scale egalitarian, redistributive and social transformation. It does not only have aspirations of equality, redistribution and social security, but it also strives to realise multiculturalism, pays close attention to gender and sexual identity, has an emphasis on participation and governmental transparency, recognises the importance of environmentalism and extends democratic ideals into the private sphere. Along these lines the concept of "transformative constitutionalism" refers to a long-term project of constitutional enactment, interpretation and enforcement committed to transforming the country's political and social institutions and power relationships in a democratic, participatory and egalitarian way. US critical legal scholar, Karl Klare first introduced this notion in 1998. Ever since the first mention of the concept scholars have interpreted and applied it in an effort to explain the role of law and the new constitution in a transformative society. Klare's article became the most frequently referred to article in the field of constitutional law and references to the term are legion. The term is usually understood as a social-democratic concept that strives for the attainment of social justice, substantive equality and the cultivation of a culture of justification in public interactions as

efforts have mainly consisted of seeking to transform gender relations through the law and human rights. Socio-economic reparation, violence against women and transformation have been viewed and widely analysed along the lines of our progressive constitution and democracy. Many of these efforts have done the important work of legally analysing gender issues within historical, economic, political and social contexts with added focus on how race, gender, sexual orientation and socio-economic status intersect.³¹ However, some commentators have pointed to the fact that the law and human rights alone cannot effect significant change.³² When considering the ongoing socio-economic divide and the prevalence of sexual violence described above, the impotency of rights and legislation relating to specific rights of gender equality in changing the concrete contexts of everyday South Africans, becomes noticeable. It can therefore be argued that efforts and theoretical interventions through the lens of constitutionalism, jurisprudential approaches to rights, although important and necessary, cannot solely address the continuing marginalisation and oppression of women.³³ Many scholars seem to suggest that the contemporary crisis that

well as the infusion of the private sphere with human rights standards. See Klare K "Transformative constitutionalism and legal culture" *South African Journal on Human Rights* (1998) 146-188, Pieterse M "What do we mean when we talk about transformative constitutionalism?" *South African Public Law* (2005) 155-166.

³¹ But a few examples include Botha H "Equality, plurality and structural power" *South African Journal on Human Rights* (2009) 1-37, Liebenberg S "Towards a transformative adjudication of socio-economic rights" *Speculum Juris* (2007) 41-59, Froneman J "Legal reasoning and legal culture: Our 'vision' of law" *Stellenbosch Law Review* (2005) 1-20, Sibanda S "Not purpose-made! Transformative constitutionalism, post-independence constitutionalism, and the struggle to eradicate poverty" in Liebenberg S & Quinot G (eds.) *Law and Poverty: Perspectives from South Africa and Beyond* (2012) 40, Moseneke D "The Bram Fischer Memorial Lecture: Transformative adjudication" *South African Journal of Human Rights* (2002) 314, Langa P "Transformative Constitutionalism" *Stellenbosch Law Review* (2006) 351, Roux T "Transformative Constitutionalism and the best interpretation of the South African constitution: Distinction without a difference?" *Stellenbosch Law Review* (2009) 258, Van der Walt A "Transformative Constitutionalism and the development of South African Property Law (Part 2)" *Tydskrif vir die Suid-Afrikaanse Reg* (2006) 1, Van Marle K "Transformative Constitutionalism as/and critique" *Stellenbosch Law Review* (2009) 286.

³² See for example Van Marle K "The spectacle of post-apartheid constitutionalism" *Griffith Law Review* (2007) 411-429, "Laughter, refusal and friendship: Thoughts on a 'jurisprudence of generosity'" *Stellenbosch Law Review* (2007) 198-206.

³³ South Africa did not escape the language and rhetoric of human rights that swept across the contemporary world of politics in the 1970's. This discourse picked up after the end of the Cold War and quickened again in the latter half of the 1990's. After South Africa's transition

South Africa is grappling with when it comes to women requires a total revolution if it is to be adequately addressed.³⁴ It is at this junction that other theoretical engagements and interventions become important and it is also from within this problematic or context that I attempt to make sense of voice and political speech so as to consider other possibilities and alternatives. Therefore, rather than exploring the inadequacy or inability of law, constitutionalism and human rights or searching for alternative approaches to law; I turn to a different exploration. My contention here is that the important and necessary work of illustrating the workings, failures and successes of legal and constitutional mechanisms have been and are being done. These efforts are myriad and continuous. My goal with this research is simultaneously broader and narrower. It is an effort to consider alternatives and to explore the wider frameworks that determine the possibility of voice. My contention is by no means that such an exploration would better address the complicated background sketched above. Rather, my contention is that considering the contradictions between the formal position of women and the complexity of issues of being politically heard and becoming politically relevant, theoretical engagement from a variety of different angles and approaches becomes necessary in making sense of these issues. My analysis of the larger frameworks that determine the possibility of voice is also a result of a more complex and multidimensional view of the law and its inherent relationship to society, power, politics and community. In this regard my research is influenced by critical legal theory.³⁵ Although I do not directly engage with specific

to a constitutional democracy the country fully embraced the rather optimistic potential for human rights law and advocacy, adopting neo-liberal lines of thinking, whilst establishing all the necessary democratic institutions. See Hafner-Burton E & Ron J "Human rights institutions: Rhetoric and efficacy" *Journal of Peace Research* (2007) 379-383.

³⁴ See the contributions in Ruiters G (ed.) *Gender Activism: Perspectives on the South African Transition, Institutional Culture and Everyday Life* (2008).

³⁵ In this regard two critical approaches that influence my work can be mentioned. Both of these approaches have been adopted in the South African legal context to a certain extent. The first is tenets that can be associated with the US Critical Legal Studies Movement and the second approach are engagements with Euro-Brit Critical Legal Studies. With regards to the first see, in the South African context, Klare K "Transformative constitutionalism and legal culture" *South African Journal on Human Rights* (1998) 146-188 and also see with regards to the second approach Motha S & Van Marle K (eds.) *Genres of Critique: Law, Aesthetics and Liminality* (2013). Although Euro-Brit CLS is associated with theorising along the lines of

arguments within critical legal theory, my direction of inquiry in this research is animated by the belief that the law should be framed and analysed alongside and within broader social, political and discursive contexts. Thus rather than placing the law and related mechanisms of rights, policy and constitutionalism central to my analysis, I look at broader frameworks of politics and political voice that ultimately influences, creates and functions alongside the law and its related instruments. Although I reflect on the notion of voice against the background of the legislative and constitutional efforts and the policy and public-political norms instituted in an effort to better the position of women since the beginning of the post-apartheid era, my goal is to reflect on these mechanisms and instruments from a different angle. More specifically, I reflect on these issues from the perspective of thinking about voice within the framework of Jacques Rancière's work on and imaginative definition of politics.

Further, the aim of my analysis of Rancière's work on politics is to illustrate that some of the formal mechanisms along the lines of rights and constitutionalism and theoretical and public interventions form part of what may be called the current "distribution of the sensible".³⁶ I elaborate fully on this notion in chapter 2 of the thesis. At this stage it can be mentioned that the "distribution of the sensible" refers to the general laws of a society that distribute and determine lines of sight, forms of speech and implicit estimations of the capacities of people in specific contexts.³⁷ The notion of voice, rather than involving the current

ethics, language and ontology (see for example Douzinas C & Gearey A *Critical Jurisprudence: The Political Philosophy of Law* (2005)) and US CLS points to the indeterminacy, contradictions and politics of the law, (see for example Unger K *The Critical Legal Studies Movement* (1986), Kennedy D "Form and substance in private law adjudication" *Harvard Law Review* (1976) 1685-1778) both schools or approaches emphasise the violence, power relationships and identity politics of the law. There is a specific emphasis on interrogating and analysing the law within the social, economic and political contexts in which it functions and these approaches suggest that the law cannot be separated from issues of power, morality, community and politics. The law is not viewed as a coherent body of rules that function objectively and neutrally. Rather, many of these scholars point to the violence and injustices prevalent in law as well as the law's ability to, behind the guise of neutrality, objectivity and fairness, perpetuate inequality and hierarchies.

³⁶ See Rancière J *Disagreement* (1999) 27-28. See section 2.3.5 below.

³⁷ If viewed from the perspective of the distribution of the sensible, the law, legal

distribution of the sensible or the current accepted forms and frameworks of possibility of voice, involves a redistribution of the sensible or a recasting of these frameworks. It is therefore also from the perspective of this line of thinking in Rancière's politics that I turn to other possibilities or alternative ways of doing.

The second important line of thinking that should be mentioned involves Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"³⁸ This contribution originally published in 1988 has been described as having altered the fields of postcolonial and gender studies.³⁹ Considered to be highly influential, the essay poses the question of whether the most oppressed and invisible constituencies in society (subalterns) can speak in the sense of their voices being politically heard. Spivak specifically focus on women in postcolonial India. Her more general analysis involves emphasising how women living in the southern hemisphere bear the brunt of global economic exploitation. In general they are not represented in the global theatre of international politics and when there are attempts to represent the political interests of women in the "Third World", it does not involve changing or transforming the infrastructural conditions which maintain the economic impoverishment of rural-based women of colour.⁴⁰ After her

establishments and mechanisms as well as the institutional language of our constitutional democracy can be regarded as part of the current distribution of the sensible that seeks to enforce a society's consensual order of things. A call for a redistribution of the sensible can therefore also be viewed as a call for the interrogation of law's complicity in determining acceptable forms of speech and the consensual frameworks of voice or authority of voice. See Jooste Y "Thinking two worlds into one: The 'distribution of the sensible' and women's renegotiation" *Stellenbosch Law Review* (2013) 528-537.

³⁸ Spivak GC "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Nelson C & Grossberg L (eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (1988) 271-313. First reprinted in Williams P & Chrisman L (eds.) *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (1994) 66-111.

³⁹ See Morris R "Introduction" in Morris R (ed.) *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea* (2010) 1-2.

⁴⁰ Morton S *Routledge Critical Thinkers: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (2003) 138-139. Spivak has consistently vocalised her criticism of global development policies which focus on women in the "Third World". In a response to the United Nations conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 for example, Spivak emphasised how the rhetoric on women's rights in the United Nations paradoxically overlooks the poorest women of the South, the very women whom the United Nations are claiming to represent. More recently Spivak has warned against the rhetoric of United Nations declarations on women's rights that seem to confuse access to global telecommunications and the right to bear credit with "Third World" women's political empowerment as such.

theoretical analysis in the essay, Spivak concludes that women, especially the most economically marginalised, cannot speak. It can be argued that when engaging with women and voice in the post-apartheid and postcolonial South African context, it becomes necessary to address the concerns that Spivak puts forth in her highly recognised essay.⁴¹ Spivak's contribution directly engages with the possibility of political speech as well as with the conditions that efface voice in the context of the global South. As such her contribution becomes part of my analysis. I explain and reflect on her essay in the study. My aim is to open up the question that she poses in the title (and answers in the negative) to discussion and contestation.⁴² As Jacques Rancière's work on politics is my main theoretical

⁴¹ For a discussion on South Africa as "postcolonial" see Chrisman L *Postcolonial Contraventions: Cultural Readings of Race, Imperialism and Transnationalism* (2003) 145-155. It should be mentioned here that a number of different other theorists could have been discussed. Two other important theorists for example that could have been discussed within the context of women and voice, are, firstly, Adriana Cavarero's work on the embodied voice of women. (Cavarero A *For More Than One Voice: Toward A Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (2005) trans. Kottman P). In this work, Cavarero begins her analysis of voice by starting from the given uniqueness of every voice. She rereads the history of philosophy by illustrating how it takes this embodied uniqueness of voice for granted and how it privileges mind over body. Through the analysis of figures of women, she provides a counter-history where the embodied voice or the "who" triumphs over the immaterial semantic or the "what" of speaking. What therefore matters is the "who" that is speaking rather than the communicative content of a given discourse. She innovatively proposes a politics of voice that reveals a more feminine or female logic. Cavarero's work with regard to voice is therefore relevant to women and speaking. However, I do not engage with her work in this study. My decision to engage with Spivak in this regard revolves around the relevance of her essay as it applies to the South African context that can be described as postcolonial and that forms part of the global south where women make up the poorest of the world. I therefore view Spivak's contribution as more fitting within and relevant to the context of the research problem that I state below. Spivak's engagement also analyses, in its most basic sense, the possibility of political speech being voiced and heard and as such, I limit my analysis to her specific essay on subaltern speaking. Further, after careful consideration, I believe that a thorough engagement with Cavarero's work here would have resulted in the project going beyond the scope of the problems that I am trying to address. However, Cavarero's work on voice reveals an important avenue for further or future research on this topic. The second theorist that can be mentioned here is Hannah Arendt and her arguments around action and speech in *The Human Condition* (1958) 75-180. Rancière critically engages with Arendt in his article "Who is The Subject of the Rights of Man?" *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2004) 103. I discuss his article in chapter 5 and explore some of the arguments he postulates. I also explain his engagement with the work of Arendt. Although I do not go into this engagement in depth, the discussions there should suffice in addressing some of Arendt's important claims on politics, speech and action.

⁴² Spivak GC in Nelson C & Grossberg L (1988) 313.

focus, I discuss and problematise her essay from the perspective of Rancière's arguments as part of my reflection on what it means to have a voice.

1.3 Research questions

Before setting out the research questions of the study it becomes necessary to clarify the following assumptions and reasoning behind the formulation of these questions: Firstly, the discussion of the background illustrate my concerns when it comes to many South African women and their specific contexts as it relates to grinding poverty and ongoing instances of sexual violence. Secondly, given the exemplary governmental and public mechanisms and legislative, democratic and other interventions, I detect a disconnect or a contradiction between the formal recognition of gender equality as well as of the issues that many South African women face AND the everyday contexts of many women. It seems, in my reading of the background sketched above, that democratic representation, formal constitutional inclusion and equality as well as the public-political recognition of the importance of overturning patriarchal systems does not translate into the embodied political visibility of many South Africa women, especially those women that live in contexts of poverty and that continuously face sexual violence. This leads me to ask questions regarding the notion of political speech or political voice. The issues of voice and political speech or visibility surrounding South African women are complicated and this study represents but one theoretical effort to make sense of the notion of voice. Thirdly, I assume with other scholars and activists that legal and policy directives, constitutionalism and efforts to transform and engage with gender relations through and along the lines of transformative constitutionalism, the law and rights are important in addressing sexual violence and the socio-economic deprivation of women. However, I contend that other theoretical engagements outside or beyond these lines of thinking and from different perspectives are also important and as such I attempt to explore a different line of inquiry in this study. I argue that the work of theorist Jacques Rancière can provide a different and valuable avenue of thinking in this regard and I aim to explain his work on politics in an effort to reflect on the notion

of political voice. I further propose that it becomes necessary to engage with Spivak's important contribution on speaking in my analysis and I contend that Rancière can provide other possibilities and shed a different light on the idea of subaltern silencing. The idea is that an analysis of the essay from the perspective of the work of Rancière, can further disclose meaningful and reflective prospects for voice. Ultimately I suggest that Rancière's work can frame questions in a new way and contribute valuable insights when it comes to the notion of voice in the South African context.

The primary aim of the research is an effort to analyse the notion of voice through exploring the work of Jacques Rancière. This analysis takes place against the background sketched above and within the context of what I perceive to be the necessity of searching for other or more theoretical possibilities. In order to make sense of voice, the research problem unfolds by way of the following questions:

1. In reflecting on voice and political speaking what directions of consideration and useful lines of thinking are opened up by an exploration and analysis of the intellectual background and theoretical work on politics of Jacques Rancière?
2. In what way does problematising Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" from the perspective of Rancière's politics identify moments within which the subaltern can speak? Or put differently, can an analysis of her essay through the lens of Rancière's work on politics answer the question differently or propose different questions?
3. When reading instances of political speaking and literary examples and figures from the perspective of Rancière's politics of speaking, what further or other possibilities of or for voice are revealed?

I explore these questions in an effort to understand political voice against the background of the specific disconnect or difficulties of voice when it comes to many South African women in the post-apartheid context. My aim is to show that the work of Jacques Rancière can meaningfully contribute to conversations around voice and political speaking. I plan on illustrating this by firstly discussing and explaining his background as theorist, his work on politics and his theoretical

engagements with certain historical figures. Secondly, I aim to explain and explore Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay on subaltern silencing and to consider it from the perspective of Rancière's work. Lastly, I plan to reflect on certain literary examples, political statements and historical figures through the lens of the politics of Rancière. I elaborate more on this in the methodology and chapter overview below

1.4 Methodology and Chapter Overview

The chapters of the thesis unfolds in the following way:

In the first chapter after this introductory chapter, chapter 2, I start with the main theoretical focus of the thesis, namely Jacques Rancière's work on politics. I begin by explaining Rancière's current influence as well as his background and intellectual beginnings. In this section I also outline the main arguments of Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser who as a former teacher of Rancière had a significant influence on his work. I shed light on Rancière's relationship with Althusser as well as on the main tenets of Althusserianism. In many ways Rancière's later work on politics may be regarded as a reaction against the key tenets of Althusserianism. His experiences with his former teacher shaped the rest of his intellectual life in numerous ways and it therefore becomes important to shed light on this period of his intellectual development. After this period, Rancière's work can be described as representing three stages. Starting from the early 1970's, the first stage was a critique of the main tenets of Althusserian theory informed by his experiences and training under Louis Althusser.⁴³ He subsequently, within the second stage, engaged with questions involving education and pedagogy as well as history, historiography and historical agency.⁴⁴ It was after and from the experiences of these engagements that he formulated

⁴³ The main work coming forth from this period was *La Leçon d' Althusser (Althusser's Lesson)* (1973).

⁴⁴ The main works that can be mentioned here are *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge* trans. Melehy H (1994), *The Nights of Labor: The Worker's Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* trans. Drury J (1989), *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* trans. Ross K (1991) and *The Philosopher and His Poor* trans. Drury J (2003).

what may be called his mature philosophy that concerns notions of politics and social and political agency and organisation.⁴⁵ Over the past ten to fifteen years his thought has also become increasingly concerned with art and aesthetics and its relation to politics and to possibilities of political participation, transformation and emancipation.⁴⁶

After explaining his intellectual background and his critique of Althusserian theory, or what can be called the first stage of his theoretical efforts, I explain Rancière's mature philosophy by exploring five aspects or moments within Rancière's formulation of politics, namely "the police order", "politics/ equality", "the political subject", "the miscount and the wrong" and "the distribution of the sensible". These five features involve the third stage of Rancière's work and they should be read together in order to get a thorough understanding of his notion of politics. After discussing the various elements of his politics, I reflect on Rancière's work against the background and within the context discussed above. The aim is to reflect on the lines of thinking that such a reading can reveal when thinking about the notion of political voice.

In chapter 3 I explore two historical figures that Rancière explored. This discussion serves to illuminate some of his arguments and also allows for an even deeper understanding of his theory. As with his intellectual background, his engagement with certain historical figures and philosophers becomes important when attempting to understand his postulations with regards to politics. In many ways the engagement with these figures crystallised Rancière's so-called mature politics. I discuss the figure of Joseph Jacotot discussed in his book on pedagogy *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* in order to explain Rancière's conception of equality

⁴⁵ See *Disagreement* (1999) trans. Rose J, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* trans. Cocoran S (2009), *On the Shores of Politics* trans. Heron L (1995), *The Hatred of Democracy* trans. Cocoran S (2006).

⁴⁶ See *Aesthetics and its Discontents* trans. Cocoran S (2009), *The Emancipated Spectator* trans. Elliot G (2009), *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing* trans. Mandell C (2004), *The Future of The Image* trans. Elliot G (2007), *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* trans. Rockhill G (2004), *The Politics of Literature* trans. Rose J (2011).

that is central to his notion of politics.⁴⁷ I also discuss the figure of Gabriel Gauny discussed in his book *The Nights of Labor*.⁴⁸ The discussion of Gauny occurs alongside a discussion of certain aspects of Plato that Rancière engages with and criticises in his book *The Philosopher and His Poor*.⁴⁹ Chapter 3 can be said to encompass the second stage of Rancière's work. Apart from shedding further light on Rancière's work on politics, the discussion of these figures in chapter 3 also serves to further reflect on the notion of political voice within a Rancièrian understanding of politics. These figures point to certain ways in which to approach and engage with the notion of political voice and I therefore contemplate Rancière's engagements with these historical figures against the background of the disconnect or contradictions that emerges when it comes to many South African women and political voice sketched out in section 1.3 above.

Since the 1970's Rancière has elaborated on his intellectual project in the form of many articles, books, lectures and interviews that spans numerous disciplines. It has been argued that Jacques Rancière's philosophy of equality represents one of the most important and original contributions to the political thought of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.⁵⁰ I therefore hope that engaging all three stages of his work, will serve to provide a clear picture of his politics. As mentioned, Rancière is the main theoretical focus. The thesis can therefore also be regarded as a way of introducing the reader that has not yet come across his work to his notion of politics. I examine the notion of voice by using Rancière's work on politics. The aim is to investigate what lines of thinking or contribution an exploration of his theory can yield when approaching the issue of voice and speaking politically.

It is from the perspective of Rancière's work that the rest of the research takes place. Chapter 4 starts with outlining and explaining the main arguments of

⁴⁷ Rancière J (1991).

⁴⁸ Rancière J (1989).

⁴⁹ Rancière J (2003).

⁵⁰ James I *The New French Philosophy* (2012) 110.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" As mentioned, the impact of Spivak's essay has been tremendous. I explain her main arguments with the purpose of addressing her concerns on the impossibility of the subaltern speaking. The discussion is not an in-depth analysis of the essay, its interpretations and impact. Spivak's essay and the work that resulted from it has been cited, invoked, imitated, summarised, critiqued, revered, reviled, misread, misunderstood and misappropriated in English and in translation.⁵¹ The academic contributions that engage with it are legion and its significance cannot be understated. Further, Spivak has revisited the essay in a chapter titled "History" which spans just over a hundred pages in her book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present*.⁵² An in-depth and detailed analysis is therefore beyond the scope of this study. I outline her main arguments and problematise and reflect on her analysis in an effort to better understand what it means to have a voice. The question that arises for me is whether problematising the essay through the lens of Rancière's theory can result in answering her question differently, or, if it identifies moments within which the subaltern can speak. In her essay Spivak declares for various reasons that subalterns, as the most oppressed and invisible constituencies in society, cannot be heard in dominant political frameworks. This argument partly rests on her definition and construction of subalternity. The displacement of her arguments from the perspective of Rancière's politics serves to highlight important points regarding the notion of voice and the possibility of actually speaking politically and being heard. It therefore becomes important to address her concerns and it is my contention that the displacement of her arguments from the perspective of Rancière's work can serve to highlight important and valuable points regarding the notion of voice. It should be emphasised here that Rancière's work on politics is my main theoretical focus. As such, I engage with Spivak's essay from a specific angle or perspective, namely from the perspective of some of Rancière's main postulations with regard to politics and political voicing. A larger investigation or comparison of the work of Spivak in relation to Rancière's work may have

⁵¹ See Morris R (ed.) (201) 2.

⁵² Spivak GC (1999) 198-310.

resulted in some interesting theoretical points for consideration.⁵³ As will be explained in more detail, Spivak focuses on the specific obstacles that confront political voicing and as such I explain some of her most important points on speaking politically.⁵⁴ However, the aim of the research is not to compare the two theorists, but rather to make sense of political voicing through an analysis of different notions put forth by Rancière. My aim is to follow Rancière's thought in order to consider what possibilities of thinking can emerge when writing about voice and as such I limit my engagement with Spivak's work to the extent of serving and answering the specific research questions formulated above.

In chapter 5 I discuss some literary and historical figures and their relevant political statements through the lens of the politics of Rancière. I start with the figure of Olympe De Gouges, a French revolutionary woman that blurs traditional political boundaries that Rancière himself discusses and analyses.⁵⁵ I also explore the character of Lucy in J.M Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* as a character that overturns the normative framework that she finds herself in.⁵⁶ I further discuss the South African Shack-dweller's movement (Abahlali baseMjondolo) and the numerous political statements that they have made declaring their equality against frameworks that describe their statements as less than political.⁵⁷ I also discuss the figure of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri that Spivak discusses in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" as a woman who recasts gender positions and limitations against silencing. The discussion of these examples is a reaction against the problems and difficulty of voicing described within the background of the thesis. It is also a way of practicing a "method of equality" that is used and suggested by

⁵³ In this regard I would like to thank one of the anonymous examiners of the thesis that drew my attention to the possibility of such a theoretical exploration. Such an exploration would have allowed for an interesting and possibly meaningful critical engagement with Rancière's work. However, my reflections here are more focused in that I follow Rancière's work and the possibilities around political voicing that it can open up or point to. The aim here is to lay the theoretical foundation from where future or further critical and other engagement with Rancière in relation to the South African context can take place.

⁵⁴ See chapter 4 below.

⁵⁵ See Rancière J *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2004) 103.

⁵⁶ Coetzee JM *Disgrace* (1999).

⁵⁷ Abahlali baseMondjolo (See Abahlali.org. (accessed 28/12/2014).

Rancière. I therefore employ his concepts so as to attempt to make sense of voice. I suggest that in all these instances a type of political speaking occurs and my aim is to contemplate their meaning and significance along the lines of Rancière's postulations as a way of considering possibilities of voice and speaking.

It is further important to mention that the research can be described as a desktop study by way of the review and analysis of various literary sources. The aim, as mentioned, is to understand Jacques Rancière's work and specifically his description and definition of politics. In this regard I engage with some of Rancière's main works on politics, but also refer to a number of authors that can be described as Rancière's principal English commentators.⁵⁸ As Oliver Davis, one of Rancière's most prominent analysts, notes, it is only relatively recently that Rancière's impact has begun to be felt in the English-speaking world.⁵⁹ The moment of reception of any thinker's work and the years following it becomes integral in explaining and engaging a thinker's work as correctly and accurately as possible. The sources and authors that I have chosen are sources and authors more frequently referred to in other academic engagements.⁶⁰ These authors

⁵⁸ The main Rancièrean works that I engage with are *Disagreement* (1999) trans. Rose J, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* trans. Cocoran S (2009), *On the Shores of Politics* trans. Heron L (1995), *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge* trans. Melehy H (1994), *The Nights of Labor: The Worker's Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* trans. Drury J (1989), *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* trans. Ross K (1991) and *The Philosopher and His Poor* trans. Drury J (2003).

⁵⁹ Davis O *Jacques Rancière* (2010) vii.

⁶⁰ One of the most notable sources in this regard is Davis O *Jacques Rancière* (2010) referred to above. This book by Davis is the first book-length publication by a single author devoted entirely to Rancière's thought. Davis has also recently edited a volume of critical essays on Rancière's work. See Davis (ed.) *Rancière Now: Current Perspectives on Jacques Rancière* (2013). Another important introductory work that I frequently refer to is Tanke J *Jacques Rancière: An Introduction: Philosophy, Politics, Aesthetics* (2011). Tanke situates a distinctive approach against the background of Continental philosophy and postulates critical questions on how we might proceed after encountering Rancière. An important volume of essays that I refer to is Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics* (2009). This book includes essays by Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy, Peter Hallward, Étienne Balibar, Yves Citton, Todd May and Kristin Ross. Ross translated Rancière's important work on pedagogy *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (1991). Gabriel Rockhill, the editor of the volume, translated Rancière's important work *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (2004). I also frequently refer to Todd May. May has published numerous articles and chapters in books on Rancière. See for example

include principle translators of Rancière's work and authors that played an integral role in introducing his work to the English-speaking world.⁶¹ What makes and explanation of Rancière's work difficult is the fact that his body of work is especially resistant to explanatory exposition.⁶² Firstly, Rancière's work embodies a suspicion of the very act of explaining or explanation. In this regard he employs a method of equality that I will elaborate on in chapter 5 of the thesis. His philosophical style, as Davis further explains, is declarative or "assertoric" rather than explanatory.⁶³ He proposes theses and seeks to constructively elaborate new conceptual frameworks of understanding. His thinking and writing strives to be egalitarian.⁶⁴ Parataxis or juxtaposition is his principle conceptual mode and he tends to eschew hierarchal constructions.⁶⁵ His approach can be described as one that intervenes, often in discussions that are already very complex. As such, explaining Rancière's work gives rise to a particular set of difficulties. In this regard other or secondary sources become important when attempting to understand his notion of politics. My aim is to present as thorough an understanding of his work on politics as possible within the scope of this project. Most of the sources that I use read Rancière in light of his intellectual history and background. As such, I also, as mentioned, explain his background and the trajectory of his thought in the first section of chapter 2. In his work, Rancière further offers a particular version of interdisciplinarity.⁶⁶ Rather than affirming disciplines or working within specific disciplinary frameworks, Rancière combines disciplines and attempts to recast their boundaries. In an attempt to explain his work as well as attempting to capture something of the spirit of Rancière's work,

"Rancière and Anarchism" in Deranty J & Ross A (eds.) *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene: The Philosophy of Radical Equality* (2012) 117, "Rancière in South-Carolina" in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 105, "There are no Queers: Jacques Rancière and post-identity politics" *Borderlands* (2009) 3, May T "Jacques Rancière and the Ethics of Equality" *SubStance* (2007) 24. May also published a full-length book on Rancière politics titled *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière* (2008).

⁶¹ See footnote 3 above.

⁶² Davis O (2010) viii –xi.

⁶³ As above.

⁶⁴ As above.

⁶⁵ As above.

⁶⁶ See Ross K "Historicising Untimeliness" in in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 24-25.

I use the following approaches in my writing: Firstly, in explaining Rancière’s work on politics (in chapters 2 and 3) my writing, more often than not, assumes a declarative tone. As mentioned, Rancière’s writing is declarative. In this regard, he proposes theses and leaves the reader free to take it or leave it.⁶⁷ I therefore declare and assert some of his standpoints and definitions on politics, rather than adopting an explanatory tone. Secondly, I identified a specific problem that I want to address- understanding the notion of political voice- and rather than trying to address this problem within specific conceptual frameworks or disciplines, I follow Rancière and adopt a more interdisciplinary approach. I especially adopt this approach in chapter 5 where I discuss some literary and historical figures and political statements. Lastly, Rancière’s work embodies “dissensus”, a term he uses to explain his politics.⁶⁸ Always looking to subvert, through an egalitarian understanding and approach, Rancière challenges forms of systematisation. He continuously rubs against the grain of established lines of thinking and regimes of thought. In this regard, I also take my cue from Rancière in my approach to and description of the problems that I attempt to address. Rather than, for example, proposing legal reform or asserting approaches to rights and constitutionalism or for that matter affirming Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s assertion that the subaltern cannot speak mentioned earlier, I aim to question certain established frameworks against the specific South African background explained above.

It should be mentioned here again that when it comes to the political subjectivity, agency and the speech of women in the South African context, there are a number of ways in which to analyse, approach or explain the notion of political voice. This project represents but one way in which to contemplate these issues. The problem can be framed in many different ways. My exploration of Jacques Rancière’s work in this thesis is but one perspective from where to explore and imagine the notion of political voice. It is also important to note that in the heterogeneous South African society, there are vast cultural, ethnic, religious and socio-economic differences between women. The experiences of South African

⁶⁷ Davis O (2010) viii –xi.

⁶⁸ See section 2.3.1 below.

women are diverse and even more so diverse given the historical marginalisation of black women and other women of colour through the systems of colonisation and apartheid, which positioned white women to a higher political status. It therefore becomes impossible to reduce women in this context to a social category or describe them as having a shared identity.⁶⁹ As will be explained later, such as a reduction or description runs counter to Rancière's analysis of politics and his work rather points to fleeting and temporary identities and categories.⁷⁰ As it pertains to the background sketched above, my aim is not to offer a universal account of the experiences of women, or to make assumptions with regards to their positions, locales, capabilities or understandings. Rather, my interest lies in the way in which the consensual frameworks of government and society describe and practice the empowerment of women in South Africa and the related efforts to create a more equal society and the contexts of many women as it pertains specifically to the well-known and extremely high rates of sexual violence and dire socio-economic circumstances of the majority of women. It is within this configuration of the public-political description of and thinking about the category of women and the perceived solutions to certain problems that I locate the need to reflect on voice so as to

⁶⁹ Such a description can be referred to as "essentialism" or the notion that "a unitary, 'essential' women's experience can be isolated and described independently of race, class, sexual orientation, and other realities of experience". See Harris "Race and essentialism in feminist legal theory" *Stanford Law Review* (1990) 585. My goal here and with the description of the background is by no means to describe a universal suffering or experience that can be located in the lives of all South African women. As mentioned, my interests rather lies in the precariousness of the specific relationship between the way in which government and society in general attempt to empower women in South Africa, the efforts to address rape and poverty, the fact that sexual violence and poverty still persists and where and when the notion of political voice can be located or detected within this relationship. My suggestion ultimately is exactly that Rancière's politics can point is into new directions of making sense of these issues or relationships.

⁷⁰ See sections 2.3.3 and 2.3.4 below. Rancière refers to a process of subjectivation in his politics. This process is never about asserting identity categories, but always about refusing the identities imposed by others or systems of power. Rancière proposes discord, polemics and the disruption and disordering of set and existing identity categories. He is highly critical of the way in which existing categories of race, gender and socio-economic position function to silence people's voices, rather than resulting in political speech. Ultimately this is a valuable insight that I attempt to demonstrate and I suggest that Rancière's politics might point to new ways in which we are to think about categories, such as the category of women, especially as formulated within consensual frameworks.

open up possible different understandings and ways of reading, thinking and speaking. My aim is exactly to demonstrate, through reflecting on the notion of voice, that Jacques Rancière's politics, informed by his intellectual background and animated by his engagement with certain historical figures, can provide new insights and frameworks when it comes to our understanding of the notion of political voice. Rancière's work indeed points to different inventions and ways of thinking about categories or descriptions of situations of inequality, politics and political voicing and his work further suggests localised, individual and contextual thinking in this regard. The aim is to suggest, against dominant configurations of the relationship between political voice, women in the South African context and questions surrounding politics that Rancière's work can contribute in mapping different relationships, different approaches and different ways of imagining these relationships. The aim is not to produce final answers or solutions in any way. Rather, it is to reflect and contemplate possibilities and to postulate Rancièrian notions, readings and ideas so as to open up questions around voice. "Reflection" in this regard does not indicate solving problems or offering solutions to the contexts of sexual violence and poverty that many South African women live in. It also does not indicate formulating concrete steps in an effort to go forward. It rather indicates a way of opening up or framing questions in an effort to point to lines of thinking from where further engagement can take place. It therefore involves a journey that can hopefully point me to new insights and possibilities from where to think about and engage with the notion voice.

I start in the next chapter to discuss and explain Jacques Rancière's innovative work on politics.

CHAPTER 2

The Politics of Jacques Rancière

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss Jacques Rancière's work on politics as the main theoretical focus of the thesis. As mentioned, I explain Rancière's formulations of politics so as to understand and reflect on the notion of political voice. The aim of this chapter is to thoroughly examine Rancière's work and to reflect on the meaning of voice within the context of his description and definition of politics. The chapter unfolds in the following way: In the first section I attempt to theoretically situate Rancière's work by explaining his background and intellectual beginnings. As mentioned in the introduction, the discussion of Rancière's background involves discussing his relationship with his former teacher, Louis Althusser. Althusser influenced Rancière's work in a significant way. Although Rancière later became one of Althusser's most trenchant critics, his work was and remains shaped by the experiences he had under the tutelage of the Marxist philosopher. Indeed, it has been noted that it was perhaps the circumstances surrounding Rancière's break with Althusser that most decisively shaped the development of his philosophy as a whole and the radical egalitarianism that characterises it.⁷¹ It is the way in which he distanced himself from Althusserian theory that determined the specificity of his subsequent concerns. Therefore, in order to thoroughly understand Rancière's notion of politics, it becomes necessary to shed light on his early contextual setting, especially his relationship with Althusser. Moreover, Rancière's work is not easily identifiable within dominant theoretical movements. I explore this point in more detail below. For now it can be mentioned that his work is expansive; it stretches across disciplines and resists easy categorisation. The broader difficulty of situating his thinking in any clear disciplinary framework has been noted many times.⁷² It is therefore also in an effort to properly theoretically locate his work that the discussion of his intellectual beginnings becomes important. I therefore discuss Rancière's

⁷¹ James I (2012) 111.

⁷² See James I (2012) 111.

background to the extent that it informs his work on politics. By way of discussing his background, I begin by shortly describing Rancière's current scholarly influence as well as the nature of his engagements. I also later outline the political events that transpired during the month of May in 1968 in France. These events had an immense impact on Rancière. The upheavals by students and workers during that time crystallised his objections to Althusser's thought. Much of Rancière's work thereafter can partly be understood as an attempt to give discursive form to the idea of radical equality that he saw as implicit in the events of May 1968.⁷³ I further outline some of the main characteristics of Althusser's project on Karl Marx in order to allow for a thorough understanding of Rancière's reaction against Althusser. The first section is therefore an attempt to theoretically position Rancière's work by exploring and explaining his current impact, his intellectual beginnings under Louis Althusser and his experiences around May 1968.

In the second section, I discuss and explain Rancière's notion of politics. This discussion is categorised with reference to five elements or moments within his definition of politics, namely, "the police order", "politics (equality)", "the political subject", "the miscount and the wrong" and "the distribution of the sensible". These elements or moments in Rancière's thinking are closely related and interrelated. Structuring his theorising in this way should help to offer a clear explanation of his politics.⁷⁴ I work from the premise that the discussion of the five elements of his politics, considered in light of his background, will provide a comprehensive explanation of his imaginative formulation of politics. The description of his engagement with certain historical figures in the next chapter provides a detailed picture and understanding of his thought. In the third and concluding section of this chapter, I reflect on the meaning of voice in the context of the discussion of Rancière's politics. I contemplate the notion of voice within the framework of his accounts and consider them against the background of the

⁷³ Davis O *Jacques Rancière* (2010) 1.

⁷⁴ See for example Davis O (2010) as well as Tanke J (2011) who also broadly structure their discussions of Rancière's politics along the lines of these elements or aspects.

disconnect between the formal position of women and the lived realities of many South African women set out in the introductory chapter.

2.2 Rancière's Background

2.2.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, it has been argued that Jacques Rancière's philosophy of equality represents one of the most important and original contributions to the political thought of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.⁷⁵ Rancière is now in his eighth decade and interest in his work has never been greater. Davis notes that since the 1970's Rancière has progressively elaborated his intellectual project in numerous articles, books, lectures and interviews ranging over a daunting number of disciplines.⁷⁶ During the last decade several high profile international conferences and keynote addresses have been devoted to his work.⁷⁷ The English translation of his book *Disagreement*, considered to be his most important work on politics, resulted in numerous articles that turned into a steady stream of special issues, symposia and edited volumes.⁷⁸ It is said that the potential of Rancière's work can be found in his ability and willingness to treat politics anew and to approach the question of politics from unexplored angles.⁷⁹ His work has influenced, echoed and demanded critical reaction from leading intellectuals such as Slavoj Žižek⁸⁰ and Alain Badiou.⁸¹ Rancière's corpus extends well beyond the boundaries of traditional philosophy and includes engagements with the fields of philosophy, history, politics, sociology, literary theory, literary history, pedagogy, aesthetics, art, psychoanalysis and film theory. Although Rancière has an explicit aversion to systematic or organised philosophies that will be elaborated on later, he has developed a robust project that is redefining contemporary thought about the

⁷⁵ In this regard, see James I (2012) 110.

⁷⁶ Davis O (2010) vii.

⁷⁷ Davis O (2010) vii.

⁷⁸ Rancière J *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (1999) trans Rose J.

⁷⁹ James I (2012) 110.

⁸⁰ See Žižek S *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (1999).

⁸¹ See Badiou A *Metapolitics* (2005) trans. Barker J.

complex relationship between politics and aesthetics.⁸² Rockhill and Watts note that if his reception in the English-speaking world has not kept pace with his rise to prominence in France, it is in part because of the fact that his idiosyncratic work does not fit comfortably within dominant models and models of intellectual importation.⁸³ He is still at times mistakenly classified as a structuralist theorist because of his early contribution to Louis Althusser's *Lire le Capital*.⁸⁴ However, as mentioned, he became one of Althusser's most rigorous critics. His first book *La Leçon d' Althusser* or *Althusser's Lesson* was a powerful collection of essays criticising his former teacher. Rockhill and Watts further explains that he has also repeatedly criticised the "discourse of mastery and the logic of hidden truths" which he identifies with the structuralist project reaching back to Marx.⁸⁵ He

⁸² See for example Rancière J *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (2009) trans. Cocoran S and *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009) trans. Elliot G.

⁸³ Rockhill G & Watts P "Introduction: Rancière: *Thinker of Dissensus*" in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics* (2009) 1.

⁸⁴ Althusser L (ed.) *Lire Capital* (1996) originally published in 1965.

⁸⁵ Rockhill G & Watts P in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 1. See Rancière J *La Leçon d' Althusser* (1973). Structuralism was one of the most influential theoretical movements in twentieth century thought, especially French thought. It reached its height in the mid-1960's with the appearance of major collective studies of "narratology" (See *Communications* 1966), the writings of Jacques Lacan, particularly *Écrits* (1966), Michel's Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1966), Louis Althusser's *For Marx* (1966) and *Reading Capital* by Althusser and Etienne Balibar (1965). In general, as Macey explains, structuralism can be defined as an attempt to unify the human sciences by applying a single model of methodology based on Saussurean linguistics. Macey D *Dictionary of Critical Theory* (2000) 364-364. This general linguistic model derives from Saussure's insight that language is not a list of names of things, but a system of signs consisting of a signifier (an acoustic image) and a signified (a concept). Macey D (2000) 364-365. Signs do not designate an external reality and are meaningful only because of the similarities and differences between them. As Macey explains, the so-called Prague School made a further significant contribution to the development of structuralism by introducing the idea of functionalism, which is the idea that the meaning of linguistic units is the function they perform within the system of language. Macey D (2000) 364-365. What becomes pertinent in structuralism is that language is no longer seen as a means of expression at the disposal of a speaking subject, but rather language, or the symbolic in Lacanian terms, is the precondition for both thought and social existence. See further Culler J *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (1975). The proceedings of the John Hopkins' Conference on *The Languages of Criticism and the Science of Man* in October 1966, marked the American "moment of structuralism", though, it also became clear in retrospect that the conference and especially Jacques Derrida's contribution ("Structure Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences") inaugurated a critique of structuralism. Macey D (2000) 364-365. Derrida described deconstruction as a criticism of structuralism. Although it is difficult to identify it with any specific school of thought, poststructuralism is usually associated with the work of Deleuze, Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida, Baudrillard and Rorty. These

therefore cannot be described as a structuralist, nor, can he be described as a poststructuralist, the other dominant theoretical movement of his time and context.⁸⁶ It even becomes difficult to decide whether Rancière is a philosopher, a historian, an anti-philosopher, or an archivist of popular struggles.⁸⁷ As mentioned in chapter one, Rancière's work introduces irreversible disturbances in the fixed demarcation of disciplines.⁸⁸ The boundaries of disciplines are blurred. The boundaries between the sayable and unsayable, the proper and improper, the legitimate and illegitimate are all dismantled. Rancière plays with the intervals between various discourses. His aim is always to derail the regimes of thought "that would assign certain ways of doing, speaking and seeing to a stable set of competences, qualities, or properties."⁸⁹ It might be precisely the fact that his

theorists can all be described as poststructuralists. Poststructuralism is often equated with deconstruction and also with postmodernism in general, but, as Macey further explains, it can also be seen as a strand within everything from "New Historicism" to postcolonial theory. Macey D (2000) 364-365. The common core of these tendencies can be described as "a reluctance to ground discourse in any theory of metaphysical origins, an insistence on the inevitable plurality and instability of meaning, a distrust of systematic scientificity and the abandoning of the Enlightenment project." See Macey D (2000) 364-365.

⁸⁶ See Rockhill G & Watts P in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 2. As Rockhill and Watts explains, Rancière cannot be described as either a structuralist or post-structuralist theorist, the dominant theoretical movements of his time and context. Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 2. Firstly, Rancière rejects the characteristic structuralist distinction between science and ideology suggested by his former teacher Althusser (and which will be discussed in detail below) and he also forcefully declared his distance from post-structuralists such as Gilles Deleuze and Jean-Francois Lyotard. Rockhill and Watts further elucidates that Rancière has been interested from the very beginning in developing a research agenda that broke with the dominant intellectual paradigms of his student years, specifically structuralism. Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 2. As mentioned, he also did not follow the lead of his poststructuralist compatriots or "the philosophers of difference" as he describes them. See Tanke J (2011) 9. There are a variety of different markers that distinguishes his work from that of post-structuralists. These markers as Rockhill and Watts articulately summarises include: "his aversion to compulsive textualism (visible in the general lack of quotations and his allergy to etymology), his angst-free relationship with Hegel, his general indifference toward phenomenology, his lack of deference to ethico-religious forms of alterity, his criticisms of the ethical turn in politics, his disregard for the supposed spectres of metaphysics and the project of deconstruction, and his intense commitment to history that has led him beyond the canonical writers of the philosophic tradition". See Rockhill G & Watts P in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 2.

⁸⁷ See Bosteels B "Rancière's Leftism, Or, Politics and Its Discontents" in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 160.

⁸⁸ As above.

⁸⁹ As above.

work does not fit comfortably within identifiable intellectual movements that makes it of such interest today.

Rancière has developed a distinct project with his own conceptual framework and reading and writing strategies. His work maintains a sharp polemical edge as he regularly critically engages with prevailing assumptions and their underlying framework. It has been argued that he is a thinker of dissensus who constantly undermines what is taken to be the solid footing of previous philosophic work.⁹⁰ Hallward explains that some of the most consistent aspects of his thinking are the affirmation of a fundamental inconsistency and instability of experience as well as a refusal of any gesture of authority or theoretical mastery that seeks to categorise and maintain experience by limiting it to conventional categories or disciplines.⁹¹ This can be directly related to the difficulty of theoretically positioning Rancière's thought:

Rather than abandoning philosophy in favour of another discipline, the practice of writing that Rancière develops questions the protocols, conventions and limits which would allow history, philosophy, political philosophy or aesthetics to maintain themselves as stable categories.⁹²

Rancière states:

My problem has always been to escape the division between disciplines, because what interests me is the question of distribution of territories, which is always a way of deciding who is qualified to speak about what.⁹³

Below I elaborate on Rancière's relationship with Louis Althusser.

2.2.2 Rancière and Althusser

Rancière began his career as a participant in Althusser's reading group on Karl Marx's *Capital* that was held between January and April 1965 at the École Normale Supérieure (ENS), Rue d'Ulm in Paris. Tanke notes that the broader environment in which Rancière began his career was marked by the social and political radicalism which grew up during and after the Algerian war and which resulted in

⁹⁰ See Tanke J (2011) 9.

⁹¹ See Hallward P "Jacques Rancière and the Subversion of Mastery" *Paragraph: A Journal of Modern Critical Theory* (2005) 26.

⁹² James I (2012) 111.

⁹³ Tanke J (2011) 9.

the revolutionary events of May 1968, which will be discussed below.⁹⁴ Rancière's intellectual beginnings can be situated within the milieu of theoretical and structuralist Marxism of which Althusser was the most prominent and leading proponent at the time.⁹⁵ The influence of Althusser on the French philosophical scene of the 1960's cannot be overestimated. In 1948, upon passing his aggregation in philosophy, Tanke notes that Althusser was awarded a position as *agrégé répétiteur* at ENS.⁹⁶ As one of Althusser's subsequent roles was to prepare students for their own aggregation in philosophy, he participated in the intellectual formation of many who would become France's most distinguished intellectuals in the twentieth century.⁹⁷ Althusser also played a crucial role in opening the ENS up to new theoretical perspectives, such as linguistics, Levi-Strauss' structural anthropology and the readings of Sigmund Freud pioneered by psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan.⁹⁸ Etienne Balibar has stated that Althusser made the ENS "a centre for philosophy that was living and not academic" and compared the atmosphere to "a proper philosophical life" in the sense that the ancients would have understood it.⁹⁹ Tanke further explains that Rancière himself fondly recalled the "intellectual dynamism" centred on Althusser and credits the differences he articulated with phenomenology as offering "a kind of liberation from university culture."¹⁰⁰

Althusser made the, by now, famous assertion that he was rereading Karl Marx "as a philosopher".¹⁰¹ He contended that Marx's early and mature works were separated by an "epistemological break".¹⁰² Davis explains that at the beginning of the 1960's Althusser advanced, by way of a series of journal articles, an original,

⁹⁴ As above.

⁹⁵ As above.

⁹⁶ Tanke J (2011) 10.

⁹⁷ As above.

⁹⁸ Tanke J (2011) 10.

⁹⁹ As above.

¹⁰⁰ As above.

¹⁰¹ Davis O (2010) 2.

¹⁰² As above.

albeit idiosyncratic, reading of Marx.¹⁰³ His reading was based on the radical break between Marx's early ideological writings and his more mature scientific project of *Capital*.¹⁰⁴ This break is also known as the science/ideology distinction.¹⁰⁵ Very simply put, ideology embodied for Althusser all those forms of ideas, understandings, beliefs and values which allow individuals to collectively function in a given socio-economic world and which work to sustain the relations of power and domination which underpin that socio economic order.¹⁰⁶ In this context, personal beliefs or attitudes (religious values or shared social discourse for example) are seen to be a function of ideology and part of the process in which individuals are "interpellated" as the subjects of ideology.¹⁰⁷ Importantly, much of what can be regarded as philosophy or political theory is also a product of ideology, which is an imaginary construct or relation that conceals actually existing constructs and relations.¹⁰⁸ James notes that as opposed to ideology, Althusser proposed his specific understanding of Marxist science.¹⁰⁹ Althusser contended that Marx's early writings were tainted by their reliance on the vocabulary of German Idealism that prevented the development of a scientific understanding of social, political and economic reality.¹¹⁰ Therefore, according to

¹⁰³ As above.

¹⁰⁴ As above.

¹⁰⁵ Tanke J (2011) 11. See Althusser L & Balibar E *Lire Le Capital* (1968).

¹⁰⁶ James I (2010) 114.

¹⁰⁷ As above. "Interpellation" refers to the mechanism that produces subjects in such a way that they recognise their own existence in terms of the dominant ideology of the society that they live in. See Macey D (2000) 203. In French it is commonly used to mean, "being taken in by the police for questioning" or it can also refer to questioning a minister of parliament. See Macey D (2000) 203. Macey mentions that Althusser's basic illustration of the mechanism exploits the sense of "questioning" or "haling". See Macey D (2000) 203. An individual walking down the street is hailed by a police officer- "Hey, you there!" and turns round to recognise the fact that he is being addressed. In doing so, that individual is constituted as subject. According to Althusser the idea of interpellation demonstrates that subjects are always already products of ideology and thus subverts the idealist thesis that subjectivity is primarily self-founding. See Macey D (2000) 203. See also Althusser L *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (1971) trans. Brewster B.

¹⁰⁸ As above.

¹⁰⁹ James I (2012) 114. For Althusser, as James explains, scientific knowledge is not ideology, attitude or opinion. It is a theoretical practice that identifies the actually existing structures which, behind the veil of ideological appearance, underpin social, economic and historical forms. James I (2012) 114.

¹¹⁰ Davis O (2010) 2.

Althusser, as Tanke elucidates, the later works belonged to a fundamentally different “problematic”, the term he used for the general conceptual framework in which concepts gain their meaning and applicability.¹¹¹ He argued that all sciences begin with a phase in which the world is understood from a perspective positioned around human nature and concrete particular facts; and it is only after an epistemological break with this early phase that abstract and so-called proper scientific conceptual knowledge of the world become possible.¹¹² Althusser contended that Marx’s work after 1845, specifically *Capital*, was not continuous with his work of the early period, but rather constituted, as Davis explains, a radical break with it.¹¹³ He suggested that *Capital* was a theoretical revolution and that it made possible knowledge of the world as it really is. This he termed “Marxist science”. Marx’s early work, by contrast, represented an inferior, pre-scientific form of understanding that he accordingly termed “ideology”. Ideology attempted to explain the world in terms of human nature and could therefore also be characterised as “humanist” and “anthropological”.¹¹⁴ Belief in “the break” is a hallmark of Althusserianism. Davis explains that non-Althusserian Marxists tend not to think that there is such a pronounced rupture or break, although many would acknowledge that there is a discernable movement away from explanation in human terms toward more abstract, theoretical formulations.¹¹⁵ Tanke notes that in *For Marx*, Althusser suggested that Marx’s thought could be categorised according to the following schema: 1840-44: early works, 1845: the works of the break, 1845-57: transitional works, 1857-83: mature works.¹¹⁶ The science/ideology distinction is central to nearly all Althusser’s thought and much of his work consisted in properly separating the scientific notions from the remnants of idealism that he thought hampered or limited Marx’s thought.¹¹⁷ An example of the more humanist writings can be seen in

¹¹¹ Tanke J (2011) 11.

¹¹² Davis O (2010) 2.

¹¹³ As above.

¹¹⁴ Davis O (2010) 2. See Althusser L & Balibar E (1970) 17.

¹¹⁵ As above.

¹¹⁶ Tanke J (2011) 12. See Althusser L (1971) 40.

¹¹⁷ As above. As Tanke explains, according to Althusser, the rupture must be continually produced if Marx’s thought was not to lapse into the speculative thought that preceded it.

Marx's early account of the way in which factory workers are alienated by their work. These writings, as Tanke explains, centred on the human worker and the way in which his work gave rise to feelings of being divided from himself and from his fellow workers as well as from the object that he is producing.¹¹⁸ "Alienation", in this early sense, is a form of unhappiness, a psychological feeling of being divided from oneself.¹¹⁹ As Davis illuminates, the first nine chapters of *Capital* on the other hand, begins with a very abstract exposition of economic concepts such as "commodity", "value" and "labour".¹²⁰ The logic of Marx's approach here suggests that these concepts are necessary if the underlying mechanisms that account for the real basis of feelings of alienation are to be understood.¹²¹ Therefore, as Davis elucidates, in *Capital*, the alienating effects of work can only be understood properly in terms of the structure of the economic relations in the society in question.¹²² These relations are not immediately accessible however. They cannot be perceived or discerned by the factory worker, as he or she requires a developed theoretical understanding of the underlying economic processes and structures.¹²³

Marx was, according to Althusser, a voracious and remarkably perceptive reader.¹²⁴ Althusser suggested that Marx, in *Capital*, could be seen as undertaking

See Tanke J (2011) 12. Activating this break therefore involved scratching Marx's corpus of concepts such as "labour", "alienation", "consciousness", "species-being", and the vague anthropology they refer to. Tanke J (2011) 12. Althusser can be read as attempting to distance Marxism from the humanist platform espoused by the French Communist Party and he also worked to undermine its attempt to find common ground with socialists, social democrats and the Catholic left. Tanke J (2011) 12. His strategy involved distancing Marx from his predecessors. He, for example, as Tanke explains, opposed the interpretation applied by Marx and Engels themselves, according to which historical materialism would be Hegelianism in inverted form. Tanke J (2011) 12-13. Althusser contended that readers should take seriously the famous thesis of Marx (*XIth on Feuerbach*) in which philosophy was condemned for only having merely interpreted the world.

¹¹⁸ Tanke J (2011) 13.

¹¹⁹ Davis O (2010) 3.

¹²⁰ As above.

¹²¹ As above.

¹²² As above.

¹²³ As above.

¹²⁴ As above.

two distinctive types of reading.¹²⁵ The second type of reading is the reading that interested Althusser. Davis explains this type of reading in the following way: Althusser suggested that when Marx reads the work of the economist Adam Smith for example, Marx discerned that Smith's theory had hit upon a correct answer to a question which Smith himself had not known how to formulate, but which Marx was able to pose openly and explicitly.¹²⁶ Marx started by handling as questions what bourgeois political economists saw as solutions. As Davis notes, his method consisted of working through the blind spots in their writings in order to supply concepts for the economic phenomena that they left unexplained.¹²⁷ Marx, for example, applies the name "surplus-value" to what Smith could think of only as profit, rent and interest.¹²⁸ While Marx was not the first to isolate this concept, Althusser contends that he was the first to handle it properly, using it to reconstruct "the causal nexus to which it belongs".¹²⁹ Tanke explains that after identifying "surplus-value" as the key explanation of capital, Marx used it to elaborate the entirety of the capitalist mode of production, which is itself viewed as a historically variable system of effects.¹³⁰ Importantly, for Althusser, this understanding of the mode of production is what allowed Marx to describe capitalism's distinct form of structural causality, or the manner in which the capitalist system is determined by "the reciprocal functioning of economic, political, ideological and scientific components".¹³¹ The scientificity of Marx's analysis thus results from the "identification of a concept-problem and the rigorous analysis of the causal system to which it belongs".¹³² Althusser termed

¹²⁵ See Althusser L & Balibar E (1970) 19-21.

¹²⁶ Davis O (2010) 3.

¹²⁷ As above.

¹²⁸ Tanke J (2011) 13.

¹²⁹ As above.

¹³⁰ As above.

¹³¹ As above.

¹³² As above. It should be mentioned here that Rancière's marked difference from structuralism and post-structuralism can also be seen in his approach to writing and reading. Rancière describes his break from Althusser in terms of a shift away from a hermeneutic reading of texts towards a more affirmative view of language. He moved away from a critique based on the "Saussurian distinction between *la langue* and *la parole*", the distinction between underlying, unconscious structures and the cultural, social, political and other texts that are determined by those structures. See Arsenjuk L "On Jacques Rancière" *Fronesis*

this type of reading “symptomatic” and in doing so he aligned Marx with a kind of psychoanalyst whose therapy comprised of helping the analyst to formulate the problem that lies beneath the surface manifestation that is his or her symptom.¹³³ In other words, to read Marx “as a philosopher” meant reading his text as a psychoanalyst, taking what it says on the surface to be a mere symptom of its underlying meaning.¹³⁴ Althusser’s intention was to explicitly theoretically formulate this underlying meaning of the philosophy of Marx, which he thought was implemented but not stated explicitly in *Capital*. He thereby applied Marx’s form of reading to his own work.¹³⁵ Davis explains that Marx’s philosophy, according to Althusser, was a theory of history as ultimately determined by relationships of material production.¹³⁶ This theory is also sometimes called “dialectical materialism”.¹³⁷

Althusser described, as Tanke explains, the symptomatic method of reading as “restoring to the text its unconscious”.¹³⁸ Symptomatic reading conceives of a theoretical text as “the necessary combination of sightings, lacks and oversights whose relationships it attempts to make explicit”.¹³⁹ It begins with “present terms, identifies the absent concepts upon which the text nevertheless relies, and attempts to reconstruct the mechanism their interactions bespeak”.¹⁴⁰ With respect to *Capital* this involves attending to those analyses that exploit, but do

(2005) 1. This comes down to a distancing from any kind of reading based on suspicion of the meaning of texts towards embracing an approach that is more affirmative of the surface of text itself. Arsenjuk L *Fronesis* (2005) 1-2. It will hopefully become clear later that for Rancière the surface of texts does not hide what is underlying, but becomes a scene on which the creativity and effectiveness of language games and speech acts are demonstrated. In Rancière’s approach speech acts are not understood as ideological artefacts, but precisely as acts or political gestures that are in themselves capable of reconfiguring the situation in which they are enunciated. See Arsenjuk L “On Jacques Rancière” *Fronesis* (2005) 1. Published in English on 2007/03/05 available online at Eurozine Journals www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-01-01-arsenjuk-en.html (accessed 28-12-2014).

¹³³ Davis O (2010) 3.

¹³⁴ As above

¹³⁵ As above.

¹³⁶ As above.

¹³⁷ As above.

¹³⁸ Tanke J (2011) 14.

¹³⁹ As above.

¹⁴⁰ As above

not explicitly articulate philosophical concepts. The symptomatic reading of *Capital* therefore “attempts to reconstruct the theoretical problematic to which it belongs, while distinguishing it from the ideological problematic from which it departs”.¹⁴¹ The project of dividing a line between science and ideology is the obligation that Althusser assigns to philosophical practice:

Philosophy represents people’s class struggle in theory. In return it helps the people to distinguish in theory and in all ideas (political, ethical, aesthetic etc.) between true and false ideas.¹⁴²

It is important to note that Althusser could not imagine a society without ideology. As Tanke further explains, even a classless society will rely on it for achieving social integration.¹⁴³ It is therefore necessary for philosophy to separate the truth of economic, political and scientific practices from their so-called mystifications.¹⁴⁴ As Tanke elucidates, philosophy is class struggle in theory to the extent that it prevents knowledge from being exploited by bourgeois tendencies.¹⁴⁵ Philosophy has for Althusser an indispensable part to play in politics: the education of those immersed in the economic sector.¹⁴⁶

Althusser, as mentioned, applied Marx’s symptomatic mode of reading to his own major text in *Reading Capital* and in doing so Althusser claimed to be formulating Marx’s philosophy in theoretical terms.¹⁴⁷ Davis states:

The understanding of Marx’s philosophy thus obtained from *Capital* was to be supplemented by an analysis of revolutionary struggle: like Marx’s masterwork, revolutionary movements were thought to be practical enactments of Marxists philosophy in which it was Althusser’s self-appointed task to read the theory. For Althusser, books and revolutionary movements alike were deemed susceptible to his eclectic mix of self-assertingly philosophical and notionally psychoanalytic analysis.¹⁴⁸

Davis further notes that the attraction of Althusser’s enterprise for Rancière and a whole generation of activists on the Left can partly be explained by the political

¹⁴¹ As above.

¹⁴² See Althusser L (1971) 21.

¹⁴³ Tanke J (2011) 14.

¹⁴⁴ As above.

¹⁴⁵ As above.

¹⁴⁶ Davis O (2010) 4.

¹⁴⁷ As above.

¹⁴⁸ Davis O (2010) 4.

climate of the time.¹⁴⁹ During the 1960's it became clear to most that the Soviet Union under Stalin had become a brutally oppressive police state. Althusser's objective was to find in Marx's thinking the principle of a theoretical understanding of Marxism's aberrations. It was suggested that only a correct understanding of the true meaning of Marx's philosophy could serve as a reliable guide to political action and as a safeguard against those aberrations.¹⁵⁰ Revolutionary political practice without the correct theory was felt to be "doomed to the short-sighted pursuit of ill-understood goals".¹⁵¹ Althusser's theory further held a particular appeal to activists on the Left who were also intellectuals as it seemed to transcend the distinction between theory and practice by redefining the kind of intellectual work undertaken in lecture halls as a form of political action, or "theoretical practice".¹⁵² Rancière: "We found in Althusser's work the idea that intellectuals could have a different role, one other than cultural consumption or ideological reflection: real involvement as intellectuals in transforming the world".¹⁵³ The fact that this was a false hope and that theoretical practice was "something of a sleight of hand", as Davis describes it, only became clear to Rancière after the events of May 1968, which shall be discussed below.¹⁵⁴ Althusser's approach therefore promised Marxist intellectuals a significant role in the revolution as intellectuals. Importantly, as Davis further explains, it also set the interpretation of Marx's work free from the authority of the French Communist Party (FCP) whose support of Stalin in the fifties led to a forceful de-Stalinisation in the sixties.¹⁵⁵ With this, the party's commitment to violent revolutionary struggle had transformed into support for the pursuit of social change through democratic means.¹⁵⁶ The most damaging to the party was their support, during the Algerian War of Independence, for the Socialist Prime minister Guy Mollet's 1956-Bill that granted special powers to the governor of

¹⁴⁹ Davis O (2010) 5.

¹⁵⁰ As above.

¹⁵¹ See Davis O (2010) 5.

¹⁵² Davis O (2010) 6.

¹⁵³ Rancière J (1974) (passage translated by Davis O (2010) 6).

¹⁵⁴ Davis O (2010) 6.

¹⁵⁵ As above.

¹⁵⁶ As above.

Algeria thereby effectively establishing a police state and by doing so, seriously compromising revolution and liberation.¹⁵⁷ As Davis notes, it was therefore no surprise that the idea that Althusser's theory could free the interpretation of Marx from the interpretive authority of the party was attractive to leftist activists, activists who positioned themselves to the left of the FCP.¹⁵⁸ As noted by Rancière, "Marx's theory belonged to nobody but his readers and their only duty was to it [...] Everyone could read Marx and see what followed. All that was required was for them to approach the text through the discipline of science".¹⁵⁹

However, as Davis further mentions, the practice proved to be less emancipatory than many students had hoped for. Behind the discipline of science lay another form of authority, that of pedagogical authority.¹⁶⁰ And as shall be seen later, with the discussion of Joseph Jacotot in Rancière's book, *The Ignorant School Master*, this is highly problematic for Rancière and key elements of his theory, especially his conception of equality, can be seen as a reaction to the idea of pedagogical authority experienced by him during these years.¹⁶¹

This pedagogical authority was related to the fact that the art of symptomatic reading was not open to all. Apart from investment of effort and attention it required instruction. As stated by Althusser "[w]e need something quite different from an acute attentive gaze; we need an educated gaze".¹⁶² Davis explains that Marxist science had been set free from the authority of the party, to become dependent on the authority of the pedagogue.¹⁶³ This is why Rancière's repudiation of Althusser is entitled "Althusser's Lesson" and why, as Davis further notes, at key junctures, it frames Rancière's argument against Althusser as an argument against pedagogy.¹⁶⁴ For Rancière, Althusserianism is "fundamentally a

¹⁵⁷ Davis O (2010) 6.

¹⁵⁸ As above.

¹⁵⁹ As above. See Rancière J (1974) 20 (passage translated by Davis O (2010) 6).

¹⁶⁰ Davis O (2010) 7.

¹⁶¹ Rancière J (1991).

¹⁶² Althusser L (1970) 27.

¹⁶³ Davis O (2010) 7.

¹⁶⁴ As above.

theory of education” and “every theory of education strives to maintain the source of the power it seeks to shed light on”.¹⁶⁵ Althusser suggested that only by a correct understanding of theory would a political practice that avoided the so-called aberrations of Stalinism and the compromises of democratic socialism be possible.¹⁶⁶ For Rancière, Althusser’s investment in the privileged position of the pedagogue meant that it would never be time for his students to fulfil the promise of political action: “It followed from the logic of Althusserian discourse that the moment would never come: the antagonistic struggle of empirical politics would never allow philosophy the opportunity to conclude”.¹⁶⁷ Although Althusserianism seemed to be at the forefront of progressive Left discourse, as Davis highlights, Rancière came to the conclusion that it functioned in accordance with a “pedagogical temporality of delay”.¹⁶⁸ The time to act would therefore never come; the inequalities that were to be eliminated would always remain in place. Rancière viewed Althusserianism as an “endlessly procrastinating process of instruction”.¹⁶⁹ It served only to emphasise the inequality between the instructed and those unschooled in Marxist science and therefore the importance and authority of the teacher.

It should also be mentioned that Althusserianism asserted itself at a time when higher education in France was subject to an intense debate that ultimately culminated in the liberation of curricula, the creation of several new universities and an influx of students from backgrounds traditionally under-represented in French Universities.¹⁷⁰ As Tanke explains, the changes eventually put in place were largely the result of the demands made by students throughout the 1960’s and it was in this sense that Althusserianism functioned as a call to order addressed to students.¹⁷¹ During this time, students were questioning the university’s position

¹⁶⁵ Rancière J (1974) 104.

¹⁶⁶ Davis O (2010) 7.

¹⁶⁷ Rancière J (1974) 104.

¹⁶⁸ Davis O (2010) 7.

¹⁶⁹ As above.

¹⁷⁰ Tanke J (2011) 17-18.

¹⁷¹ As above.

within the capitalist system.¹⁷² They were politicising forms of instruction as well as the power relations inherent in traditional pedagogy.¹⁷³ Althusserianism attempted to “defuse these institutional critiques by shifting the investigation from the forms of power at issue in the student-teacher relationship to a discussion about the content of courses themselves”.¹⁷⁴ The science/ideology distinction transformed debates about social functions and procedures into assessment of whether or not the knowledge was properly materialist. However,

Althusserianism masked the novelty of student demands, displacing critique of practices into the realm of ideas. Not only did this gesture forestall a serious reckoning with institutionalised forms of domination, it quietly laid the groundwork for a pedagogical space in which philosophy could be awarded pride of place.¹⁷⁵

In Rancière’s view the idea that Althusserianism allowed its supporters to claim that theory itself was class struggle, amounts to a shell game in which the revolution continually “recedes behind the endless development of science”.¹⁷⁶ Rancière has explained that the book-length publication of *Althusser’s Lesson* in 1974 was made pressing by a renaissance of Althusserianism, attempting to recapture the events of May ‘68.¹⁷⁷ The book describes how Althusser’s “theoreticist” assumptions, predicated upon a sharp divide between those who think and those who act forecloses possibilities of human emancipation.¹⁷⁸ Throughout the book, Rancière rejects any conception of philosophy premised on the idea that some are capable of thought while others are not.¹⁷⁹ As will be demonstrated later, this notion or idea becomes central to Rancière’s politics.

For Althusser, revolutionary education “must have a rigorously defined object, unfold with a carefully defined methodology, and be officiated over by those

¹⁷² As above.

¹⁷³ As above.

¹⁷⁴ As above.

¹⁷⁵ As above.

¹⁷⁶ As above.

¹⁷⁷ Tanke J (2011) 18.

¹⁷⁸ As above.

¹⁷⁹ As above.

possessing specialised training”.¹⁸⁰ Tanke mentions that Althusserian students were famous for their insistence that the “theoretical formation” was a precondition for political militancy.¹⁸¹ The science/ideology distinction institutes a division into the sphere of practices, separating the learned from those absorbed by ideology. This secures the necessity of scholars in general and university theoreticians in particular. For Rancière, as mentioned, this attitude reserves a place for philosophy at the top of the division of labour. Rancière: “The challenge is clear: it is a question of saving philosophy, and ‘Marxist philosophy’ in particular, as the business of university specialists”.¹⁸² And as Tanke explains

[L]ike its Platonic forbearer, Althusserianism presents itself as indispensable for discerning between true and false ideas, that is, the directives of science and the petit-bourgeois tendencies threatening to take hold of the worker’s movement. It is here that philosophy finds its justification, for as long as men and women misjudge the shadows in the cave wall, they will require philosophers to guide their politics.¹⁸³

Philosophy therefore struggles on behalf of the non-ideological concepts produced by science, using them to clarify political thought and action. Tanke further explains that theory’s “clear-sightedness” is predicated upon its conscious removal from the spheres of economic and political practice. It provides those engaged with the reality of what they cannot see because of their position within the division of labour.¹⁸⁴

What was therefore alarming for Rancière was that Althusserianism requires the masses to wallow in ideology.¹⁸⁵ Althusser opposed any practices of what can be called “auto-emancipation”.¹⁸⁶ He assumed that popular movements are limited by degrees of incapacity, therefore requiring the formation of a theoretical avant-garde.¹⁸⁷ For him, the class struggle unfolds transparently and therefore relies

¹⁸⁰ Tanke J (2011) 19.

¹⁸¹ As above.

¹⁸² Rancière J (1974) 35.

¹⁸³ Tanke J (2011) 20.

¹⁸⁴ As above.

¹⁸⁵ As above.

¹⁸⁶ As above.

¹⁸⁷ As above.

upon science to clarify its stakes.¹⁸⁸ Tanke explains that Rancière, in contrast, assumes that practices are relatively evident to those engaged in them.¹⁸⁹ He even suggests that economic exploitation and political domination require little explanation to those who are subjected to it. He, as will be elucidated in the discussion of his mature politics below, turns his critical efforts against those discourses that benefit from postulating truths in an effort to redistribute the field of capacities.¹⁹⁰

Davis explains that for Althusser, the Marxist truth of things does not lie on the surface waiting to be discovered by the attentive reader.¹⁹¹ It is rather, as Davis further explains, the educated reader, schooled in the art of symptomatic reading that delves beneath the surface in order to find and formulate the latent

¹⁸⁸ As above.

¹⁸⁹ As above.

¹⁹⁰ As above. It should be mentioned that although it has rightly been remarked that Rancière's reaction against Althusserianism borders on the extreme, as Davis notes, it is also multifaceted. Davis O (2010) 12-13. Davis identifies four aspects of Althusserianism, which he argues are preserved in Rancière's project. Davis O (2010) 12-13. For the purposes of my discussion I refer to the aspect with regards to Rancière's style. Davis explains two marks that can broadly be termed Althusser's philosophical style that are reflected in Rancière's work. Davis O (2010) 12-13. According to Davis, Althusser, by reading Marx "as a philosopher" and thereby, as he put it, "redressing one hundred and twenty years of censorship by silence within the university", provided a model for displacing philosophy which is echoed by Rancière in the 1970's when Rancière, as lecturer in philosophy at Vincennes, used the academic freedom accorded to him to immerse himself and his student Alain Faure in the archives of the nineteenth century French worker's movement and read them "as philosophers". See Davis O (2010) 12-13. For all Althusser's rhetoric of disciplinary rigour and systematicity, he also offered an early lesson in "indiscipline" or "anti-disciplinarity". For Davis, the intellectual and political potential of this approach is demonstrated in an unparalleled fashion in Rancière's work. Davis O (2010) 12-13. Davis further explains that the second vestige of Althusser's philosophical style exhibited in Rancière's work is what has been called Althusser's "declarative" conception of philosophy, which Rancière adopted to some extent. Davis O (2010) 12-13. The philosopher's task is to "present his theses". Some of Rancière's more schematic work, for example his assertion of the separation between politics and the police order that will be explained later in this chapter, or the periodisation of the history of literature and art, exhibits, according to Davis, a decidedly Althusserian inclination for declaring the existence of lines of demarcation and seeing what follows. Davis O (2010) 12-13. Davis argues that these observations are in no way an argument of Rancière's work as derivative of Althusser's in any reductive sense. Davis O (2010) 12-13. Rather, he demonstrates that the relationship between the two thinkers is more involved than cursory readings would suggest. See Davis O (2010) 12-14.

¹⁹¹ Davis O (2010) 13.

theoretical question.¹⁹² The specialists in symptomatic reading, namely, the Althusserian intellectuals engaged in this work of theoretical practice, would then instruct the proletariat, the ordinary men and women, in correct political action.¹⁹³ The intellectual thus stands in a “one-way pedagogical relationship” to the proletariat.¹⁹⁴ The public is condemned to spontaneous practice, rather than being engaged in real revolutionary action. Rancière states:

The “masses” make history, no doubt about it, but not just any masses: those which we educate and organise. They only make history if they first understand that they are separated from it by a thick layer of “dominant ideology” by all of those stories the bourgeoisie tell them and which, stupid as they are, they would always swallow hook, line and sinker if we weren’t there to teach them how to tell good ideas from bad ones.¹⁹⁵

Thus, Althusserianism is for Rancière a condescending philosophy, which protects the social privilege of those institutionally associated with it. As Davis notes, the tone in the passage above is almost visceral. Rancière’s response to Althusserianism is less of a critique and rather almost a “violent allergic reaction”.¹⁹⁶ Rancière’s approach, as will be discussed later, is founded upon the assumption of radically equal capacities. Central to his thesis is that one cannot start with inequality and work progressively towards its elimination. Equality in Rancière’s approach is a “presupposition, an axiom, or it is nothing”.¹⁹⁷ Rancière contends that politics is not hampered by a lack of knowledge, the mal-information of the marginalised classes or the inopportunity of the moment, but rather by the failure to embody, in advance, the equality we want to bring into a context.¹⁹⁸ For him, nothing is more troubling than the contention that the world is divisible on the basis of intellectual capacities, the fact that some can draw lines and erect hierarchies, whether between theory or practice, or between science and ideology, intellectuals and workers.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹² As above.

¹⁹³ As above.

¹⁹⁴ As above.

¹⁹⁵ Rancière J (1974) 34 (passage translated by Davis O (2010) 13).

¹⁹⁶ Davis O (2010) 13.

¹⁹⁷ Rancière J *The Philosopher and His Poor* (2004) 223.

¹⁹⁸ Davis O (2010) 14.

¹⁹⁹ As above.

Rancière, as a student of Althusser, initially contributed to *Reading Capital*.²⁰⁰ The contribution entitled “The Concept of Critique and the Critique of Political Economy from the 1844 Manuscripts of *Capital*” followed immediately after Althusser’s prefatory essay. Rancière’s contribution was a compliant rehearsal of Althusserian doctrine. As Davis mentions, Rancière’s contribution is extreme in its Althusserian orthodoxy because it emphasises the opacity of the world to ordinary perception and because it holds that only symptomatic reading can result in a reliable understanding of the world.²⁰¹ It is important to mention that Rancière’s transition from compliant student to outspoken critic of Althusser did not happen in a vacuum. Mao’s Cultural Revolution that was at its height in the period between 1965 and 1968, and the near revolution in France in May ’68, both applied pressure on young Althusserians.²⁰² The Cultural Revolution questioned the social and institutional privilege accorded to scholars, teachers and bureaucrats by virtue of their knowledge and education, whilst May ’68 began as a student revolt and it questioned the power and processes of pedagogy. May ’68 saw students and factory workers engage in revolutionary action without guidance from the FCP.²⁰³ On the contrary, the FCP was instrumental in ending it. In this context Althusserian science and the FCP became redundant. Rancière: “Althusserianism met its death on the barricades of May along with many other ideas of the past”.²⁰⁴ Althusser, however, did not seem to realise this. As Davis notes, even before publishing his excoriating repudiation, *Althusser’s Lesson*, Rancière had already written a sceptical book and an article in which he described

²⁰⁰ See Davis O (2010) 4. Davis notes that Rancière’s essay followed at least within the first edition of 1965. Davis O (2010) 4. The textual history of Rancière’s piece reflects his relationship with Althusser. The second French edition at the end of 1968 contained only Althusser’s and Balibar’s contributions. Davis O (2010) 4. In his preface to that edition, Althusser rather insultingly remarks that the new edition is “improved” (p xii) and that the omissions in no way damage the integrity of the interpretation of Marx’s works being put forward. Davis O (2010) 4. In 1973, Althusser and his publisher wanted to reprint the first edition in its entirety. Rancière requested that his contribution be preceded by a prefatory *autocritique*, but Althusser refused. Davis explains that the *autocritique* was published separately. Davis O (2010) 4.

²⁰¹ As above.

²⁰² Davis O (2010) 20.

²⁰³ As above.

²⁰⁴ As above.

Althusser's work as "reactionary" and labelled his own contribution to *Reading Capital* as "rustic" because of the crudeness with which it reproduced Althusserian dogma about the epistemological break.²⁰⁵ Rancière presented *Althusser's Lesson* as an exasperated reaction to his former teacher's failure to take in the broad lessons of May '68.²⁰⁶ Rancière complained that Althusser's "Response to John Lewis" written in 1973, a counterattack against the British communist, simply restated in more accessible language the same ideas he had advanced eight years before, as though May '68 had changed nothing.²⁰⁷

Rancière's break with Althusser was therefore in part because of their different views on the significance of the events of May 1968. Rancière has explained that his Althusserian perspective began to fall apart when 9 million people struggled and went on strike across France, without the support of parties or trade unions.²⁰⁸ For Rancière "a whole system of certainties was shaken".²⁰⁹ Tanke explains that the events indicated that it was time to revisit the tenets of Marxism as articulated by Althusser. May'68 had arguably demonstrated the capacity of workers and students to instigate and organise protests without the guidance of Marxist intellectuals. It had in fact happened and popular revolt was eminently possible without correct theoretical understanding.²¹⁰ For Rancière, Althusserianism's overemphasis on acquiring scientific rigorous understanding, "risked suppressing [struggle] in the endless meantime, the social and institutional hierarchies through which pedagogical power is exercised".²¹¹

Althusserian analysis was out of feeling with the new forms of politics brought forth by May '68. In order to demonstrate the eclipse of Althusserian Marxism, Rancière juxtaposed it to the experiences of workers at the LIP watch factory in France. Tanke explains that these workers, upon learning of plans for the

²⁰⁵ As above.

²⁰⁶ As above.

²⁰⁷ See Althusser *L Réponse à John Lewis* (1973) as referenced in Davis O (2010) xx.

²⁰⁸ Davis O (2010)

²⁰⁹ Tanke J (2011) 20.

²¹⁰ Davis O (2010) 15.

²¹¹ As above.

termination of a number of their colleagues, forcibly occupied their plant.²¹² Rather than simply striking, these workers continued the production and sale of watches under the slogan “[i]t is possible: we make, we sell, we pay ourselves!”²¹³ Tanke notes that what followed were experiments in self-management that gripped the imagination of the French public.²¹⁴ In simple economic terms, workers’ control produced greater profits than those of management. Because of the refusal of traditional channels such as labour unions, the event is often claimed as part of the political legacy of May ’68.²¹⁵ This was at the time when Althusser wrote his famous “Reply to John Lewis”, affirming most of his original theses. These workers articulated their struggle in the following terms: “The economy is in service of man, man is not in the service of the economy”.²¹⁶ “Man” according to Rancière did not function as a lure to lead workers back into the darkness of ideology, but rather as a means of resisting hierarchy.²¹⁷ “Man” is the political name by which workers opposed the powers exercised over them, with its extension refuting the division on which their bosses rely.²¹⁸ The question is not for Rancière whether the name is of bourgeois derivation, “but whether it can be made to serve the self-emancipation of the people”.²¹⁹ For Rancière, the Althusserian equation of “Man” and his rights with bourgeois humanism is rash, as a brief history of the workers’ movement demonstrates.²²⁰ The events at the watch factory closely resemble demonstrations of equality that will become central to Rancière’s politics, demonstrations that use a name of sufficient generality, “man”, which facilitates in the creation of a polemical scene.²²¹ The workers asserted themselves against a distribution in which they had little part and the name allowed for the elaboration of a site of struggle where the goal was

²¹² Tanke J (2011) 20.

²¹³ Tanke J (2011) 21.

²¹⁴ As above.

²¹⁵ As above.

²¹⁶ As above. See Rancière (1974) 157.

²¹⁷ As above.

²¹⁸ As above.

²¹⁹ As above.

²²⁰ Tanke J (2011) 21-22.

²²¹ As above.

to determine who was and who was not covered by it.²²² The use of such names provides an opportunity to engage in politics, altering current relations. The LIP-workers' experiment asserts, as Tanke highlights, that a world free of hierarchal divisions is possible.²²³ For Rancière, they demonstrated that the time in which intellectuals instructed people about what they can and cannot do had passed.

Rancière's exploration in the mid-1970's of the archives of the French workers' movement that will be discussed later, was driven by a desire to refute the Althusserianism claim that "the workers need our scientific knowledge" by showing that workers had time and again not only organised meaningful political revolt, but also understood their circumstances and their position in the world.²²⁴ According to Davis, this understanding was in no sense inferior to Marxist science.²²⁵ His work in the archives affirmed his belief that the Althusserian understanding of the relationship between Marxist intellectual work and revolutionary struggle was incorrect. In his book *The Philosopher and His Poor* Rancière explores the relationship between intellectual work and revolutionary struggle in the work of Marx, tracking its reappearance in the work of Jean-Paul Sartre and Pierre Bourdieu as well as its prehistory in Plato's model of the ideal state.²²⁶ In this book, Davis explains that Rancière insinuates by suggestive juxtaposition that the scientific strand identified within the Marxist tradition, in Marx, Sartre, Bourdieu and Althusser, is rooted in a specific relationship between power and knowledge first elaborated in Plato's ideal state in Republic.²²⁷ Importantly, in Rancière's subsequent work, Plato, as Davis discerns, is enemy number one against whom his politics of radical equality and true democracy will be defined.²²⁸ I will elaborate more on this point in the following chapter.

²²² As above.

²²³ As above.

²²⁴ As above. See chapter 3.

²²⁵ Davis O (2010) 15.

²²⁶ Rancière J (2004).

²²⁷ Davis O (2010) 15-16.

²²⁸ See chapter 3.

At this stage it is important to further mention that in *The Philosopher and His Poor*, Rancière reaches the conclusion that Marx “alternately disparaged and idealised the workers of his day”.²²⁹ Rancière was struck by the way Marx and Engels often distanced themselves from the working-class activists of their day, even going as far as to contemptuously refer to some of them in private as “jackasses hungry for new ideas but unable to engage with them other than by feeding them like animals”.²³⁰ As Davis clarifies, Marx, in Rancière’s view, is guilty of a condescending view of even the most overtly politicised members of the working class as intellectually incapable.²³¹ Rancière juxtaposes Marx’s contempt towards the workers of his day with his commitment to a theoretical position that states that the future lies with the proletariat - “a new class which is strictly not a class but which would emerge with the growth of industrialisation from the dissolution of existing classes, including the working class as it was then”.²³² As Davis explains, Rancière’s point was not that Marx’s private remarks to Engels about certain workers contradict the theoretical claims of his work.²³³ Rather, Marx’s private contempt seems disconcertingly consistent with certain kinds of public theorising and also helps to illuminate it. Workers, as they actually are in the here and now, “are the brut embodiment of a future that they are incapable of understanding”.²³⁴

All the nobility of humanity may shine on the brows of Parisian workers who meet for study, but the commodity itself presents a more obtuse face. It does not have written on it that it is the sign of the division of labour that marks it as the property of capital, except in the form of hieroglyphics that cannot be read by workers who wear on their brows the sign of a people both chosen and condemned.²³⁵

As Davis further notes, the identified “germs” of Althusserian scientism were actually already present in Marx’s conflicted view of workers who embody a

²²⁹ Davis O (2010) 17-18.

²³⁰ As above.

²³¹ As above.

²³² As above.

²³³ As above.

²³⁴ Davis O (2010) 16.

²³⁵ Rancière J (2004) 75.

future that they cannot know.²³⁶ Rancière also draws attention to the way in which Marx may be said to “police” the proletariat, particularly in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*.²³⁷ He is concerned with distinguishing the true proletariat from their degenerate close cousins, the common criminals, colonial fortune-seekers and Bohemians, referred to as the “lumpenproletariat” in the Marxist tradition.²³⁸ Rancière’s question is as follows: “what exactly are we to make of an abstract theory of the revolutionary proletarian future if, from the outset, it is accompanied by a view of large numbers of workers in the present as, at best, constitutionally unable to grasp the political reality of their own situation and at worst, asinine and degenerate?”²³⁹ Davis further notes that Rancière, although he by no means offers a systematic and complete genealogy of Marxist “scientism”, does succeed in pointing to an uneasy combination within the tradition of a theory of proletarian future with condescendingly reductive views of concrete workers in the present and their limited capacity to understand themselves and their world.²⁴⁰ Marx therefore assumes that were it not for the intervention and contribution of intellectuals and their “generously extended pedagogical helping hand”, the proletariat would be incapable of an understanding necessary for the accomplishment of their historical role, namely, revolution.²⁴¹ Rancière’s target is scientism as manifested in the idea that the proletariat are incapable of understanding their political function without the pedagogical assistance of bourgeoisie intellectuals. For Rancière, May ’68, amongst other happenings, prove this was a convenient fiction. Further,

[s]cientism is associated, for Rancière, not just with a privileging of the social position of intellectuals but also with an indefinite deferral of the realisation of equality: for Marx, just as for Althusser, with his pedagogy of delay, the time to enact the egalitarian future would always be after the knowledge-deficit of the student-proletariat had been corrected [...] in other words, never now.²⁴²

²³⁶ Davis O (2010) 16.

²³⁷ Davis O (2010) 17.

²³⁸ As above.

²³⁹ As above.

²⁴⁰ As above.

²⁴¹ Davis O (2010) 18.

²⁴² As above.

And it is this scientism that privileges some and decides who can think and who cannot think, who can act and under what circumstances, as well as the fact that equality is infinitely deferred by it, that Rancière reacts against for most of the rest of his intellectual life. After he distanced himself from Althusser and criticised the tenets of Althusserianism, he engaged with questions around history, historical agency, education and pedagogy.²⁴³ I elaborate on these engagements in the next chapter. It is these engagements that gave rise to his “mature politics”.²⁴⁴ In the next section I discuss the five elements or moments of Rancière’s mature politics.

²⁴³ The main works that can be mentioned here is *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge* trans. Melehy H (1994), *The Nights of Labor: The Worker’s Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* trans. Drury J (1989), *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* trans. Ross K (1991) and *The Philosopher and His Poor* trans. Drury J (2003).

²⁴⁴ Davis mentions that Rancière’s political work, or mature politics, responded to two countervailing pressures. See Davis O (2010) 99. In global terms, the collapse of the communist regimes in or shortly after 1989 inspired some philosophical and political commentators to declare “the end of history” and “the end of politics”. (The “end of history” refers to a book written in 1992 by Francis Fukuyama (*The End of History and The Last Man*) in which he declares that the advent of Western liberal democracy may signal the endpoint of humanity’s sociocultural evolution and the final form of human government. Western liberal democracy therefore signals the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution as this form of government becomes universal. In general it refers to political and philosophical concepts that suppose that a particular political and economic or social system may develop that would constitute a final form of human government. In different forms Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx, Vladimir Solovyov and Fukuyama have posited this idea.) Davis explains that during the same time in France, there was a resurgence of interest in political philosophy, particularly by, neo-Aristotelians and followers of Hannah Arendt and it went hand in hand with the idea that “ideological” or emancipatory questions could be put aside and the political could be rethought in ethical terms of how to best “live together”. Davis O (2010) 99. See also in general Beasley JP *A Prehistory of Rhetoric and Composition: New Rhetoric and Neo-Aristotelianism at the University of Chicago 1947-1959* (2007). Rancière’s determination, in *Disagreement*, as will be discussed later, to refute Aristotle’s assumption that the political could be deduced from the properties of human beings, language and the power to reason, was motivated, in no small measure, according to Davis, by the popularity of neo-Aristotelian conceptions of politics at that time. Davis O (2010) 99. Rancière, in his mature politics, goes much further than attacking a single philosopher’s conception of politics and he sets his sights instead on political philosophy as a whole, which he argues is flawed and conservative because of the fact that it is unable to accept and think through the consequences of the basic fact that any social order is contingent. See Davis O (2010) 99. Davis explains that Rancière suggests that political philosophy cannot help but to always look for the most rational social arrangement and what it fails to see is that any and “every social arrangement is inherently irrational and ultimately provisional”. Davis O (2010) 99. Rancière goes as far as suggesting that the ambition of the longstanding tradition of political philosophy is to dispense with politics all together. Davis explains that the intellectual mood

2.3 The Mature Politics

2.3.1 The Police

In order to explain Rancière's alternative vision of politics, it is necessary to start with an explanation of his conception of "the police", "policing" or "the police order". Rancière states in *Disagreement*:

Politics is generally seen as a set of procedures whereby aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organisation of powers, the distribution of places and roles and the systems for legitimising this distribution. I propose to give this system of distribution and legitimisation another name. I propose to call it the police.²⁴⁵

Rancière, in the quote above, is describing mainstream politics, or politics as we have come to know it, namely, the hierarchal administration of society that governs its citizens in the name of welfare.²⁴⁶ Rancière, however, defines this as "the police". On this description, as Chambers elucidates, the actions of parliaments and assemblies, the decisions of courts, the work of politicians and bureaucratic efforts are all classified under the non-political heading of "the police", "policing" or "the police order".²⁴⁷ It is important to note that the police order does not only refer to state institutions, but also, as Davis explains, include private institutions and an array of social and cultural practices and arrangements.²⁴⁸ Therefore, it does not only refer to the institutions and processes of governing, organisation and the representation of communities, but it also includes the exercise of power on different levels of society as well as the

of the 1990's with talk of "the end of politics" and the return to political philosophy was a fitting trend to accompany what Rancière had already discerned operating in French politics since the early 1980's. Davis O (2010) 99. That is, the development and advancement of the idea that the aim of politics is consensus. Importantly, as Davis elucidates, Rancière, in a characteristic emphatic reversal, claims that consensus is not the aim of politics, but the negation of politics: "consensus politics", as will become clearer later, is effectively the transformation of politics into management, a transformation which Rancière also associates with the increasing power of elites and experts trained to undertake this managerial task. Davis O (2010) 99-100.

²⁴⁵ Rancière J (1999) 28.

²⁴⁶ May T "There are no queers: Jacques Rancière and post-identity politics" *Borderlands* (2009) 3.

²⁴⁷ Chambers S "Jacques Rancière and the problem of pure politics" *European Journal of Political Theory* (2011) 306.

²⁴⁸ Davis O (2010) 76.

way in which social roles are distributed and legitimated.²⁴⁹ Rancière, in order to explain the broad nature of the term, states the following:

[I]t is an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task. It is an order of the visible and sayable.²⁵⁰

Rancière's reference to "an order of the visible and sayable" connects with what he calls the "distribution or the partition of the sensible" (*la partage du sensible*). The distribution of the sensible glosses over a central point of Rancière's, namely, the aesthetic dimension of politics.²⁵¹ The notion of the distribution of the sensible will form an integral part of this chapter and I believe that it is one of the most interesting and valuable facets of Rancière's political formulations. I therefore explain and analyse the notion fully at a later stage. At this stage it should be mentioned that the distribution of the sensible and the police are two closely related and interrelated terms. The police, as Tanke explains, is the means by which a society enforces its distribution of the sensible and the distribution of the sensible is the general laws distributing lines of sight, forms of speech and estimations' of people's or bodies' capacities.²⁵² Put simply, for the purposes of this section, the distribution of the sensible indicates a specific picture of the world and the police order is that which (through different mechanisms and procedures of domination and prescription) enforces that picture of the world.

²⁴⁹ As above.

²⁵⁰ Rancière J (1999) 29. Rancière demonstrates the link between his use of the term and the work of Michel Foucault in the quote above. Foucault argues that "the police includes everything" to the extent that any police order determines hierarchal relationships between human beings as well as to the extent that it sets up relationships between "men and things". It thus also constitutes a material order. See Foucault M "Omnes et Singulatum" *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (1979). Davis has mentioned that Rancière draws on an older and wider sense of the term "police" than the familiar one of a repressive state organ. Davis O (2010) 76-77. He rather draws on one closer to that identified by Foucault in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writings as synonymous with the social order in its entirety. Davis O (2010) 76-77. Despite his reference to Foucault, Davis claims that the opposition between "the police" and "politics" that Rancière describes and the renaming of what is normally thought of as politics as "policing" is a twisting of the ordinary usage of both of the terms which blurs their proper meanings and dramatises the conflict between them. According to Davis, Rancière works with a more open, creative and less disciplined view of the normal usage of these terms. See Davis O (2010) 76-77.

²⁵¹ As above.

²⁵² Tanke J (2011) 45.

The quote mentioned above indicates that the police or policing should be understood broadly. The police enforce the framework of how things are. It hierarchises, it orders and regulates. It allocates roles, occupations, norms of communication and display. It determines modes of being, seeing and saying, it affixes ranks and values and continually reinstates the legitimacy of social hierarchy as well as its own domination.²⁵³ Its role, as Tanke notes, is to maintain the *status quo* and to delimit, in advance, the sphere of politics.²⁵⁴ It indicates who is capable of speaking and what they are able to say and also what can become a matter of political dispute.²⁵⁵ The police order assigns individuals to particular positions in society and assumes that their way of thinking and behaving will follow from those positions. In other words, the police order assumes that people have different capacities and are accordingly destined to occupy different positions in society.²⁵⁶

Todd May describes the police order as any order of hierarchy.²⁵⁷ May notes that within a specific police order or order of hierarchy there are those who benefit and those who do not, or those who benefit more than others.²⁵⁸ Rancière has called it “those who are counted and those who are not”.²⁵⁹ The way in which we understand the counted and uncounted is crucial to understanding police orders. The counted and uncounted should not be understood as or reduced to a single class division. As May elucidates, societies function with a number of hierarchies, such as racial hierarchies, economic hierarchies, sexual hierarchies, gender hierarchies, religious hierarchies and so forth.²⁶⁰ Who is therefore among the counted and who is among the uncounted depends on the hierarchy one is looking at. The concept of the police can therefore be utilised in a fluid way. Not

²⁵³ Stoneman E “Appropriate indecorum: Rhetoric and aesthetics in the political theory of Jacques Rancière” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* (2011) 143.

²⁵⁴ Tanke J (2011) 45.

²⁵⁵ As above.

²⁵⁶ Davis O (2010) 78.

²⁵⁷ May T *Borderlands* (2009) 4.

²⁵⁸ As above.

²⁵⁹ Rancière J (1999) 6. In the section that explains the notions of the “miscount and the wrong” below, I elaborate fully on the idea of the counted and uncounted.

²⁶⁰ May T *Borderlands* (2009) 4.

all oppression occurs along a single register. May highlights that the police does not refer to a single or particular hierarchy, but to the various and different hierarchies that govern societies. Therefore, “[i]t is entirely possible for one to be a member of the uncouneted in one part of the police order and among the counted in another part”.²⁶¹ Further, not all orders of hierarchy are equally oppressive or dominant. Thus, as Rancière states as a further indication of the term’s fluidity, “[t]here is a worse and a better police”.²⁶²

Tanke explains that the police monopolises interpretations in an attempt to create a single direction for the movement of society.²⁶³ It therefore refers to a series of assumptions that structure life in common.²⁶⁴ It is a specific interpretation that attempts to strip the given order of things from its litigious character.²⁶⁵ It primarily has to do with the logic of inequality that creates forms of inclusion and exclusion. It distributes bodies and voices, define what is seen and unseen and draws boundaries such as those that exists between the public and the private.²⁶⁶ Policing attempts to co-opt, manage, contain, and undermine any dispute about the excluded within the community. Tanke explains further that police operations include the selective framing of issues by mainstream news organisations, the management of economic, cultural and existential insecurity and the transformation of political names or subjects like “the people” or “the workers” into socio-economic identities.²⁶⁷ The police order can also be described as that which enforces the perceptual configuration of society.²⁶⁸ What is sayable, visible, understood, who counts and who doesn’t? It maintains the more or less “automatic perception of status, identity, position and entitlement”.²⁶⁹ With its close relation to the distribution of the sensible, Tanke explains that the police

²⁶¹ As above.

²⁶² Rancière J (1999) 30-31.

²⁶³ Tanke J (2011) 46.

²⁶⁴ As above.

²⁶⁵ As above.

²⁶⁶ As above.

²⁶⁷ Tanke J (2011) 45.

²⁶⁸ As above.

²⁶⁹ As above.

order ultimately concerns the material ground of communicability, intelligibility and sensibility.²⁷⁰ It maintains the operations that set the limit of what is conceivable and possible in a specific time and place.

It should be mentioned further that Rancière's formulation of the notion of the police helps to explain some of his opinions or arguments when it comes to our current perception of politics. He encourages us to question that the notion of governance is about the management of a shared and unequal, prosperity and, more radically, he opposes the equation of politics with the state. Rancière attributes the weakness of contemporary politics to the politics of what he terms "consensus". I elaborate shortly on the meaning of consensus in order to introduce the notion. Thereafter, I turn to Rancière's definition of politics.

Consensus is the means by which the police attempt to prevent the emergence of political subjects or what Rancière calls "the demos".²⁷¹ Consensus aims to avoid the demos' politicisation by distributing the various parts of a community without remainder.

As the absence of politics, it attempts to render invisible and inaudible those discourses, issues, individuals, and groups that would tear open the self-evidence of the police by giving voice to their exclusion.²⁷²

Consensus, through the mechanisms of the police, holds forth that everyone in the community has been fairly counted or taken into regard. Consensus, as will become clearer later, is not the goal of politics for Rancière; it is rather the sensible distribution that politics must overcome.²⁷³ Rancière has in the same vein referred to our time as a "consensual time" to indicate that the logic of depoliticisation is becoming more sophisticated and politics itself more difficult.²⁷⁴ Rancière has set his conception of politics in opposition to a specific consensus prevalent today: "The discourses ascendant since the fall of the Berlin Wall that

²⁷⁰ As above.

²⁷¹ Rancière J (1999) 9.

²⁷² Tanke J (2011) 45.

²⁷³ As above.

²⁷⁴ Rancière J *Chroniques Des Temps Consensuels* (2005) 7-10 as quoted in Tanke J (2011) 46.

attempt to legitimate the unrestricted reign of the market”.²⁷⁵ This form of consensus employs, as Tanke explains, a particular series of operations to convert democratic struggles into a series of managed conflicts.²⁷⁶ Tanke further explains that consensus exploits the cover of political realism as a doctrine that “justifies war, social hierarchies and economic inequalities by invoking necessity”.²⁷⁷ For Rancière “[r]ealism is the absorption of all reality and all truth in the category of the only possible thing”.²⁷⁸ According to Rancière, the type of political realism present today is the ideology that claims that it is beyond ideology. An ideology that would have us believe that it is possible to base government on a pragmatic estimation of human nature, the laws of the market and the global situation:

We witness a version of realism whenever leaders exploit the imperatives of modernisation, economic necessity, or notions such as the “post-9/11 world” to justify unpalatable decisions. Realism gains traction by promoting itself as the efficient alternative to the chimeras of democracy. [...] They encourage citizens to become reasonable in their demands and to acknowledge the contingencies of the globalised world, asking us to be content with what we have, and, in lean times, to give back some of our “privileges”.²⁷⁹

Realism is therefore one form of police operations that attempt to put an end to politics. It is one of the discourses that attempt to convince us that the existing world is the only one possible. It also presents itself as the only rational choice in the management of common life. Tanke argues that in instances where realist discourse is employed, for example, to undermine pension funds, lower wages, deny people healthcare, or limit democracy, it typically promises a future in which prosperity and security will offset these short-term inconveniences.²⁸⁰ Rancière asks; “what is more utopian than a schema whose goal continually recedes into the future?”²⁸¹ The meaning of consensus will hopefully become even clearer as the different aspects of Rancière’s politics are explained. At this stage, I can add that consensus has to do with the agreement of political parties and social partners within a given community about the common interests of that

²⁷⁵ Tanke J (2011) 46.

²⁷⁶ As above.

²⁷⁷ As above.

²⁷⁸ Rancière J (1999) 132. See also Tanke J (2011) 46.

²⁷⁹ Tanke J (2011) 47.

²⁸⁰ As above.

²⁸¹ Rancière J *Aux bords du Politique* (1998) 56-59.

community. Moreover, it has to do with agreement about what is given or self-evident in a specific context. These “givens” are objectified to the extent that they can no longer lend themselves to a dispute; they are not open to litigation or contestation. It is against this type of contemporary consensus or realism that Rancière conceptualises his definition of politics. Consensus results from and relies upon the police operations that enforce roles, places and positions as well as ways of doing, seeing and saying that delimit the boundaries of the perceptible, thinkable and possible and see that those boundaries persist.²⁸² For Rancière, it is politics functioning upon equality that can protect the possible as possible. With the police in mind, I now turn to Rancière’s definition of politics.

2.3.2 Politics/Equality

I propose to reserve the term politics for an extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing: whatever breaks with the tangible configuration whereby parties and parts or lack of them are defined by a presupposition that, by definition, has no place in that configuration- that of the part that has no part [...] political activity is always a mode of expression that undoes the perceptible divisions of the police order by implementing a basically heterogeneous assumption [...] an assumption that at the end of the day, itself demonstrates the sheer contingency of the order, the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being.²⁸³

Politics is the undoing of the police order through a presupposition of equality.²⁸⁴ Rancière conceptualises politics around the concepts of equality, contingency and antagonism.²⁸⁵ It is always dissensual and polemical. Importantly, “[p]olitics is the activity which turns on equality as its principle”.²⁸⁶ In order to make sense of Rancière’s politics, I firstly address two aspects described by Rancière in the opening quote above, namely, the equality of speaking beings and the heterogeneous assumption that needs to be implemented.

The presupposition of equality is the presupposition of the equality of all speaking beings:

²⁸² Tanke J (2011) 47.

²⁸³ Rancière J (1999) 29-30.

²⁸⁴ May J “Jacques Rancière and the ethics of equality” *SubStance* (2007) 24.

²⁸⁵ As above.

²⁸⁶ Rancière J (1999) XI.

There is an order in society because some people command and others obey, but in order to obey an order at least two things are required: you must understand the order and you must understand that you must obey it. And to do that, you must already be the equal of the person who is ordering you.²⁸⁷

According to this conceptualisation, equality must be presupposed on the basis of the equality of anyone capable of hearing and understanding an order. It is the presupposition of those who have no part in the police order. May explains that this presupposition belongs to anyone who acts in terms of it, when a person or persons decide to assert himself/herself/themselves in the name of his/her/their own equality.²⁸⁸ By presupposing equality, subjects undo the classifications of the police order.²⁸⁹ Equality therefore undoes the classifications by which some give orders. May notes that the equality of every speaking being lies at the heart of democratic politics for Rancière.²⁹⁰ This equality is found within the fact that the person who understands the order is equal to the one who issues it. People can communicate with one another and conduct their lives on the basis of these communications, but “one may be in a position that permits one to give orders, but that position is never justified by any inequality between those who give orders and those who receive it”.²⁹¹ The heterogeneous assumption that Rancière refers to in the quote mentioned above is exactly the equality of all speaking beings. This is the heterogeneous assumption that politics postulates against the police. Police orders work on the assumptions that some are to give orders and some are to receive them. May further notes that racial, gender and class distinctions for example are grounded in the police assumption that there is inequality between those who can order the lives of others and those who have

²⁸⁷ Rancière J (1999) 16.

²⁸⁸ May T *SubStance* (2007) 24.

²⁸⁹ May T *SubStance* (2007) 25.

²⁹⁰ As above.

²⁹¹ May T *Borderlands* (2007) 5. Equality in this sense is an irreducible fact of social existence that can never entirely be effaced. Rancière does not argue that humans are essentially equal. He doesn't have to. He instead argues that all attempts to justify inequality are incoherent. See Tanke J (2011) 56. Rancière states that “in order for authority to be more than arbitrary force, it must inevitably give reasons. This process of supplying reasons undermines the claims on behalf of inequality for when it attempts to explain the hierarchies it would erect, inequality presupposes equality”. See Rancière J (1991) 46-49.

no part.²⁹² In other words, the simple act of understanding a command can become an occasion for staging a counterdemonstration of equality. For Rancière, in principle, every social arrangement is therefore open to disruption by egalitarian politics.²⁹³

It should be mentioned here that May explains that when one presupposes equality a contradiction comes into play.²⁹⁴ Political action brings out into the open the fact that elites, especially those in democratic societies, on the one hand believes in equality, whether this belief is ontological (in the sense that for politics it is important for people to be considered equal) or normative (in the sense that all human beings should be treated equally) and on the other hand believes in inequality.²⁹⁵ This, as May further elucidates, does not necessarily refer to a belief in inequality *per se*, but rather to a commitment to hierarchies and dominations of the police order, which implies inequality.²⁹⁶ This is the belief that it is permissible to distribute certain roles to certain people, i.e. by approving of the hierarchal police order they hold the principle of inequality. Politics introduces the assumption that every speaking being is equal to every other. Heterogeneity functions on two levels within this assumption. Firstly, equality is posited against inequality. It challenges the right of those positioned to give orders. As May notes:

Those who fail to have a part do not do so because of some lack they possess. They find themselves where they are, not because it is right that they be there, but because the police order just happened to place them there. It could well have been that they were placed elsewhere, better positioned in the police order, and the order would be no worse off for that.²⁹⁷

The second level on which heterogeneity functions in Rancière's formulation is the contingency of the order itself. If every speaking being is equal to every other speaking being, then the fact that some have a part and others do not is purely

²⁹² As above.

²⁹³ As above.

²⁹⁴ May T *SubStance* (2007) 28-29.

²⁹⁵ As above.

²⁹⁶ As above.

²⁹⁷ May T *Borderlands* (2009) 5.

contingent. Having a part is therefore not naturally justified.²⁹⁸ This does not mean that people are never to delegate authority, but delegation itself presupposes participation of the delegators and presupposes their equality.²⁹⁹ Police orders that divide along various registers refuse to recognise the contingency of their distributions.³⁰⁰ Such distributions or divisions are taken as justified and even natural. Politics positing the equality of speaking beings, as May elucidates, gnaws away at the supposedly natural order.³⁰¹ Politics concerns equality and equality arises when the traditional mechanisms of what are usually called politics are put into question.³⁰² Rancière states:

Politics only occurs when these mechanisms are stopped in their tracks by the effect of a presupposition that is totally foreign to them yet without which none of them could ultimately function: the presupposition of equality of anyone with everyone.³⁰³

It should be mentioned here that Rancière derives his conception and understanding of equality from the notion of the equal intelligence of people postulated in his work on pedagogy. His specific understanding of equality is developed in his book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* in which he engages with the ideas of the historical figure of Joseph Jacotot.³⁰⁴ This engagement is central to

²⁹⁸ As above.

²⁹⁹ As above.

³⁰⁰ As above.

³⁰¹ As above.

³⁰² May T in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 108.

³⁰³ Rancière J (1999) 17. To illustrate the above-mentioned point, Rancière has frequently referred to the account of the plebeian revolt around Menenius Agrippa, who served as the patrician ambassador to the plebs occupying Aventine Hill. See Rancière J (1973) 9. He explains how, in an attempt to restore order to the city, Menenius resorted to the familiar fable of the body politic with hierarchal divisions of labour. Menenius explained that everyone has a place, and without patrician command the plebeian body will starve. Rancière highlights that the problem with his explanation is that it had to be spoken. He was addressing a group of addressees capable of understanding. Rancière: "The principle of superiority is ruined if it has to be explained to inferiors why they are inferior". See Rancière J (1973) 9. A command, Tanke notes, presupposes that it can be understood, cutting across the relationship of dissimilarity from which it is articulated. Tanke J (2011) 57. Rancière: "There is no service that is carried out, no knowledge that is imparted, no authority that is established without the master having, however little, to speak 'equal to equal' with the one he commands or instructs". Rancière J (1973) 9. This can also be seen as Rancière's response to Aristotle's partitioning of the logos, namely that there is no meaningful distinction between perceiving and possessing reason. See Rancière J (1973) 9. See also Tanke J (2011) 57.

³⁰⁴ Rancière J (1991).

Rancière’s understanding of politics and equality. Because of its centrality and importance, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, I dedicate a section to it in the next chapter. That discussion should enable an even deeper understanding of his formulation of equality. In this section, I ensue with a general discussion of his politics and the role of equality therein. What should be made clear at this stage is that not every disruption of the police order is worthy of the name of politics.³⁰⁵ Tanke explains that Rancière reserves this term for actions, speech situations, manifestations, practices, arguments, and even works of art and literature that inscribes equality into police divisions of inequality.³⁰⁶ He states that “[n]othing is political in itself [...] for the political only happens by means of a principle that does not belong to it: equality”.³⁰⁷ Therefore, only the supposition of equality allows for speech, action and organisation to break from the police. Without equality such operations are categorised under the heading of non-political competition between parts.³⁰⁸ Rancière:

What makes an action political is not its object or the place where it is carried out, but solely its form, the form in which the confirmation of equality is inscribed in the setting up of a dispute, of a community existing solely through being divided.³⁰⁹

Thus, politics entails the enactment of equality (the equality of speaking beings), through the staging of a scene of dissensus or conflict, within a police situation of inequality. Put differently, politics is that which ruptures orders of domination, legitimacy and distribution through people enacting their equality within an unequal police order.³¹⁰

³⁰⁵ Tanke J (2011) 51.

³⁰⁶ As above.

³⁰⁷ Rancière J (1999) 33.

³⁰⁸ Tanke J (2011) 51.

³⁰⁹ Rancière J (1999) 32.

³¹⁰ Davis explains that Rancière’s opposition between the police and politics and the renaming of what is normally thought of as politics as policing is a twisting of the ordinary usage of both terms and which blurs and dramatises their proper meanings. See Davis O (2010) 76. This twisting and dramatising is, as will become clearer later, characteristic of Rancière’s politics. See Davis O (2010) 76.

Stoneman highlights that politics in Rancière’s sense does not derive from *a priori* truths about knowledge, human nature or social interaction.³¹¹ It is not a function or form of government and it neither ensures nor establishes socio-economic order.³¹² Politics is a dissensual activity that consists only in demonstrating equality in order to break with the “tangible configuration” of the police order as Rancière puts it in the quote mentioned in the beginning of this section. The type of equality that Rancière holds forth is, as Stoneman mentions, not something to be attained, preserved or balanced against competing factors.³¹³ Equality, understood in this way, names an assumption that political subjects must presuppose on their own account and demonstrate through their own actions.³¹⁴ Equality is therefore not given by a social order, nor is it claimed, it is practiced, verified.³¹⁵ In this regard, May has usefully described Rancière’s conception of equality as an “active equality”, a form of equality that the oppressed presume, declare and verify for themselves and which is to be distinguished from equality as conventionally understood as “passive equality” which is given by those in power.³¹⁶ Equality cannot be given. The police order or given hierarchal social arrangement is symbolically disrupted by an equality that is presupposed and antagonistic.³¹⁷ Politics is the subversion of hierarchy by way of introducing a scene of dissensus into the inegalitarian partitions or orderings of the police. It ruptures the logic that presupposes inferiority and superiority.³¹⁸ As Stoneman further highlights, it disorders the coherence of any distribution of places, roles and parts given by the police.³¹⁹

³¹¹ Stoneman E *Philosophy and Rhetoric* (2011) 129.

³¹² As above.

³¹³ As above.

³¹⁴ As above.

³¹⁵ Rancière J (1991) 88.

³¹⁶ See May T *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière* (2008).

³¹⁷ Stoneman E *Philosophy and Rhetoric* (2011) 129.

³¹⁸ Stoneman E *Philosophy and Rhetoric* (2011) 135.

³¹⁹ Stoneman E *Philosophy and Rhetoric* (2011) 136.

Further, it can be stated that politics is also not the assertion of personal autonomy. One does not emancipate oneself politically by oneself.³²⁰ The practice of democracy is a matter of community and of “membership in a single world which can only be expressed in adversarial terms, a coming together which can only occur in conflict”.³²¹

It is an assumption made together. May notes:

To engage in a democratic politics, in the politics of equality is not simply to say, or act as though one were saying “we are all equal now”. It is to structure the past in light of equality. To act democratically is to always have been equal. The democratic political subject creates itself in the moment of its struggle, but the presupposition of its struggle is ascribed to a past that justifies it retrospectively.³²²

Within the presupposition of equality, political subjects are not asking to be merely “included”. The presupposition of equality is demonstrating the fact that political subjects have always been equal.³²³ It is important to mention that since the practice of politics occurs in a situation of the inegalitarian classifications of the police order, by breaking with that order, politics can, in Rancière’s conception, be more or less effective in creating change.³²⁴ But, as warned by Ross, we ought not to confuse social effects with the existence of politics.³²⁵ It is not in the consequences but in the acting out of the presupposition of equality that politics occurs. Ross notes:

Unconcerned with the duration or, for the most part, with measuring any social effects or usefulness such events might have- and supremely unconcerned with institutions- Rancière’s thought has produced disappointment for readers looking for a prescription or a program for action or, for that matter, a celebration of time spent “in the trenches”, so to speak, the temporality of militant organising.³²⁶

Politics begins and ends in a scene of dissensus or police conflict.³²⁷ Ross eloquently explains further:

³²⁰ Rancière J *On the Shores of Politics* (1995) 49 trans. by Heron L.

³²¹ As above.

³²² May T (2008) 71.

³²³ As above.

³²⁴ As above.

³²⁵ Ross K “Historicizing Untimeliness” in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 29.

³²⁶ As above.

³²⁷ May T (2008) 71.

Politics is an event that cannot be predicated any more than its end can be apocalyptically announced. It is always circumstantial, local and entirely contained in its singular manifestations.³²⁸

It therefore does not carry on indefinitely, but only exists through enacting equality by means of a scene of dissensus within a particular police order and it is only within the moment of dissensus and undoing of the classifications of the police order that it exists. Politics in Rancière's definition of it is rare, it is temporal and it is localised. It is an activity of the moment and always provisional.³²⁹

Enactments of equality also re-enacts what Rancière calls "the distribution of the sensible" which I mentioned in the previous section and explain below.³³⁰ The division or distribution of the sensible is both an order of intelligibility and an order of distribution. The order of distribution constitutes division. Some can speak, others cannot, some have their voice heard or have greater say and others do not. Politics is a partition in this division of the sensible that only ever institutes yet another order that is itself open to egalitarian challenge.³³¹ Politics, therefore, as Dillon eloquently explains, is itself this never-ending polemical intrusion of equality into specific historical orders (distributions of the sensible).³³² In other words, politics takes place within the police order. The encounter between politics and the police is never final or definitive and never "produces a new stage of history".³³³ It is always a renegotiation of the police order that we must live in.³³⁴ Democratic politics, enacted by the presupposition of the equality of speaking beings, can only renegotiate or reconfigure the police order. The practice of equality occurs in the context of a particular hierarchy in a particular police order. As mentioned, nothing guarantees that politics will create change.³³⁵ According to Rancière, equality's "verification becomes 'social', causes it to have

³²⁸ Ross K in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 29.

³²⁹ Davis O (2010) 79.

³³⁰ Dillon M "A Passion for the (im)possible: Jacques Rancière, equality, pedagogy and the messianic" *European Journal of Political Theory* (2005) 431.

³³¹ As above.

³³² As above.

³³³ Chambers S *European Journal of Political Theory* (2011) 307.

³³⁴ As above.

³³⁵ May T in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 116.

real social effect, only when it mobilises an obligation to hear”.³³⁶ Politics is a process and “[i]t is the emergence of a collective subject acting under the presupposition of its equality, an acting that disrupts a particular police order”.³³⁷ It should be emphasised further that the police and politics are closely related. Rancière elucidates:

If the distinction between politics and the police can be useful, it is not to allow us to say: politics is on this side, police is on the opposite side. It is to allow us to understand the form of their intertwinement. We rarely, if ever, face a situation where we can say: this is politics in its purity. But we ceaselessly face situations where we have to discern how politics encroaches on matters of the police and the police on matters of politics.³³⁸

Further, the idea that we should not confuse change with politics does not mean that for Rancière political change is merely unimportant. As may reiterate, it is of the highest importance for Rancière.³³⁹ But, we must distinguish the existence of politics from its effectiveness.³⁴⁰ If we do not “we risk missing it in the moment of its happening, and, on the other hand, ascribing it where it does not exist”.³⁴¹

Politics and equality as described by Rancière upsets, it ruptures and breaks apart. Hallward emphasises that equality does not refer to a place, but to the placeless or the out of place, not to a class, but to the unclassifiable or the out of class.³⁴²

The essence of equality is not so much to unify, but as to declassify, to undo the supposed naturalness of orders and replace it with controversial figures of division. Equality is the power of the inconsistent, disintegrative and ever-played division.³⁴³

Rancière’s politics postulate the presumptions of a disruptive equality against the advocates of an orderly, hierarchical inequality. Rancière’s most general effort has always been “to explore the various resources of displacement, indistinction, de-

³³⁶ Rancière J (1995) 86.

³³⁷ May T in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 116.

³³⁸ Rancière J “The Method of Equality: An Answer to Some Questions” in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 287.

³³⁹ May T in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 116.

³⁴⁰ As above.

³⁴¹ As above.

³⁴² Hallward P in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 141.

³⁴³ Rancière J (1995) 32-33.

differentiation or de-qualification that are available in any given field”.³⁴⁴ And the tool for this displacement or indistinction is equality.

In his formulation of equality Rancière attempts to defend the idea that the notion of politics should be reserved for democratic forms of organisation, communication, practice, and action. Democracy in the Rancièrian framework is necessarily a destabilising and disruptive force. Politics is distinguishable from other ways of ordering the community by its most basic element, equality. Without equality therefore, distributions, operations, and discourses partake of the opposite of politics, namely the police. The police employ a fundamentally different logic than politics and the opposition is sometimes explained by Rancière in terms of “worlds” in order to highlight the fact that the police and politics are essentially, although closely related, different orientations toward the community.³⁴⁵ “Doing” politics is placing the two worlds or logics in conflict by creating spaces where the two can be opposed and the police hierarchies, however provisionally, overturned.

The political, according to Rancière, is the third space of contestation, an indeterminate and always shifting meeting point between politics and the police.³⁴⁶

It is further important to mention that equality relies upon its demonstration. Tanke explains that Politics is about generating obligations to recognise the existence of a shared world through the creation of polemical sites where equality can be verified.³⁴⁷ Equality follows from demonstration, both in the logical and performative sense.³⁴⁸ It resides in demonstrating that the demonstrators are political subjects and that their arguments count as political arguments. This notion of demonstration is closely related to Rancière’s argument that politics is about redistributing the distribution of the sensible. As mentioned,

³⁴⁴ Hallward P in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 141.

³⁴⁵ Tanke J (2011) 51. See for example “Who is the subject of the Rights of Man?” *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2004) 297-310 at 304 where Rancière describes politics as “putting two worlds in one and the same world”.

³⁴⁶ As above.

³⁴⁷ Tanke J (2011) 59.

³⁴⁸ As above.

I will discuss this notion fully at a later stage. At this stage it should suffice to mention that the demonstration of equality is necessary to create the conditions in which others recognise the import of equality.³⁴⁹ These demonstrations or actions create a shared world where one was previously denied and they are significant for, as Tanke notes, they overturn the exclusionary partitions of the police.³⁵⁰ Therefore, demonstrations create possibilities to begin to take part or participate. Equality requires a polemical demonstration, a case or verification. Equality as demonstration is closely related to Rancière's idea of politics as dissensus. Dissensus has to do with "disputing subjects and litigious objects".³⁵¹ Politics opposes consensus by means of dissensus. Tanke notes further that dissensus is the means by which the given situation is deprived of its self-evidence and subjected to dispute. He states that "[d]issensus is the process of politics itself in that it is the activity of countering the police distributions of the sensible with the egalitarian supplement".³⁵² Dissensus breaks open an interpretation of sense thought to be undisputable, whether it be through polemics, demonstrations, strikes, speech, poetic activities, or the definition of new capacities.³⁵³ If consensus promotes the obviousness of the *status quo*, politics as dissensus opposes it by postulating another world:

Dissensus operates on space and time in order to create a new terrain for confrontation. It is the action of creating a stage upon which one can appear equal. It sketches the outline of a different world and forces us to reconsider it alongside our own. Politics is the activity of holding in conflict the world of the police and the one defined under the assumption of equality. Dissensus consists in making apparent fundamentally heterogeneous ways of parcelling out capacities and parts.³⁵⁴

³⁴⁹ As above.

³⁵⁰ Tanke J (2011) 60.

³⁵¹ Tanke J (2011) 61.

³⁵² Tanke J (2011) 62.

³⁵³ As above.

³⁵⁴ Tanke J (2011) 62- 63. According to Tanke it is for this reason that Rancière speaks of politics as "made up of the relationships between worlds" and not simply conflicts over power. Tanke J (2011) 62- 63. As he explains, for Rancière the concept of power has outlived its usefulness. Tanke J (2011) 62- 63. It was formerly an instrument for problematising aspects of existence erroneously believed to be apolitical. It provided resources for critiquing phenomena as diverse as education, urbanism, the framing of life in the media and the ability of class, race, gender and heteronormative privileges to perpetuate themselves. For Rancière, it sustains the thesis that "everything is political" and therefore ends politics. See Rancière (1999) 31-32 & 118.

Politics as dissensus means that police distributions are never secure and can be continually contested by those who as subjects question its objects, parameters and partitions. Before explaining Rancière's notion of the political subject, I reiterate the most important points discussed above.

Politics is an antagonistic activity, which inscribes equality into police situations of inequality. Its aim is to, on the basis of a universal equality (the equality of speaking beings), disrupt particular hierarchal arrangements so as to reconfigure the police order that we must live in. Equality is central in Rancière's conception of politics. Political subjects presuppose it on their own and it is an equality that is demonstrated and manifested in order to generate obligations within a specific police order. Politics occur in a scene of dissensus, which is the setting up of a scene or a stage where equality can play itself out. It lays bare the contingency of police meanings, rejecting police definitions. The police order is concerned with titles and roles, classification and identification. Politics is concerned with not only breaking with the established framework of the police, but importantly; with opening up the possibility of reconfiguring the police order itself. If the police order is concerned with prescribing what is thinkable and perceptible, the political subject is concerned with instituting breaches so that other meanings and directions are possible. In the section below I explain Rancière's notion of the political subject.

2.3.3 The Political Subject

Politics, as mentioned, involves dissensus. It is the disruption and reconfiguration by a political subject of the given order of domination and the political subject, in Rancière's terms, only emerges and comes to exist through the act of politics.³⁵⁵ To engage in politics is not to discover a subject of politics, it is rather to create one.³⁵⁶ Before the scene of dissensus, before the enactment of equality there is no political subject. Political subjectivity happens alongside and through the

³⁵⁵ Rancière J (2010) 31.

³⁵⁶ May T (2008) 71.

enactment of equality. To become a subject is therefore, as May explains, one side of the coin.³⁵⁷ The other side is the creation of dissensus. Rancière states that “[i]t consists of creating a stage around a specific conflict on which the equality or inequality as speaking beings of the partners in conflict can be played out”.³⁵⁸ One becomes a subject by “rejecting the classification of the police order and one does that by acting and speaking in a way that demonstrates equality that runs counter to the inequality of the classifications of the police order”.³⁵⁹ Equality cannot be received, but only, as mentioned, practiced or verified by the political subject. As May further notes, Rancière might argue that equality cannot be received, because to receive it, is already to be less than equal to those who bestow it. Democratic politics is politics of the formation of subjects.³⁶⁰ Rancière states:

Politics is not the exercise of power. Politics ought to be defined in its own specific mode of action that is enacted by a specific subject and that has its own proper rationality. It is the political relationship that makes it possible to conceive of the subject of politics, not the other way around.³⁶¹

Therefore, there is no sphere of pre-constituted subjects. There are no pre-given interests, classes or struggles.³⁶² Interests, classes and struggles arise because a group of people decide to make itself a subject by demonstrating their equality. Rancière explains it in the following way:

Politics does not happen just because the poor oppose the rich. It is the other way around: politics causes the poor to exist as entity.³⁶³

Rancière does not mean here that nobody is poor before the emergence of politics. What come into existence are not poor people, but *the poor*, a collective subject taking action by challenging the police order’s presupposition of the inequality of poor people.³⁶⁴ In order to describe the political subject as Rancière

³⁵⁷ As above.

³⁵⁸ Rancière J (1999) 51.

³⁵⁹ May T (2008) 71.

³⁶⁰ As above.

³⁶¹ Rancière J (2010) 27.

³⁶² As above.

³⁶³ Rancière J (1999) 11.

³⁶⁴ May T *Borderlands* (2009) 7.

envisions it, it is important to introduce the concept of “subjectivisation”, “subjectivation” or “subjectification”:

By way of subjectification I mean the production through a series of actions of a body and a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose identification is thus part of the reconfiguration of the field of experience.³⁶⁵

Subjectivation is a production that arises through collective action. It does not give rise to collective action and does not pre-exist it. It also, as May notes, doesn’t arise from collective action as a consequence. Subjectivation rather arises through collective action, within it and alongside it.³⁶⁶ What therefore arises is a *we*.³⁶⁷ Where there were once individuals, within the moment of politics, a subject of collective action comes to exist when the members, recognising one another in solidarity, confront the police order on the basis of equality.³⁶⁸ But what then distinguishes politics from any group taking action in its own name? Let’s say in the name of women, homosexuals or black people? Importantly, subjectivation should not be understood as a process of identifying, but rather as one of declassifying. May states:

A democratic politics rejects the hierarchy of the police order not in the name of particular identities, but in the name of equality, the equality of speaking beings.³⁶⁹

The process of subjectivation is not a process of adding a new police category, but a process of undercutting police categories. It does not merely give us a new name that can be added to the existing names in the police order.³⁷⁰ Rancière argues that “[t]he essence of equality is in fact not so much to unify as to declassify, to undo the supposed naturalness of orders and to replace it with

³⁶⁵ Rancière J (1999) 35. It seems that these terms are used interchangeably in the English translations of Rancière’s books as well as in the various works of authors who write about the process of subjectivation. See for example the index of words in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 352.

³⁶⁶ May T *Borderlands* (2009) 7.

³⁶⁷ As above.

³⁶⁸ As above.

³⁶⁹ As above.

³⁷⁰ As above.

controversial figures of division”.³⁷¹ Identification imposes qualities, usually qualities already associated with the police order.³⁷² Subjectivation is not blackness or the feminine, for example, or any other particular content for that matter. The underlying meaning is equality and only equality.³⁷³

The following important question has been formulated in this regard: Is the concept of equality shorn from any type of identity capable of supporting politics directed at specific hierarchal conditions?³⁷⁴ Or put differently, don’t we need the specific content of identity in order to struggle against the identity imposed by the police order. May answers this question in the following way and I quote him at length:

Rancière’s politics does not deny that people in struggle see themselves as having particular identities. What is at issue is how the politics defines itself or at least how its unfolding reveals it to be. We might put the point this way: an identity may be motivating for political actors, and it may structure the way they act, but what is politically relevant for a democratic politics does not have to do with any of that. It only has to do with whether the presupposition of equality is in play: that is, whether the action taken is reasonably seen as an expression of that presupposition. [...] What is at stake is not the preservation of identity but the equality of those who seek to live as they see fit. [...] It is the politics of those who, regardless of [let’s say for example] their sexual orientation, see one another as fellow members of a police order that can incorporate and co-opt almost anything into its operation: anything, of course, except equality.³⁷⁵

Gabriel Rockhill has defined Rancière’s political subject as:

neither a political lobby nor an individual who seeks adequate representation for his or her interests and ideas. It is an empty operator that produces cases of political dispute by challenging the established framework of identification and classification.³⁷⁶

The established framework of identification and classification is of course the police order. “Identity” is therefore not a term usually associated with Rancière’s work. In fact, he is highly critical of identity, specifically the way in which it

³⁷¹ Rancière J (1995) 37.

³⁷² May T *Borderlands* (2009) 7.

³⁷³ As above.

³⁷⁴ May T *Borderlands* (2009) 12.

³⁷⁵ May T *Borderlands* (2009) 14-15.

³⁷⁶ Rockhill G “Glossary of Technical Terms” in Rancière J (ed.) *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004) 90.

operates within and becomes identical to the distribution and classifications of the police order. It is for this reason that it might be apt to describe, as Rockhill does, Rancière's political subject as an "empty operator".³⁷⁷ In this regard, Rancière states the following:

For me politics is never a question of identity; it always stages a gap [un écart]. When one says "we are the people", I would say precisely that "we" and "the people" is not the same thing; politics takes place in the gap between the two. [...] For me politics is the constitution of a theatrical and artificial sphere [...] A political subject is a type of theatrical being, temporary and localised.³⁷⁸

It should be mentioned that the notion of verifying equality, or presupposing it, encompasses the idea that one is acting "as if" one is an equal and the idea of creating a scene of dissensus relates to the idea of building a stage from where to demonstrate one's equality. This notion of acting "as if" shall be discussed in more detail later, when discussing the distribution of the sensible. Rancière uses a number of theatrical metaphors in order to explain his politics and it is from within this formulation that he conceptualises the political subject, not according to any type of identity, but according to the enactment of equality, through the process of subjectivation. The people "does not constitute a type of group; it is not a mass; it is purely the name of an act of subjectivisation".³⁷⁹

In order to understand Rancière's political subject, we need to make a distinction between the identities forced upon people in the police order and the political subjects that break from these allocations.³⁸⁰ It is only through the elaboration of bodies and voices not identified within the police order that politics take place. This is what Rancière means when he states in the above-mentioned quote that politics involves "actions of a body and a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose identification is thus part of

³⁷⁷ As above.

³⁷⁸ Citton Y "Political Agency and the Ambivalence of the Sensible" in Rockhill G & Watts P (2009) 129-130.

³⁷⁹ As above.

³⁸⁰ Tanke J (2011) 67.

the reconfiguration of the field of experience”.³⁸¹ The political subject is a class that belongs to no one in particular and thus potentially to everyone.³⁸² The process of subjectivation contains two closely related moments; firstly, the moment of disidentification where the subject tears away from the identities and interests as defined by the police.³⁸³ In other words, the moment when an individual actively challenges their position within the dominant order. And the second moment entails a creation of new subjectivities in excess to the parts already identifiable within the police order.³⁸⁴ These subjectivities revolve around “impossible identifications” or names that do not belong to anyone in particular. Tanke elucidates:

Strictly speaking, these subjectivities cannot be inhabited by the person or group making the identification; however, they provide the means for escaping the policed identities that limit individuals.³⁸⁵

The impossible identification allows a subject to extend beyond itself, redefining capacities and insisting upon commonality with others.³⁸⁶

In “Politics, Identification and Subjectivization” Rancière refers to an impossible identification as “an identification that cannot be embodied by he or she who utters it”.³⁸⁷ Rather than erasing the difference between one subject and another, impossible identifications take “the difference between voice and body” to generate otherwise unimaginable political effects.³⁸⁸ Rancière states:

“We are the wretched of the earth” is the kind of sentence that no wretched of the earth could ever utter. Or, to take a personal example, for my generation politics in France relied on an impossible identification- and identification with the bodies of Algerians beaten to death and thrown into the Seine by the French police, in the name of the French people, in October 1961. We could not identify with those Algerians, but we could question our identification with the “French people” in whose name they were murdered. That is to say, we could act as political subjects in the interval or

³⁸¹ Rancière J (1999) 35.

³⁸² Tanke J (2011) 67.

³⁸³ Tanke J (2011) 67.

³⁸⁴ As above.

³⁸⁵ As above.

³⁸⁶ As above.

³⁸⁷ Rancière J *October* (1992) 67.

³⁸⁸ Parker A “Impossible Speech-Acts: Jacques Rancière’s Erich Auerbach” in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 256.

gap between two identities, neither of which we could assume. That process of subjectivisation had no proper name, but it found its name, its cross name, in the 1968 assumption “We are all German Jews”- a “wrong” identification, an identification in terms of the denial of an absolute wrong.³⁸⁹

Therefore, to identify with the Algerian people is impossible. It was impossible to identify with their lives and suffering under the existing regime, yet neither was it possible to identify with the French in whose name they had been killed. But, as Rancière states, “we could act in the interval between two identities”, hence the slogan “We are all German-Jews” whilst most of the demonstrators were not themselves German Jews. Therefore, what is staged by the political subject is not an identity, but the gap between two identities. The idea of subjectivation will become clearer later with the discussion of the distribution of the sensible and with illustration of some of the examples that Rancière uses. At this junction it should be made clear that political subjectivity is about reconfiguring the police order by creating new identities, capacities or bodies. It is therefore a claim to equality that rejects the allocations of the police order and appeals to identifications that are new to the police order and that holds the potential to reconfigure the order. Subjectivation is the process of straying from one’s “natural” position given by the police order, under the heading of equality, in order to create new capacities or bodies. The example that Rancière uses and mentioned above is complex and contains multiple nuances. But, ultimately, for the purposes of this section, Rancière stipulates that subjectivation is never simply about the assertion of identity but always also about the refusal of an identity imposed by others, by the police order, and it therefore involves an impossible identification, which places the subject between identities.³⁹⁰ The subject strays from the police order identity and then has to identify with something else, an identification that undercuts the police order and therefore doesn’t exist within the given police order. Because of the fact that it doesn’t exist within the police order, it is an impossible identification, so to speak. The discussion of the figure of Gabriel Gauny in the next chapter will illustrate in more

³⁸⁹ Parker A in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 257.

³⁹⁰ Davis O (2010) 42.

detail in what way impossible identifications can be made. Impossible identifications, at this juncture, can be said to involve names belonging to no one in particular because they are not simply the reiteration of police identities.³⁹¹ The particular name is not the important thing in question. Rather, it is how that name manifests, the content it is given and the way in which it used to disrupt police order identities. Because it is not merely a confirmation of the categories of the police order, the subject is between identities, between a police identity and an impossible identity. At this stage, it should therefore suffice to say that dissensual politics prefers polemics, discord and confusion to the identities, places and capacities of the police order.

This definition is intimately related to Rancière's view of politics as disruptive, as that which attempts to break apart the police order's logic and to reconfigure the order. Politics and political subjectivity is about mixing identities, spaces and places of the police order. It is about challenging the police order's account of things by demonstrating something different to the police order and, not merely disrupting it, but opening up the possibility of reconfiguring the order itself; and equality is the vehicle of this demonstration.

It is further important to mention that subjectivation has a complex relation to time and it relates to the time of politics. Subjectivation is "self-creation" and a people in struggle become subjects when they act out of a collective sense of their equality.³⁹² However, although the sense of one's equality is bound to the struggle itself, it is projected backwards in time. May explains:

Thus equality is not simply that presupposition which ascribes social congregation in the last instance to the community of speaking beings as to a principle necessarily forgotten; for it is manifested in the recurring rupture which, by projecting the egalitarian presupposition back to a point anterior to itself, endows it with social significance.³⁹³

³⁹¹ Tanke J (2011) 67.

³⁹² May T (2008) 71.

³⁹³ May T (2008) 72.

The political subject is therefore the subject that acts “as if” it has always been equal within a particular dissensus or instance. Or more to the point, the political subjects act as if it has always been a political subject within a particular dissensus.

Before explaining the notions of “the wrong and the miscount”, it should be reiterated that one becomes a political subject within a specific scene of dissensus by rejecting police classifications and identities as well as the allocations of ways of doing, seeing, saying and being that the police order states should follow from these classifications or identities. It is about rejecting the “natural” position given by the police order as well as the implicit police order assumptions about that position. There are no pre-constituted political subjects that are regarded as qualified to participate in politics. It is through the construction of a “we” that speaks in and through equality that a political subject is constituted. As shall become clear later, for Rancière, unimaginable political effects can be generated by the process of subjectivation, by the process of speaking to the gap between identities and by identifying with the impossible.

The wrong and the miscount further elucidates Rancière’s political subject. I turn to these notions below.

2.3.4 The wrong and the miscount

It was mentioned in the previous section that subjectivation is as much a struggle for recognition of the political existence of subjects as it is for the identification with a new category. The notions of the miscount and the wrong serve to further elucidate this idea. Rancière, in order to explain his formulation of the “structural miscount”, looks back at democracy in ancient Athens. Democracy emerged after Solon’s reforms of 594 BCE abolished enslavement for indebtedness.³⁹⁴ Davis explains that this led to the emergence of a class of citizen called the *demos* or

³⁹⁴ Davis O (2010) 80. See also Rancière J (1999) 9.

the people.³⁹⁵ The *demos* lacked all of the traditional attributes thought necessary for active involvement in the political process or public sphere, such as noble birth, wealth or moral excellence. Yet, they nevertheless claimed not only to participate in the political process, but also to be on equal footing with those thought to have the right to participate in politics.³⁹⁶ Their claim is a response to what Rancière calls the “wrong” (*le tort*). This refers to the fact that they are denied a legitimate part in society, or the right to legitimate political participation.³⁹⁷ Aristotle describes the members of the *demos* as those who had “no part in anything”.³⁹⁸ Their political existence was essentially denied. For Rancière the *demos* is a prime example of a political subject. Rancière states that the *demos* is:

An excessive part- the whole of those who are nothing, who do not have specific properties allowing them to exercise power [...] Democracy is, properly speaking, the symbolic institution of the political in the form of the power of those who are not entitled to exercise power- a rupture in the order of legitimacy and domination. Democracy is the paradoxical power of those who do not count: the count of the unaccounted for.³⁹⁹

“The part of those who have no part” (*la part des sans-part*) occurs alongside “the count of the uncounted” (*le compte des incomptes*).⁴⁰⁰ The *demos* becomes the very subject of politics and Rancière uses Aristotle’s formulation in order to explain the notions of the wrong and the miscount. The *demos* is the political subject inasmuch as it is capable of exceeding and thereby undermining the police’s accounting.⁴⁰¹ The *demos* therefore have no recognised existence within the social hierarchy of the police order. They do not count and they have not been counted. Policing therefore also denotes a specific way of counting.⁴⁰² An aspect of the police order has counted all the parts of the community. Policing is not just a way of counting the actual groups that make up the social whole, it is also a way of counting that excludes the possibility of any remainder to that

³⁹⁵ Davis O (2010) 80.

³⁹⁶ As above.

³⁹⁷ As above.

³⁹⁸ As above.

³⁹⁹ Davis O (2010) 81. Rancière J in Panagia D *Diacritics* (2000) 124.

⁴⁰⁰ Tanke J (2011) 43.

⁴⁰¹ As above.

⁴⁰² Chambers S *European Journal of Political Theory* (2011) 307.

order.⁴⁰³ As Davis explains, the police must count it all. The *demos* is therefore the part “that has no part”, “the unaccounted for”. Politics occurs when the *demos* appears through the enactment of equality, by the construction of a scene of dissensus.⁴⁰⁴ Whereas the police define the community as unified and whole, politics consists of contesting the very definition of community.⁴⁰⁵ It demonstrates that there has been a fundamental “miscount” and insist, through the enactment of the equality of speaking beings, that there is another ac/count of the city.⁴⁰⁶ For Rancière, the hierarchy of a specific social order is based on the basic injustice of the wrong or this miscount. The *demos*’ claim to equality is therefore also an assertion of their existence outside of the police’s accounting. Their egalitarian claim seeks to highlight the contingency of the police order’s hierarchy, which is a hierarchy based on a basic injustice, the fundamental miscount or wrong of their non-existence.⁴⁰⁷ Therefore, politics cannot be other than antagonistic or disputatious, because it is the expression of a basic disagreement with a police order that recognises neither the claim, nor the existence of the part that has no part.⁴⁰⁸ The police order assumes that there is no part of those who have no part. And the struggle for equality is the struggle for the very existence of the part of those who have no part as subject.

Equality exists through the inability of any political order to count the shares of the community or the communal parts and distribute the common between them on the basis of some “harmonious geometrical governance” or what Rancière refers to as an *arkhe* (a principle of justice or the good for example).⁴⁰⁹ Because

⁴⁰³ As above.

⁴⁰⁴ As above.

⁴⁰⁵ As above.

⁴⁰⁶ Tanke J (2011) 43.

⁴⁰⁷ Davis O (2010) 81.

⁴⁰⁸ As above.

⁴⁰⁹ Arsenjuk L “On Jacques Rancière” *Fronesis* (2005) 1-2. (Published on 2007/03/05 and available online at *Eurozine Journals* www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-01-01-arsenjuk-en.html (accessed 28-12-2014). Rancière states: “An *arkhe* is two things: it is a theoretical principle entailing a clear distribution of positions and capacities, grounding the distribution of power between rulers and ruled; and it is a temporal beginning entailing that the fact of ruling is anticipated in the disposition to the rule and, conversely, that the evidence of this disposition is given by the fact of its empirical operation”. Rancière J (2010) 51. For Rancière the

there is no *arkhe* or perfect principle or transcendental truth according to which the parts of the community can be regarded, there is a fundamental wrong done during any type of counting.⁴¹⁰ The equality of speaking beings is irreducible to any political order and thus never instituted as such. Arsenjuk notes:

It is an equality which presents itself only through a declaration of a wrong committed by the count of the community parts- it is thus, an equality which exists through what it denies.⁴¹¹

Equality needs to be axiomatically assumed through the declaration of the wrong.⁴¹² This equality is of course simply the equality of anyone with everyone else, or the equality of speaking beings. It demonstrates the absence of the *arkhe*, of a proper principle or the sheer contingency of the social order.⁴¹³ The political subject demonstrates not merely the lack of proper principle, “but the principle that there is lack of a proper principle”.⁴¹⁴

Politics is the process that authorises the exercise of power by those with no sanctioned authorisation or authority. Politics is the process that founds the power to govern other people on nothing other than “the absence of foundation”, on nothing other than the absence of the *arkhe*.⁴¹⁵

existence of a wrong pre-sets philosophy with the effect of another kind of equality, “one that suspends simple arithmetic without setting up any kind of geometry. This equality is simply the equality of anyone with anyone else: in other words, in the final analysis, the absence of *arkhe*, the sheer contingency of any social order”. Rancière J (1999) 15. According to Rancière, it is this contingency that the existence of politics makes manifest and that political philosophy has sought to domesticate and placate by suturing politics to a certain extra-political principle. Rancière J (1999) 15. Arsenjuk explains that this takes on three forms: Firstly, “archi-politics”; this refers to Plato and the attempt to tie politics to a communitarian rule, to subsume politics under the logic of a strict and closed distribution of parts and the establishment of a social space which is homogenously structured and thus leaves no space for politics to emerge. Arsenjuk L *Fronesis* (2005) 3-4. Secondly, “para-politics”; this refers to Aristotle and the attempt to reduce political antagonism to mere competition, negotiation and exercise of an agonistic procedure, or, to draw the political subject into the police order as just one more of its many parts. Arsenjuk L *Fronesis* (2005) 3-4. Lastly, “meta-politics”; this refers to Marx and the understanding of political antagonism as a displaced manifestation of “true” antagonism, which is socio-economic, or, politics that can only happen with the promise of its self-abolishment or the destruction of the political theatre that is necessary for the direct administration of the socio-economic sphere. Arsenjuk L *Fronesis* (2005) 3-4. See Rancière J (1999) 61-93.

⁴¹⁰ As above.

⁴¹¹ As above.

⁴¹² As above.

⁴¹³ As above.

⁴¹⁴ As above.

⁴¹⁵ Hallward P in Rockhill G & Watts P (2009) 146.

For Rancière democracy is a radical paradox and it is indeed the paradox of politics itself. It is a paradox “[b]ecause the institution of politics seems to provide an answer to the key question as to what it is that grounds the power of rule in a community”.⁴¹⁶ And democracy provides an answer, but it is an astonishing one: namely, that the very ground for the power of ruling is that there is no ground at all”.⁴¹⁷ Rancière thinks of politics in the form of encounter.⁴¹⁸ Politics opposes the logic of “the supplementary” (that there is another part) with the logic of the police logic of saturation (all is counted). The police take for granted that there are only the existing parts of society and that each of them has been given its due, its common share. Politics claims the opposite, that there is a wrong done in the existing count of the community, that there is the part of those who have no part and it is through constructing a scene of dissensus in which the existence of the wrong is verified. It is also then through the axiomatic assumption or presupposition of equality that the political subject is born.⁴¹⁹ Further, the part of those who have no part has to be staged because it is not a part identifiable or recognisable within the police order, as such an “impossible identification” is necessary.⁴²⁰ The *demos*, the people, appear as the exception that stands in for the whole and has the effect of disrupting existing identifications by separating the community parts from its places.

For Rancière there are no privileged political actors, no inherently political object; there is no proper political content. Because of the fact that politics occurs within the police order and it shares its objects and its content and happens against its background, politics is a matter of *form*:

Anything can become political (the strike, the demonstration, the workplace)- if it breaks with the logic of negotiation between the existing parts of social entities, stop being the site of determination of the proper, an becomes a scene of an encounter between the logic of the police and the

⁴¹⁶ As above.

⁴¹⁷ Rancière J (2010) 50.

⁴¹⁸ Arsenjuk L *Fronesis* (2005) 15.

⁴¹⁹ Arsenjuk L *Fronesis* (2005) 4.

⁴²⁰ As above.

axiomatic assumption of equality, a subjectivisation of a wrong and the disidentification of the communal parts from themselves.⁴²¹

It has been noted that the idea of the wrong or *le tort*, derived from the word “*torde*”, a verb that Rancière frequently uses, means to wring or to twist.⁴²² This indicates that the wrong is torsion or twisting of the equality underpinning all human relationships. Social inequality is therefore a wronging or wringing of the primordial equality on which inequality relies.⁴²³ Politics name these twists. It disrupts the supposed naturalness of the initial count with the emergence of the *demos*, whose emergence also manifests the wrong.⁴²⁴ The emergence of the *demos* impacts on the entire community for the reason that it cannot begin to take part without altering the ordering, count and distribution of parts constituted at its expense.⁴²⁵ The logic of the *arkhe*, mentioned above, attempts to turn the arbitrariness of the social into something natural and it is the emergence of the *demos* that makes its arbitrariness manifest. The essentially groundless nature of human community, along with any natural equality that might exist is covered over by a “geometric equality” that attempts to suppress the emergence of the *demos*, by claiming it doesn’t exist.⁴²⁶ The emergence of the *demos* therefore turns the consensual community into a litigious one; where the community was the sum of its parts, the emergence of the *demos* separates the community from itself.⁴²⁷

⁴²¹ As above.

⁴²² Tanke J (2011) 52.

⁴²³ As above.

⁴²⁴ As above.

⁴²⁵ As above.

⁴²⁶ Tanke J (2011) 54.

⁴²⁷ Rancière states: “Politics exist whenever the counts of parts and parties of society is disturbed by the inscription of a part of those who have no part. It begins when the equality of anyone and everyone is inscribed in the liberty of the people. This liberty of the people is an empty property, an improper property through which those who are nothing can purport that their group is identical to the whole of the community. Politics exists as long as singular forms of subjectification repeat the forms of the original inscription of the identity between the whole of the community and the nothing that separates it from itself- in other words, the sole count of its parts. Politics ceases wherever this gap no longer has any place, wherever the whole of the community is reduced to the sum of its parts with nothing left over”. Rancière J (1999) 306.

It should further be noted that the wrong does not simply precede and therefore determine political subjects.⁴²⁸ This would mean finding the equivalent of an *arkhe* of politics. The situation is a bit more complicated. Arsenjuk explains that the declaration of the wrong that marks the beginning of politics happens within the police order.⁴²⁹ The police order is by its definition the order of the non-existence of the wrong. The wrong can't therefore simply precede its declaration. The wrong does not simply precede the appearance of the subject.⁴³⁰ Not only does the political subject appear within the police order, but also the wrong itself:

The declaration of a wrong is therefore never simply a statement of an already existing fact. Politics is not the countering of facts with other facts. The existence of a wrong is not a fact. The declaration of the wrong consists rather in the break with the logic of the factual.⁴³¹

In a strict sense then the declaration of a wrong is impossible due to the fact that the wrong does not precede such a declaration. Nevertheless, the declaration occurs. It happens through an “enunciation that retroactively changes the conditions of its own possibility”.⁴³² As Arsenjuk aptly notes, the birth of the political subject through the declaration of the wrong thus involves “a kind of free gesture or an anarchic that authorises itself through a retroactive presupposition of its own existence”.⁴³³

Rancière's analysis of the Greek experience allows him to describe the encounter between politics and the police as a specialised form of class struggle.⁴³⁴ As Tanke notes, this is not to say that politics is in any way about the contest over goods within a society.⁴³⁵ In the Greek experience, the rich attempt to put an end to politics by insisting upon the fundamentally just nature of the distribution of the police order. The poor on the other hand, who embody, according to Rancière, “nothing other than politics itself” attempt to reconfigure the police distribution

⁴²⁸ Arsenjuk L *Fronesis* (2005) 4.

⁴²⁹ As above.

⁴³⁰ As above.

⁴³¹ As above.

⁴³² As above.

⁴³³ As above.

⁴³⁴ Tanke J (2011) 52.

⁴³⁵ As above.

so that they can take part.⁴³⁶ Politics is the means by which the part that has no part, through the declaration of a wrong, “contest the categories, divisions, identifications and means of social integration that attempt to consign them to non-existence”.⁴³⁷ Rancière makes it clear that political conflict does not involve an opposition between groups with different interests that has an equal share or equal right to participate in politics.⁴³⁸ The count of the unaccounted is relegated by the police order to that which is not. Politics forms an opposition between logics that count the parties and parts of the community in different ways.⁴³⁹

In conclusion and to clarify, the whole of the community is, according to the police, a perfect “fittingness of functions, places and ways of being”.⁴⁴⁰ Everyone has his or her place and function. This can even include the poor, or those that are excluded. The point is that the police have named them or counted them. And with this naming all the assumptions about what the poor or the excluded can be or do is established. The police count the community as the sum or totality of this “fittingness” of empirical parts, each part bearing particular qualifications for membership. These parts or groups are defined by differences in birth, by different functions, locations and interests and by their “dedication to specific modes of action, in places where these occupations are exercised”.⁴⁴¹ The police say what there is and what there is not and politics, through the declaration of the miscount, disturbs this entire arrangement. The *demos* therefore brings politics into existence through the manifestation of the wrong and is therefore the subject of politics in two senses, namely: “It is the agent whose emergence turns the consensual community into a litigious one, and its existence as a potential part-taker is the very object of confrontation”.⁴⁴²

⁴³⁶ As above.

⁴³⁷ As above.

⁴³⁸ Rancière J (2010) 35.

⁴³⁹ As above.

⁴⁴⁰ As above.

⁴⁴¹ As above.

⁴⁴² Tanke J (2011) 52.

The miscount and the wrong can mean different things in different contexts. Simply put, it refers to the attempt to make manifest the fact that there is nothing natural, or that there is no principle that can justify the existing structure of the community's hierarchies, parts, groups and positions. On the contrary, this structure's existence is based on a fundamental miscount, or wrong. The central point that Rancière attempts to make with regards to these specific notions of the wrong, the miscount and the *demos* can be further explained by his use of the term "disagreement". Rancière has stated that politics "has the rationality of disagreement as its very own rationality".⁴⁴³ Disagreement here does not refer to simple differences of political outlook. Disagreement "has clearly not to do with words alone. It generally bears on the very situation in which speaking subjects find themselves".⁴⁴⁴ As James explains, Rancière's concern is the concrete and material situation or conditions from which people are able to speak and from which their voices can be heard and understood.⁴⁴⁵ It refers to content as well as position. As will become clear later, disagreement is a function of the distribution of the sensible which divides up space and place, sites and the perspectives of a shared world. As such, disagreement cannot simply be a matter of discursive differences, but it rather concerns the ground of intelligibility and communicability upon which such differences may be articulated in the first place.⁴⁴⁶ Rancière states that disagreement

is less concerned with arguing than with what can be argued, the presence or the absence of a common object between X and Y. It concerns the sensible presentation of this common object, the very capacity of the interlocutors to present it.⁴⁴⁷

Disagreement is therefore not just a difference in opinion or misrecognition, nor is it misunderstanding.⁴⁴⁸ It therefore concerns, as James further notes, fundamentally divergent ways of understanding and encountering any object of disagreement as well as the relative possibilities of expression and

⁴⁴³ James I (2010) 120.

⁴⁴⁴ Rancière J (1999) XI.

⁴⁴⁵ James I (2012) 121.

⁴⁴⁶ As above.

⁴⁴⁷ Rancière J (1999) XII.

⁴⁴⁸ As above.

communication that are available to those who may be party to the disagreement.⁴⁴⁹ The essence of an unequal order lies in the unequal distribution of material conditions, situations and positions which determine possibilities of active participation. James states:

This means that the things which may be disputed in Rancière's understanding of disagreement are not disputed by parties who have an equal say in the dispute, nor an equal position from which to shape its terms.⁴⁵⁰

Politics, with disagreement as its rationality, therefore, does not just relate to the contestation of a disputed object but also to the status and position from which parties can speak and make themselves heard.⁴⁵¹ This is why the political subject is formulated as “the part that has no part”. They have no part in the sense that they are not afforded an equal position to participate and speak from. Politics, through the miscount and the wrong, demonstrates or makes manifest the unequal distribution of speaking-positions and the contingency thereof.

Before turning to the concept of the distribution of the sensible, it is necessary to state that politics is therefore about the part that has no part; the *demos* that must make manifest their existence as political subject within a particular scene of dissensus or context. Rancière uses the Greek experience and the definition of the *demos* in order to show that questions of politics and political participation rely on prior decisions about what will be a political argument and who will be able to qualify for participation in what circumstances. The *demos*, therefore

⁴⁴⁹ James I (2012) 121.

⁴⁵⁰ As above.

⁴⁵¹ As above. As James elucidates, for Rancière the activity of politics of disagreement concerns the inequality of material conditions which determine the possession or otherwise of a voice or *logos*. James I (2012) 122. In this context, politics cannot simply be party politics because political parties already participate, have a voice and are assigned a place within the social order. James I (2012) 122. Nor, as James further explains, can politics be the more or less competent management of economic forces and resources since this too is a matter for those who are already accounted for and have been given a privileged role within the order of society. James I (2012) 122. Not, for the same reason, can politics be the management of competing interests within a shared political, legal and juridical framework. Rancière wants to underline that politics properly speaking is not an activity, which is pursued on the basis of any consensus, constitutional or institutional or on the basis of shared norms or protocols. See James I (2012) 122.

represents the groundlessness of any political title, the fact that these decisions are contingent and that there is a different way of counting. The part that has no part also serves to illustrate the notion that politics is at once the entering into a realm of perceptibility and visibility. Other than being the presupposition of equality through the process of subjectivation, by declaring a wrong against the classifications of the police order, politics is also about redistributing the sensible.

2.3.5 The Distribution of the Sensible

Politics is, before all else, an intervention in the visible and sayable.⁴⁵²

Rancière has stated that “[t]here never has been any aestheticization of politics in the modern age because politics is aesthetic in principle”.⁴⁵³ And “[p]olitics is aesthetic in that it makes visible what had been excluded from a perceptual field, and in that it makes audible what use to be inaudible”.⁴⁵⁴ Politics is for Rancière fundamentally a matter of expression and therefore of aesthetics. Police orders are also “regimes of expression and they determine what is expressible on the basis of a “partition (or sharing out) of the perceptible”.⁴⁵⁵ Rancière argues that the struggle of politics is always an aesthetic struggle for a new partition of what can be called the distribution of the sensible.⁴⁵⁶ As Ross affirms, aesthetics, in this formulation, should be understood in its widest sense, not only as perceptibility, but also sensibility.⁴⁵⁷ Politics is demonstrated and expressed and within and through it that the political subject *appears*. Politics is a political aesthetic countering of the presentations and representations of the police order.⁴⁵⁸ As mentioned, the distribution of the sensible comprises of a certain picture of the world and the police order comprises of the mechanisms, procedures and functions that enforces this picture. The police order is therefore the means by

⁴⁵² Rancière J (2010) 37.

⁴⁵³ Rancière J (1999) 58.

⁴⁵⁴ Rancière J (2004) 226.

⁴⁵⁵ Ross D “Politics and Aesthetics, or, Transformations of Aristotle and Bernard Stiegler” (2009) *Transformations: Journal of Media and Culture* available at www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_19/artivle_032.shtml(accessed2014/12/0).

⁴⁵⁶ As above.

⁴⁵⁷ As above.

⁴⁵⁸ As above.

which a society enforces its distribution of the sensible. The police maintain the operations that set the limit of what is thinkable, possible and conceivable and the distribution of the sensible describes or defines the thinkable, possible and conceivable within a specific context. Policing further denotes an ordering of the parts of society, which is an ordering “that invents a range of communicative and behavioural norms that is then distributed on the basis of a body’s nature, function and occupation”.⁴⁵⁹ The distribution of the sensible therefore, as mentioned, comes down to the perceptual configuration of society.⁴⁶⁰ What is sayable, what is visible, what is understood, who counts and who doesn’t? It is, more or less, as mentioned, our “automatic perception of status identity and entitlement”.⁴⁶¹ In this regard, the French formulation of the distribution of the sensible becomes helpful. Tanke explains that the word *partage* has two elements or senses that is easily lost in the English translation.⁴⁶² *Partage* has a double meaning, namely, separation *and* community, dividing *and* sharing.⁴⁶³ In the first sense, “it describes how partitions and divisions of the sensible is seen and unseen, audible and inaudible, how certain objects and phenomena can be related or not, and also, who, at the level of subjectivity, can appear in certain times and places”.⁴⁶⁴ It denotes, as Tanke further explains, a general distribution of bodies as well as an implicit estimation of what they are capable of in what times and in what places.⁴⁶⁵ It therefore divides up and separates spheres, people, places and times. The second sense of *partage* indicates that these distributions are shared.⁴⁶⁶ It indicates a sharing of the sensible that refers itself to the principles and forms of relation that are part of the community or common world. It therefore denotes the parcelling out of spaces and times to create a shared

⁴⁵⁹ Stoneman E *Philosophy and Rhetoric* (2011) 43.

⁴⁶⁰ Tanke J (2011) 2.

⁴⁶¹ As above.

⁴⁶² As above.

⁴⁶³ Bosteels B “Rancière’s Leftism, Or, Politics and Its Discontents” in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds) (2009) 170.

⁴⁶⁴ Tanke J (2011) 2.

⁴⁶⁵ As above.

⁴⁶⁶ As above.

world.⁴⁶⁷ As Tanke further highlights, the distribution of the sensible is of great significance to Rancière.⁴⁶⁸ Its distinctions and divisions anticipate what is thinkable and possible.⁴⁶⁹ Tanke eloquently explains that it provides a picture of the world of what can be conceived, discussed and disputed and what can be conceived, discussed and disputed in turn structures what presents itself as thought and as possibility for further thought.⁴⁷⁰ The sensible provides courses of action, forms of relation and what may be regarded as new thought for sensible configuration.⁴⁷¹ The distribution of the sensible thus ultimately defines the field of possibility and impossibility within a specific context or community.⁴⁷² In French, the word *sens* means at once, sense, meaning and direction.⁴⁷³ Politics is a redistribution of the sensible and to redistribute the sensible means to bring into question both the obviousness of what can be perceived, thought and done, as well as the distribution of those thought capable of perceiving, thinking and doing.⁴⁷⁴ With his formulation of the distribution of the sensible, Rancière is interested, as Tanke further explains, in the sense that is made of sense.⁴⁷⁵ The distribution of the sensible connotes to the meanings that are made of what appears to our senses.⁴⁷⁶ The task of politics is that of introducing breaches so that other meanings and directions are created.⁴⁷⁷ The police order, enforcing the distribution of the sensible, ultimately concerns the material ground of communicability, intelligibility and sensibility and politics concerns the contestation of this material ground.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁶⁷ As above.

⁴⁶⁸ Tanke J (2011) 2-3.

⁴⁶⁹ As above.

⁴⁷⁰ Tanke J (2011)

⁴⁷¹ Tanke J (2011) 2-3.

⁴⁷² As above.

⁴⁷³ As above.

⁴⁷⁴ Sellberg K "Sublime gender transposition: The reformed platonism of Jacques Rancière's aesthetics as queer performance" *Transformations: Journal of Media and Culture* 2011 www.transformationsjournal.or/journal/issue_19/artivle_032.shtml (accessed 2014/12/06).

⁴⁷⁵ Tanke J (2011) 2.

⁴⁷⁶ Tanke J (2011) 22.

⁴⁷⁷ Tanke J (2011) 2.

⁴⁷⁸ Tanke J (2011) 49-50.

Citton mentions that the partition or distribution of the sensible has become something of a household name in France.⁴⁷⁹ With this phrase or formulation Rancière refers to the most basic system of categorisation through which we perceive and intuitively classify the data provided to our senses.⁴⁸⁰ Citton explains the usefulness of the formulation by highlighting that it has been adopted by literary critics, philosophers, theorists of aesthetics as well as sociologists, who all seem to find in the formulation a way of expressing what they always wanted to express.⁴⁸¹ Indeed, many scholars have been seduced by the phrase as its role hinges between politics and aesthetics and it proves to be extremely helpful as it allows one to dig tunnels under disciplinary frontiers.⁴⁸² For Citton, it sets up an interface through which various approaches can interact and shed light on each other and it offers a foundational common ground on the basis of which one can root and articulate various reflections.⁴⁸³ It unites discussions on philosophy,

⁴⁷⁹ Citton Y in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 120.

⁴⁸⁰ As above.

⁴⁸¹ As above.

⁴⁸² As above.

⁴⁸³ As above. Rockhill explains that Rancière has formulated an alternative conception of the relationship between art and politics. Rockhill G "The Politics of Aesthetics: Political History and the Hermeneutics of Art" in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 200-201. Instead of searching for a definitive solution of the long-standing problem of the connection between art and politics, he attacks the guiding assumption on which the problem is based: "that art and politics are separate domains in need of being linked together". See Rockhill G in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 200-201. Rather, with the notion of the distribution of the sensible, Rancière sums up his position, namely, that art and politics are consubstantial insofar as they both organise a common world of self-evident facts of sensory perception: "In fact, the very delimitation and definition of what are called art and politics are themselves dependent upon a distribution of the sensible regime of thought and perception that identifies them as such". See Rockhill G in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 200-201. Rancière states: "[A]rt and politics are not two separate realities about which it might be asked if they must be put in relationship to one another. They are two forms of distribution of the sensible tied to a specific regime of identification". See Rancière J *Le Destin Des Images* (2003) 19. It is argued that since the late 1990's, Rancière has put forth one of the most powerful accounts of aesthetics. See Rockhill G in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 200-201. Instead of taking art to be historical and attempting to unveil its fundamental essence he maintains, as Rockhill and Watts elucidates, that there is no "art in general" but only historically constituted "regimes" that establish a given distribution of the sensible and determine the framework of possibility for artistic production and theoretical reflection on art. Rockhill G & Watts P Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 9.

politics, art, aesthetics, and cinema, all of which are conceived of as practices of creating, distributing, contesting and redistributing the sensible world.⁴⁸⁴

When the distribution of the sensible is viewed through the lens of human capacity or action, some data is perceived and selected as relevant by people, while other data is rejected as irrelevant or ignored.⁴⁸⁵ As Citton further elucidates, each time this happens, agents inherit a specific social configuration of the distribution of the sensible, which they can transmit as it has been transmitted to them, or which, following the encounter with this data, can lead them to modify it at a minute or sometimes more dramatic level.⁴⁸⁶ The reconfiguration of the distribution of the sensible appears, within Rancière's formulation, as the founding moment of political subjectivation:

Whether I stand in front of a work of art or am involved in a social movement, the possibility of politics rests on such a moment when I am led to reconfigure the *partage du sensible* I have inherited from the majoritarian norms (along with its blind spots, its denial of rights, and its hierarchy of privileges).⁴⁸⁷

When it comes to the concept of the distribution of the sensible, aesthetics should be understood, as mentioned, in an expanded sense. It should include

⁴⁸⁴ Tanke J (2011) 1-2.

⁴⁸⁵ Citton Y in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 123 & 313.

⁴⁸⁶ As above. Citton further theorises the distribution of the sensible as active in the sense that theatrical politics draws on our capacity to repartition, alter lines and blur borders. Citton Y in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 131-137. Citton reminds that we should not forget that we can only do so from within a certain given or inherited configuration of the *partage du sensible* or "a state of things that pre-exists and largely predetermines our possible work of reconfiguration". Citton Y in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 131-137. Before taking place toward other people, the re-presentation takes place within us. This is what is active in Rancière's formulation according to Citton. Citton Y in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 131-137. He refers to the process of thought within which certain data perceived by our sensory apparatus get to be considered as relevant, and make it to the point where they become a deciding factor in the determination of our future behaviours, while other comparable data gets lost along the way. Citton Y in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 131-137. And it is in this process that we become agents, political or otherwise. The selective re-presentation appears as a way to manage a situation of excess. There are too many data in our sensory input for us to give an exhaustive account of all features. Not everything can count and any given state of things carries excess. See Citton Y in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 131-137.

⁴⁸⁷ As above.

factors such as time and space that structure the way in which things appear.⁴⁸⁸ The way in which the given world or the sensible is defined through the partitioning of space and time is political because it sketches the boundaries of what is sensible, intelligible and possible. The redistribution of the sensible is about invalidating the current distribution of space and time.⁴⁸⁹ It is about undermining the space and time prescribed by the police order. As mentioned, the noun *le partage* from the verb *partager*, means both to share out and divide up.⁴⁹⁰ It therefore simultaneously suggests the sharing-out and the dividing-up of the sensory or the sensible world.⁴⁹¹ The sharing-out and dividing-up can be understood in terms of a system of

[a] priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent [...] to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.⁴⁹²

Further, the nature of the distribution of the sensible makes it seem as self-evident. The redistribution of the sensible is about disputing that which is given, it is a division put in the common sense.⁴⁹³ Rancière states:

[Politics] is a subversion of a given distribution of the sensible. [...] The subversion implies the reframing of a common sense. A common sense does not mean a consensus but, on the contrary, a polemical place, a confrontation between common senses or opposite ways of framing what is common. [...] Politics is a polemical form of reframing of common sense.⁴⁹⁴

And it is up to political subjects, presupposing their equality, to reframe the given distribution of the sensible.⁴⁹⁵ To become the subject of politics is to make oneself

⁴⁸⁸ Tanke J (2011) 5.

⁴⁸⁹ Tanke J (2011) 25.

⁴⁹⁰ Davis O (2010) 91.

⁴⁹¹ As above.

⁴⁹² Rancière J (2004) 13. As Kristin Ross notes, Rancière prefers to think about time in terms of the way it gives form to relations of power and inequality and how its denaturalisation shatters those relations. See Ross K in in Rockhill G & Watts P (2009) (eds.) 18.

⁴⁹³ Rancière J *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2004) 304.

⁴⁹⁴ Rancière J "The method of Equality: An Answer to Some Questions" in Rockhill G & Watts P (2009) (eds.) 277.

⁴⁹⁵ It should be mentioned, as Rockhill explains, that some of Rancière 's more recent work offers a slightly more nuanced position that remained somewhat peripheral in his earlier work

appear where there had previously been only categories and indeed categories that rendered one or one's experience invisible.⁴⁹⁶ Politics is an aesthetic phenomenon; it makes something appear that had not been there before, namely, the part of those who has no part.⁴⁹⁷ Politics therefore disorders the coherence of any distribution of roles and places and parts. As May notes, it disidentifies bodies from their police order nature and their ends.⁴⁹⁸ It interrupts, through the part that has no part, the symbolic partitions that mark some as unseen, unheard and of no account.⁴⁹⁹ Politics has to do with aesthetic performances that create spaces for disagreement. As mentioned in the previous section, Rancière often refers to politics and the police in terms of worlds. He states in *Disagreement* that politics is bringing two worlds together, the world in which all speaking beings are regarded as equal and the world in which they are not.⁵⁰⁰ Politics may therefore be regarded as an “aesthetic operation of world-

when it comes to politics and the distribution of the sensible. See Rockhill G in Rockhill G & Watts P (2009) (eds.) 201-202. Instead of simply juxtaposing a consensual distribution of the sensible and dissensual acts of political subjectivisation, Rancière increasingly uses the term politics to refer to both distributions and redistributions of the sensible order. See Rockhill G in Rockhill G & Watts P (2009) (eds.) 201-202. Because of the more detailed account of the conjunction of politics, Rancière has been led to break down “a strict opposition between an established order and intermittent moments of destabilisation”. See Rockhill G in Rockhill G & Watts P (2009) (eds.) 201-202. The distribution of the sensible, more recently, refers to both of these elements: “This distribution and redistribution of places and identities, this delimitation and re-delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and invisible, of noise and speech constitutes what I call the distribution of the sensible”. Rancière J *Malaise Dans L'esthétique* (2004) 38 (passage translated by Rockhill G). A similar change is visible in his definition of politics: “[Politics is] the configuration of a specific space, the delimitation of a particular sphere of experience, of objects established in common and coming from a common decision, of subjects recognised as capable of designating these objects and arguing about them”. See Rancière J *Malaise Dans L'esthétique* (2004) 37 (passage translated by Rockhill G). Rockhill further explains that Rancière is emphasising the police process in politics and the dissensual elements in the distribution of the sensible. See Rockhill G in Rockhill G & Watts P (2009) (eds.) 201-202. He therefore breaks down the rigid opposition between stable structures and intermittent acts of reconfiguration. Politics is a distribution of the sensible insofar as every distribution presupposes at least the potential for redistribution. See Rockhill G in Rockhill G & Watts P (2009) (eds.) 201-202.

⁴⁹⁶ Tanke J (2011) 3-4.

⁴⁹⁷ May T (2008) 71.

⁴⁹⁸ As above.

⁴⁹⁹ As above.

⁵⁰⁰ Rancière J (1999) 30.

disclosure”.⁵⁰¹ It transforms perceptual limitations to reveal an equality of bodies, capacities and voices.

Tanke has mentioned that the key question for any distribution of the sensible is to know whether it is founded upon equality or inequality.⁵⁰² A division is always a division into parts and it is essential, in Rancièrian terms, to determine the metric according to which this division takes place: “Whether it is the distribution of parts, objects, the arts, or the relationship between speech and visibility, these operations define worlds that are either compatible or incompatible with equality”.⁵⁰³ Therefore, the primary goal of any analysis of the distribution of the sensible is thus to determine whether equality is present or not. It is interesting to note that Tanke reads Rancière’s writings as initiating a twofold movement with respect to the distribution of the sensible.⁵⁰⁴ In the first instance, it offers what Tanke calls a “topographical analysis” of the sensible. This form of analysis should be seen as sidestepping the so-called “hermeneutics of depth”.⁵⁰⁵ This refers to interpretations that are premised upon meanings thought to reside below the surface of texts, political arrangements and artistic forms.⁵⁰⁶ If one is to explain it in Rancièrian terms, beside from such interpretations’ theological residue, depth hermeneutics establishes the pedagogical space of the master, the one who knows the true meaning of things and is gracious enough to impart it to others.⁵⁰⁷ As we will see, with reference to Joseph Jacotot that will be discussed below, the hermeneutics of depth is problematic for Rancière as it, along the lines of scienticism, divides the world into two: minds capable of detecting in words and forms their correct meaning and those who are dependent upon others for such discoveries. In Tanke’s reading, the topographical analysis sticks to the surface of things.⁵⁰⁸ It offers a description of the relationship between elements and the

⁵⁰¹ Stoneman E *Philosophy and Rhetoric* (2011) 146.

⁵⁰² Tanke J (2011) 2.

⁵⁰³ As above.

⁵⁰⁴ Tanke J (2011) 3.

⁵⁰⁵ As above.

⁵⁰⁶ As above.

⁵⁰⁷ Tanke J (2011) 3.

⁵⁰⁸ As above.

common world.⁵⁰⁹ This form of analysis does not claim to strike upon the ultimate or correct meaning of these forms. The point is rather to try and indicate “how they appear, the logic of their relations, the conditions of their historical possibility, the meanings they have been given and the overall picture they give rise to”.⁵¹⁰ The sensible world is itself shared and these elements are detectable on the surfaces of texts, images and political arrangements.⁵¹¹ Because of this, topographical analysis employs a supposition opposed to the hermeneutics of depth, namely; “it credits its addressees or readers with being already in possession of capacities for making sense of sense”.⁵¹² The analysis is thus framed inter-subjectively according to Tanke.⁵¹³ The second instance, or moment that Tanke detects, is evaluating these arrangements in terms of the version of the possible that they define.⁵¹⁴ Rancière attempts to analyse how the constitution of a sensible given (whether in philosophical discourses, political arrangements and artistic practices) defines forms of openness or closure. Rancière’s work can be viewed as a series of interferences designed to break apart and undermine the sense of inevitability attached to many forms of intellectual, political and artistic labour.⁵¹⁵ The second movement is therefore an intervention into the sensible configuration of our common world designed to create space for the implementation of equality.⁵¹⁶ Further, it becomes important to explain Rancière’s

⁵⁰⁹ As above.

⁵¹⁰ As above.

⁵¹¹ As above.

⁵¹² As above.

⁵¹³ Tanke J (2011) 3-4.

⁵¹⁴ As above.

⁵¹⁵ As above.

⁵¹⁶ As above. Ross argues that beginnings, or points of departure is more important for Rancière than for most thinkers and he likes to begin by throwing things into reverse. Ross K in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 20-21. For example, if one looks at Rancière along the lines of culture; he doesn’t begin with culture (conceived of as one’s proper allotment in symbolic capital or culture conceived of as a set of consoling rituals). Ross K in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 20-21. He, as Ross explains, rather begins with emancipation. Ross K in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 20-21. The concept of culture “whether one applies it to knowledge of the classics or to the manufacture of shoes, has the sole effect of effacing this movement of subjectivisation that operates in the interval between several nominations and its constitutive fragility”. See Rancière J *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge* (1994) 98. The concept of culture thus presupposes an identity tied to a way of speaking, being and doing that is itself tied to a situation, a name, body, assigned to a place, a life station. Ross K in

use of theatre within his notion of politics, the power of language and speech within the context of the distribution of the sensible and the argumentative and logical character of equality that seeks to redistribute the sensible. I address these points below before concluding.

Rancière's conception of equality is illuminated by his use, metaphorically and literally, of theatre.⁵¹⁷ Here aesthetics again come into play and, as Hallward explains, rather than a principle of order or distribution, Rancière presents equality as a "pure supposition that must be verified continuously - a verification or an enactment that open specific stages of equality, stages that are built by crossing boundaries and interconnecting forms and levels of discourse and spheres of experience".⁵¹⁸ Hallward explains that every subject plays or acts in the theatrical sense.⁵¹⁹ Every political subject is first and foremost "a sort of local and provisional theatrical configuration".⁵²⁰ The thematic of the stage is all pervading in Rancière's work. In the mid-1970's Rancière already adopted the view that rather than a matter of "popular savagery" or "historical necessity", revolt is "a staging of reasons and ways of speaking".⁵²¹ Rancière went on in *Disagreement* to define politics as a matter of

Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 20-21. Culture, as Ross further notes, is "inherently functionalist and non-contingent" in Rancière's terms. Ross K in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 20-21. With reference to Arlette Farge and her discussion of the anti-ethnological dimension of Rancière's work on history, the following might be discerned, according to Ross: "If a space (territory or *terroir*) is the point of departure for an analysis, whether it be the space of the region, ghetto, island or factory, the people's voices, their subjectivities, can be nothing more than the naturalised, homogenised expressions of those spaces". Ross K in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 20-21. Rancière's project could be said to be a different kind of cultural studies, an anti-identitarian one: "A cultural study where the concept of culture has been banished from the outset and identitarian matters twisted into a fluid and unscheduled non-system of significant misrecognitions". See Ross K in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 20-21.

⁵¹⁷ Hallward P in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 141.

⁵¹⁸ As above. See Rancière J "The Thinking of Dissensus: Politics as Aesthetics" paper presented at the conference "Post-structuralism and Radical Politics" Goldsmiths College, London (16-17 September 2003) available at <http://homepages.gold.ac.uk/psrpsg/conference/fidelity/html>(accessed2014/12/16).

⁵¹⁹ As above.

⁵²⁰ Hallward P in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 141.

⁵²¹ Rancière J *Les Scenes Du Peuple* (2003) 10 as referenced in Hallward P in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 142.

performing or playing, in the theatrical sense of the word, the gap between a place where the *demos* exists and a place where it does not [...] Politics consist in playing or acting out this relationship, which means first setting it up as theatre, inventing the argument, in the double logic and dramatic scene of the term, connecting the unconnected.⁵²²

In this regard, Rancière has also referred to the example of an ordinary act of policing, namely, the instruction to “move along now, there is nothing to see here”.⁵²³ If the police order denies that there is anything to see, politics creates a spectacle or something to see. Politics entails transforming this space of “moving-along” into a space of the appearance of the subjects.⁵²⁴ Politics is in this sense creative and dramatic.⁵²⁵ Moreover, it is axiomatically theatrical since the emergence of a subject is, for Rancière, always also the emergence into the realm of perception, visibility and audibility. As Davis states, “it is a manifestation”.⁵²⁶ Political subjectivation resembles acting because it involves pretending that you are something you are not in order to become it; pretending to be an equal participant within the political process from which you are in fact excluded. And within the act of demonstration, the political subject or the *demos*, previously unaccounted for, appears within the realm of perception or the current distribution of the sensible.

Importantly, the notion of speech is intimately linked to Rancière’s politics and the distribution of the sensible. Rancière states:

⁵²² Rancière J (1999) 88. Hallward terms Rancière’s politics as theocracy and discusses seven reasons why Rancière’s politics is theatrical, namely, “it is spectacular”, “it is artificial”, “it privileges multiplicity over unity”, “it is disruptive”, “its performance is contingent”, “it tends toward improvisation” and “it operates within a liminal configuration”. See Hallward P in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 146-157.

⁵²³ Davis O (2010) 86.

⁵²⁴ As above.

⁵²⁵ As above. Hallward, as mentioned, has described Rancière’s politics as “theocracy”. See Hallward P in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 140-157. The term derives originally from Plato who famously excluded theatre from his ideal city in *Republic*. This was not because of the immoral content of plays, but rather because the theatre was a dangerous place of semblance where actors are doing two things and being two people at the same time. Theatre therefore challenges the metaphysical organising principle of Plato’s autocratic and hierarchal state, namely, the principle of specialisation according to which people can only do or become one thing. Rancière’s deep-level connection and engagement with Plato will be discussed within chapter 3 below.

⁵²⁶ Davis O (2010) 86.

[P]olitics, in fact, is not the exercise of power and the struggle for power. It is the configuration of a specific space, the parcelling out of a particular sphere of experience, of objects we take to be shared and stemming from a common decision, of recognised subjects able to designate these objects and to discuss them. Man, Aristotle says, is political because he can speak and thereby share notions of just and unjust, whereas animals have only the ability to voice pain and pleasure. But the question is, who has the power of speech and who has only a voice? Politics happens [subjects] demonstrate that their mouths can articulate speech that states shared realities and not just a voice that signifies pain. This arrangement and rearrangement of places and identities, the parcelling and reparcelling out of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of noise and speech, constitute what I call the sharing of the sensible.⁵²⁷

When Rancière asks in the above quote “who has the power of speech and who has only voice?” he points to the fact that when people sometimes try to voice their grievances or claims, there is a tendency for their speech not to be heard as rational argument.⁵²⁸ Part of the wrong or the miscount is that there is a presumption that no account will be taken of the complaints of the part of those who have no part. As Davis notes, this does not mean that these complaints are understood and then disregarded.⁵²⁹ Rather, in a more fundamental sense, they are not heard as meaning-bearing language or speech that is politically relevant.⁵³⁰ Rancière is not referring to inaudibility and invisibility in a straightforward way. The question revolves around whether or not a group in question is thought to be capable of participation in the life of the community as a whole, a question of that group’s share in “the definition of the common of the community”.⁵³¹ Rancière uses the aesthetics of politics to express the idea that questions of partaking rely on prior decisions about what will be interpreted as logically formed human speech and what will be construed as animal noise.⁵³² He illustrates the aesthetic dimension of politics by making recourse to the double sense of *logos*, which in Greek means both speech and account:

⁵²⁷ Rancière J *Malaise Dans L'esthétique* (2004) 37-38 passage translated by Méchaoulan E. See Méchaoulan E “Sophisticated Continuities and Historical Discontinuities, Or, Why Not Protagoras?” in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) 55.

⁵²⁸ Davis O (2101) 90-91.

⁵²⁹ As above.

⁵³⁰ As above.

⁵³¹ Rancière J (199) 36.

⁵³² Tanke J (2011) 49.

Politics exists because the *logos* is never simply speech, because it is always indissolubly the account made of this speech: the account by which a sonorous emission is understood as speech capable of enunciating what is just, whereas some other emission is merely perceived as noise signalling pleasure or pain, consent or revolt.⁵³³

Rancière is therefore highlighting here that *logos* is at once speech and a distribution of speech positions.⁵³⁴ Domination and oppression follows from the refusal to acknowledge someone's full possession of speech, which is the basic requirement for political participation. As Tanke explains, the aesthetics of politics indicates that before being about the negotiation of interests, the community relies upon judgments about what constitutes speech, who is capable of possessing it, what the appropriated places for it are and what can be addressed as a political issue.⁵³⁵ Politics revolves around the use that is made of the distinction between speech and noise. Politics contests the general aesthetic framework in which distinctions, such as the distinction between full and partial possession of speech, operate:

It consists of forcing an opposing side to acknowledge not only the demands for inclusion but also the speech of those making the demands.⁵³⁶

In order to explain this line of thinking, Rancière refers to a number of Aristotle's and especially Plato's formulations. These are important references and I discuss them in full when discussing the figure of Gabriel Gauny in the next chapter. Rancière has a specific view of language that can be described as a poetical account of language. It is based on a rereading of Plato's critique of writing in *Phaedro*.⁵³⁷ Plato views the written word or what he calls the "orphan" word as always supplementary to the communal order.⁵³⁸ As Arsenjuk highlight, the written word can liberate itself from a situation in which the roles of both the addresser and the addressee are established.⁵³⁹ The limits of what is sayable are strictly determined within specific orders of power. Anyone can appropriate the

⁵³³ Rancière J (1999) 22-23.

⁵³⁴ Tanke J (2011) 50-51.

⁵³⁵ As above.

⁵³⁶ As above.

⁵³⁷ Arsenjuk L *Fronesis* (2005) 1-3.

⁵³⁸ As above.

⁵³⁹ As above.

written word. It is not the same for the spoken word however. The spoken word is tied, for Plato, as Rancière states, to the “logic of the proper”.⁵⁴⁰ The written word on the other hand presents excess.⁵⁴¹ It is unexpected and inexhaustible in its relation to a world of distributed tasks and roles and speech that belong to individuals and groups in the communal order.⁵⁴² Excessive words or words of excess over the existing distribution of the sensible represents the egalitarian power of language, which Rancière calls “literarity”.⁵⁴³ These words can disturb the existing circuits of meanings and places of enunciation.⁵⁴⁴ Humans are political animals for Rancière for two reasons, firstly, because they have the power to put more words into circulation (useless words, supplementary, unnecessary words that go beyond rigid designation) and, secondly, because that ability is unceasingly “contested by those who claim to speak properly or correctly”.⁵⁴⁵ The words used within the moment of politics become significant. Words or phrases can intervene within a specific distribution of the sensible and can as such create or mobilise the moment of politics. Rancière argues that politics connects individuals with the entire community by announcing, for example, “we, the workers of the world”.⁵⁴⁶ Tanke aptly and very importantly highlights that for Rancière, political speech relies upon poetic world-opening devices, such as “we are the workers of the world”. These enunciations fashion collective subjects, a “we”, a people or the *demos*.⁵⁴⁷ The logic of equality uses expansive political names:

⁵⁴⁰ As above.

⁵⁴¹ As above.

⁵⁴² As above.

⁵⁴³ As above.

⁵⁴⁴ As above.

⁵⁴⁵ As above. See also Rancière J (1999) 59. If one for example looks at the name “the proletariat”, the classical name for the part of those who have no part in a capitalist society, Rancière claims that this word, when it appeared in the struggles of the nineteenth century, did not really express a working-class culture. Rancière J (1999) 59. It is not that it functioned as a representation of a social class or that it identified a part of the existing population. It rather functioned as a “useless” word, unrecognisable as a valid category from the standpoint of the police order. It is an artifice, which enabled a declaration of a wrong, the naming of the part that has no part. See Arsenjuk L *Fronesis* (2005) 1-3.

⁵⁴⁶ As above.

⁵⁴⁷ Tanke J (2011) 65.

The poetic moments of politics are the creative linguistic actions that challenge the divisions between capacity and incapacity, between rulers and ruled, between those with and those without a part.⁵⁴⁸

The poetics of politics is about the invention of names for a collective. These names are usually names with sufficiently generality, recognisable within the current distribution of the sensible. But, the invention occurs in making new connections or configurations with regards to these names, giving them new content as well as using them to make impossible identifications. For Rancière, concepts can be used as tools “to displace existing topographies and undermine consensual regimes by thinking through the far side of the police”.⁵⁴⁹ The poetics of politics invents new names and identities and the point is also to invent arguments. Davis explains that one of the aspects of subjectivation is that it has an argumentative dimension to it.⁵⁵⁰ The argumentative characteristic of subjectivation highlights Rancière’s insistence on struggles that involve language and rational argument, especially in his historical work. In his book *On the Shores of Politics* he places a strong emphasis on the logical and argumentative character of revolt by referring to what he terms the “syllogism of emancipation”.⁵⁵¹ The example he discusses of such a syllogism of emancipation is a strike by Paris tailors in 1833, protesting against their employer’s refusal to entertain their demands for better pay, shorter working hours and improved working conditions. Davis explains that they invented their argument by using a clause, or syllogism, from the preamble of the Charter of 1830 that resulted from the July Revolution, namely “all the French are equal before the law”.⁵⁵² Three premises seemed to contradict this clause according to Rancière.⁵⁵³ Firstly, the refusal to entertain the workers’ demands meant that they were not treated as equal, secondly, confederations of workers and employers alike were illegal and yet only workers were pursued by authorities and thirdly, no less a representative of the law than the public prosecutors gave a speech in which he asserted that workers were not

⁵⁴⁸ As above.

⁵⁴⁹ Rockhill G & Watts P in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 12.

⁵⁵⁰ Davis O (2010) 84.

⁵⁵¹ As above.

⁵⁵² As above.

⁵⁵³ Davis O (2012) 85.

equal members of society.⁵⁵⁴ As Davis further highlights, it could be argued that the Charter had always been understood as an aspiration.⁵⁵⁵ But, this was not the approach adopted by the tailors.⁵⁵⁶ They demanded that the three premises be reconciled with the clause or that the clause be changed to something like “not all the French are equal before the law”.⁵⁵⁷ The charter therefore employed in an effort to create logical argument. For Rancière, the charter served as a basis for the practical verification of equality as part of a logical and argumentative demonstration of equality. However, it should be mentioned with regards to the logical and argumentative aspect that Rancière does not conceive of politics as simply a debate between subjects who disagree and negotiate over specific issues. For him, as mentioned, the subjects are wronged in such a fundamental way as to place in doubt their very existence as subjects, their capacity to participate in the debate and whether their arguments are understood as rational arguments by other parties.⁵⁵⁸ Further, in his analysis of the strikes of the 1830’s Rancière elucidates the workings of equality. Rancière refers to the charter as “a most peculiar platform of argument”.⁵⁵⁹ The tailors acted as if they have always been equal and they demanded that the charter should be rectified to reflect their situation or that the conditions of their situation must be changed. In this regard, political subjects are those who make visible the fact that they belong to a shared world that others do not see and importantly:

⁵⁵⁴ As above.

⁵⁵⁵ As above.

⁵⁵⁶ As above

⁵⁵⁷ As above. As Davis highlights, the declaration of equality in the Charter and similar legal and political declarations or instruments are, for Rancière, a powerful resource. Davis O (2010) 85. But they are only powerful resources “if they are taken up confidently with a view of verifying them, rather than regarded as optimistic aspirations or illusory descriptions of reality”. Davis O (2010) 85. According to Davis, Rancière is far from being a disillusioned skeptic about formal declarations of equality in legal and constitutional documents, unlike Marx, for instance that saw rights as mere expressions of the interests of the bourgeois property-owning class. Davis O (2010) 85. Rancière is not naïve enough to think that such documents can somehow magically produce the equality that they declare, but he does insist then that they can serve as a basis for a practical verification of equality as part of a logical argumentative demonstration. See Davis O (2010) 85.

⁵⁵⁸ As above.

⁵⁵⁹ Davis O (2010) 86.

The worker who puts forward the public nature of a “domestic” wage dispute must demonstrate the world in which his argument counts as argument and must demonstrate it as such for those who do not have the frame of reference enabling them to see it as one. Political argumentation is at one and the same time the demonstration of a possible world in which the argument could count as argument [...] It is the construction of a paradoxical world that puts together two separate worlds.⁵⁶⁰

The workers must stage equality and they must pretend it already exists in order to create it. They must not only demonstrate their argument, but also demonstrate a common world of argument. Davis elucidates:

The worker subject that gets included on it as speaker has to behave as though such a stage existed, as though there were a common world of argument- which is eminently reasonable and eminently unreasonable, eminently wise and resolutely subversive, since such a world does not exist.⁵⁶¹

Rancière detects through his analysis that creative linguistic actions, poetic devices and expansive political names or syllogisms can disclose possibilities for the demonstration of arguments and the worlds in which they count and therefore also disclose possibilities for reconfiguring sensible distribution.

2.4 Conclusion

Rancière’s experiences under Althusser resulted in him distancing himself from any notion of politics that function to maintain social and institutional hierarchies through the exercise of pedagogical power. The idea that some can not only instruct others on how to politically revolt, but can also help them in fully understanding their own conditions and position within the world became untenable for Rancière. The concept of the truth of Marxist science against all the falsehoods of ideology served only to classify people into those who need scientific knowledge and those who can impart it. Scientism infinitely defers political struggle and equality whilst maintaining the *status quo*. For Rancière, the events of May ’68 made the ideas that he came to adopt under Althusser questionable. He gleaned from it the possibility of an equality embodied in advance and the events only affirmed the problematic relationship between

⁵⁶⁰ Rancière J (2010) 38-39.

⁵⁶¹ Davis O (2010) 87.

knowledge and power that he later reacted against. For him this relationship represented nothing more than a form of legitimisation of current roles, what he would later refer to as the police order.

Rancière highlights in his mature politics that what we normally perceive as politics comes down to policing, or the suppression of politics. Governance, organisation and the representation of communities as well as the exercise of power on different levels of society, rather than facilitating struggle, legitimates current ways of doing, being and saying. Rancière's conception of the police is a fluid concept indicating the mechanisms and procedures that enforce the broad systems of domination in a specific context. The police order help to maintain hierarchies, it allocates and regulates. It indicates who is capable of speaking and what they are able to say in what time and in what place. The police order embodies consensus, holding forth a form of realism that tells us that the police's way is the only possible way. It objectifies matters to such an extent that they can no longer be contested. They become self-evident and not open to dispute.

Against the police Rancière postulates politics. A specific form of demonstration that runs counter to policing. It implements the assumption of the equality of speaking beings in order to undo the workings of the police order. Equality presupposed, from the outset, confronts the police with its own contingency. Equality is central. What makes something political is not its object or the place within which it is carried out, it exists solely in the form of an equality that is declared, demonstrated and presupposed. Equality cannot be given by governments and it cannot be preserved, attained or balanced against other principles. It is practiced and verified. Politics therefore exists solely in the enactment of equality by means of a scene of dissensus. It does not carry on indefinitely. It exists in and through the demonstration of dissensus. It is rare, temporal and localised. It does not necessarily effect change. It institutes a breach within a specific police order that divides a specific distribution of the sensible that is itself open to egalitarian challenge. Politics and the police order are therefore not perfectly identifiable or pure enactments or systems. They are

interrelated, intertwined and fluid and the point is to discern where politics actually happen, where and when it encroaches on the police and where and when police matters encroach on politics. The meeting point between politics and the police is always shifting.

Politics, through the declaration of equality disorders, upsets, breaks apart and ruptures. Its power is division and inconsistency. The police order is by its very nature an order of unequal ordering and the equality of speaking beings therefore becomes a tool for displacement and declassification. It breaks open, through dissensus, interpretations thought to be incontestable.

In Rancière's formulation of the political subject, it becomes clear that the subject of politics only exists through and within the process of subjectivation. A political subject exists and ends within the moment of politics. It is politics that declares equality that makes it possible to conceive of the subject of politics and not the other way around. The political subject too, is localised and temporal. The process of subjectivation is the process whereby a subject rejects the classification of the police order. It undercuts police categories. It is not simply the process of adding a new police category to the existing police categories. Rancière, as mentioned, is highly critical of identity, especially the way in which it becomes identical to the classifications of the police and all the assumptions implicit in police categories. Politics is never a question of identity; it is a question of working within the gaps between identities, of dividing a police identity from itself, of complicating and overturning it. The first moment of subjectivation is the disidentification with police categories and the second is the creation of new identities or of giving new content to identities- confusing and disrupting the identities within the police order. In the next chapter the figure of Gabriel Gauny will demonstrate how impossible identifications tear people away from police order designated places. The process of subjectivation whereby subjects identify with new categories also encompasses the struggle for the existence of political subjectivity as such. Rancière demonstrates this by his equation of the political subject with the *demos* in Athenian democracy. The *demos* as collective were regarded as not having the

necessary attributes for involvement in politics. Policing also denotes a specific way of counting the community. The police order's way of counting excludes the possibility of remainder. However, the police's way of counting is based on a structural miscount. The *demos* lays bare this miscount or wrong of their non-existence as political subject. Politics therefore has to be disputatious or antagonistic as it expresses a basic disagreement with the recognitions of the police order. When the equality of speaking beings is postulated, it discloses that the ground for the power of ruling is that there is no ground at all. The miscount and the wrong are employed by Rancière to demonstrate that politics is about disagreement. Disagreement involves the concrete and material conditions from within which people are able to speak. It illustrates that politics is not the participation of parties that have an equal say from within the context of equal positions. At the heart of a political dispute there is conflict over what constitutes reason, what is a legitimate object of political discussion, and what it means to be a political subject. This is why Rancière's states that politics is first and foremost about the existence of politics.⁵⁶²

Politics is not about the management of competing interests within shared political, legal or juridical frameworks. That is the police order. Politics is therefore not an activity pursued on the basis of any consensus, constitutional, institutional or on the basis of shared norms. Politics consists of a radically more fundamental manifestation. Politics is about the part that has no part in anything, the *demos* that is according to the police not within the realm of visibility and perceptibility. The *demos* as political subject, struggles in order to enter into this realm, to essentially, *appear*. Rancière therefore demonstrates that the police order determines speaking positions and politics is not about struggling within the already existing realm of determined positions. Rather, it is about a radical egalitarian call that disputes and opens up the foundational and structural beliefs that holds claim to the correct way of counting. Because of the fact that politics radically disputes the framework of speaking positions it is also always an

⁵⁶² Rancière J *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (2010) 35.

intervention into the visible and sayable. It is an intervention into the distribution of the sensible. It is in this sense that politics is aesthetics. The distribution of the sensible as the perceptual configuration of society shapes what is visible, audible and what object and phenomena can be related in what times and spaces. As the regime of possibility and impossibility, it determines sense, meaning and direction. The distribution of the sensible has become a popular concept. It can not only be described as an idea. It is also a way of describing, a way of mapping, of viewing and of bringing together and taking apart everything that we experience through our sense. Rancière postulates a type of topographical analysis that attempts to trace the distribution of the sensible, its logic and relations; the conditions and the possibilities it gives rise to. The sensible is a certain picture, a way of framing things and politics intervenes in this picture, and it subverts its message, its narrative and form. If the police order enforces the fact that the distribution of the sensible has specific perceptual limitations, politics confronts it with expansion.

The thematic of the stage permeates Rancière's work. Indeed, politics is about *staging* a scene of dissensus, *presupposing* equality, *creating* it where it isn't, *inventing* arguments and worlds in which these arguments count. Political subjects are local, provisional and theatrical configurations that act *as if* they are equal in unequal police distributions. They create syllogisms or use words in order to build a stage on which their equality can be played out.

In reflecting on voice within the framework of Rancière's formulation of politics, it becomes clear that politics is the very struggle for voice. The police order enforces a specific regime of sensible distribution that determine who has the power of voice and who has not. Politics is the process by which those whose speech is seen as noise declare themselves as equal participants with equal voice. The police order determines the forms that a speech-act can take, its place and time. As the basic system through which we perceive and intuitively classify and process information, the distribution of the sensible creates the framework that determines the possession or otherwise of political voice. In Rancièrian terms

political voice or the notion of having political voice, can be aligned with speech as opposed to noise, which cannot appear within the sensible distribution of the police order. Rancière makes it clear that politics concerns realms of visibility, intelligibility and perceptibility. The possession of political voice is conditioned upon the possibility of appearance within these realms. This is why politics can be described as a conflict over voice, over who has it in what times and spaces. As such, political voicing occurs upon entering or appearing within a specific framework of thinking and interpretation. However, this is not appearing or entering into a framework of perception in any straightforward way. Political voicing opens up the possibility of the reconfiguration of the sensible realm itself. In a Rancièrian sense, political voicing radically disputes the current configuration by confronting it with an alternative configuration. Political voicing occurs within the context of a political subject that challenges the sensible distribution of the police. Matters of politics and political voicing are in this way aesthetic. Voicing is the moment wherein the properties of space, the possibilities of time, the formation of identities and locales are thought of in another way. When considered from the perspective of Rancière's politics, political voice is not about claims for inclusion, or for that matter identity. It is about the employment of universal equality in order to displace, divide and redistribute. As mentioned, politics discloses (through staging a dissensus, acting equal, inventing arguments and syllogisms and supplementary words) a different world. Political voice is therefore that which must reveal, through demonstration, a different way of thinking, doing, seeing, saying and interpreting. In the context of Rancière's politics, political voice involves creation. Politics consists of creating spaces and times in which the demonstration of equality can take place. At this juncture it can already be gleaned from his formulations that it is the invention of worlds, words, arguments and linguistic configurations that blur the well-ordered partitions of voice and silence.

The discussion of Rancière's engagements with certain historical figures in the next chapter as well as the engagement with Spivak after that, will serve to further shed light on the notion of political voice. My aim is for a more complete

picture of voice to emerge during these explorations. At this stage, what further emerges, when considering voice against the background of the problems, difficulties or the lack of political voicing or political visibility of many South African women, is that the distribution of the sensible becomes a valuable formulation. The distribution of the sensible, as mentioned, has become a popular concept and tool for analysis across a variety of disciplines. It is not only a concept that describes a specific regime of thinking and interpretation, but it's also a way of tracing and mapping the various sensible distributions that determine the possibilities and perceptual limitations of voice. This way of describing a given framework allows for the identification of mechanisms, procedures and ways of thinking that suppress or reveal the content, form and times and spaces of speech, voicing or enunciation. Political arrangement, power relations and social hierarchies within society are conceived of as practices of creating, distributing and contesting the sensible world. The distribution of the sensible names these practices and as such provides a basis from where to intervene in the structures that render some issues, individuals and discourses inaudible and invisible. It therefore provides a useful foundation from where various reflections can take place.

It should further be mentioned that Rancière's formulation of the police order and of the notion of consensus, highlights the fact the legal and institutional mechanisms of government and even more broadly; the shared norms and protocols within a community cannot give rise to political activity, properly speaking. Rather, these mechanisms and shared norms give rise to a specific logic or orientation towards the sensible world. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, from one perspective the specific issues facing many South African women, especially the levels of sexual violence and contexts of poverty, are addressed through various legal and political mechanisms and tools. It was mentioned that in this regard a paradox emerges: Women's issues and broader gender challenges are within the public realm, but they themselves, as bodies and beings, are somehow beyond the realm of care, with many living in abject poverty and in constant fear of sexual violence. When it comes to gender, South Africa has

one of the most progressive legislative and policy frameworks in the world. However, it would seem that either the voices of many women cannot be heard to the extent that their material and concrete contexts are meaningfully transformed, or these issues can to a certain extent not even be formulated. When viewed through the lens of Rancière’s formulation of politics, it becomes clear that specialised policy and law as well as consensual activism and awareness becomes part of the mechanisms of the police order. The sexual violence perpetrated against many women as well as their socio-economic marginalisation has been taken into account by the police order. “Women” have been counted and their issues named. There can be no doubt about the fact that the strides made by government through policy and legal frameworks in order to promote gender equality were and remain important, on a practical as well as a symbolic level. However, Rancière’s formulation of the police order allows us to ask to what extent these mechanisms contribute in maintaining the *status quo*. These frameworks, mechanisms, procedures and discourses that surround the particular problems that many women face, also serve to confirm the notion that government is aware of these pressing issues, that it has done a lot and that it is doing what it can, affirming that they are being addressed. This results in the closing off of alternative conversations surrounding these issues, establishing a discourse of pragmatic management. Moreover, the ineffectiveness of measures and laws with regard to these problems might be explained by the fact that it would seem that government is less concerned about actually reducing the number of rapes and improving the living conditions of the majority of women, than showing that they are tirelessly engaged in the effort. Further, because of the progressive frameworks that are established, the issues of the socio-economic deprivation of many women as well as the continuing sexual violence perpetrated against them are selectively framed and interpreted. They are therefore only viewed through and along the lines of these frameworks, limiting other possible perceptions and possibilities of voice. Progressive policy frameworks as well as activism within the public and private realms of society serve to limit democracy to a certain extent. The widespread awareness and consensual activism, together with specialised policy and legislation effectively

neutralises these issues. When we have societal consensus (coupled with the managerial efforts of government) over the fact that the highly patriarchal cultures in the country needs to be transformed and the suffering of many women need to be alleviated, these problems become part of the most interior logic and workings of the police order and they therefore essentially lose their capacity for litigation, for dispute, for contestation, for discussion and controversy. As mentioned, the specific legislative and policy directives of the South African government as well as societal activism in general are exemplary. These efforts cannot be lamented. However, Rancière's description of politics and the police order allows us to ask what different frameworks and understandings are available. His formulations points the question of how certain issues can become intelligible, visible and perceptible to the extent that it declares a wrong or manifests in a struggle for equality. These postulations therefore point to a different visibility than the visibility involved in consensual frameworks. They point to the possibility of a different voicing that can frame certain issues in such a way so as to politicise them or open them up to dispute or contestation again.

Rancière's politics reminds of the fact that the police order through consensus refers to a topography of the visible, of what is possible and what can be thought. Political voice does not form part of this topography. It forms part of dissensus. Dissensus has two primary operations; firstly, it questions who counts as subjects worthy of taking part in politics and secondly, what constitutes an object, or the possible topic of politics. Dissensus therefore multiplies "litigious objects and disputing subjects" as Rancière puts it.⁵⁶³ It questions a society's definitions of competence, forms of relation, and divisions of labour. The potency of dissensus is that it politicises issues, objects or subjects thought not to be political, ever or anymore. When it comes to the precariousness, complexity and difficulty of issues surrounding voicing as it relates to many South African women, Rancière's politics points to the creation of a new terrain for confrontation. It becomes clear that the most urgent issues that many South African women face are within the

⁵⁶³ Rancière J (1999) 118.

current distribution of the sensible, but, they appear (they are only audible, visible and intelligible) in a specific way. As such these problems also essentially, disappear. In the face of disappearance, Rancière's formulation of politics points to the fact that a dissensual, radically egalitarian political voicing can re-open the space in which they can again be thought.

In the next chapter I discuss the figures of Gabriel Gauny and Joseph Jacotot as figures that overturned sensible distributions. These discussions further serve to explain Rancière's work around politics and they also further serve to make sense of voice. They allow for a deeper understanding of Rancière's formulation on politics and therefore political voice. Jacotot illustrates the power of equality and Gauny demonstrates the power of identifications that redistribute the times, spaces and places of the distribution of the sensible.

CHAPTER 3

Radical Intellectual Equality and the Reconfiguration of Work's Space and Time

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I explained Rancière's formulation of politics and reflected on the notion of political voice through the lens of his formulations. Against the background of the complexities and difficulties of political voice or visibility as it pertains to many women within the South African context, I discussed in what way the mechanisms of government and consensual activism can be thought of when viewed in the frame of Rancière's conception of politics. I suggested that the operations of government and activism, rather than opening issues of silencing to litigation, dispute and contestation, to a certain extent contributes to the disappearance of some of the most pressing issues that many South African women face. These operations, rather than giving rise to political voicing, create a discourse of pragmatic management. It was mentioned in the introductory chapter that the discussions of Joseph Jacotot and Gabriel Gauny in this chapter will allow for an even deeper or better understanding of Rancière's formulation of politics. In this regard it should be mentioned again that Rancière's work can be said to represent three stages.

The first stage was his critique of the main tenets of Althusserian theory starting from the early 1970's. The second stage involved questions of education, pedagogy, history, historiography and historical agency. From these engagements he formulated his mature politics that represents the third stage of his work. The previous chapter therefore involved the first and third stages. The discussion of Joseph Jacotot and Gabriel Gauny in this chapter involves the second stage of his work. As mentioned, the discussions around these historical figures that Rancière engages with serve to illuminate some of his most important arguments. In many ways, Rancière's research into these figures not only crystallised his objections to Althusserianism, but also allowed him to properly formulate his work on politics.

The way in which Rancière engages with these figures as well as the arguments that he formulates on the basis of them, demonstrates two important elements of his work namely; the political potency of equality and the reconfiguration of the space and time of the distribution of the sensible. I therefore find it necessary to shed light on Rancière's work in this regard. It provides significant insight into his thinking.

A further aim of this chapter can be described as involving ways in which to approach the notion of voice or moments of voicing in the context of the difficulties surrounding the voice of many South African women set out in the first chapter. What becomes important here is the way in which Rancière mobilises these historical figures in order to refute certain dominant lines of thinking in specific contexts. The way in which these historical figures are staged has itself the political effect of expanding perception and reframing what is thinkable.⁵⁶⁴ Therefore, apart from providing further insight into Rancière's thinking on politics, the figures and discussions in this chapter also represent a way of engaging with and writing about moments of political voicing. These discussions therefore serve to suggest different angles or places from where to think through and how to write about the notion of political voice within the context of a Rancièrean understanding of politics. The question that arises is, when making sense of voice, how are we to engage with and approach the notion political voice? In this regard, I suggest that Rancière's engagement with the figures of Joseph Jacotot and Gabriel Gauny is suggestive of some important considerations, which I explain below.

I firstly discuss the figure of Joseph Jacotot explored in his book on pedagogy, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* in order to explain Rancière's conception of equality that is so central to his notion of politics.⁵⁶⁵ I also discuss the figure of Gabriel Gauny discussed in his book *The Nights of Labor*.⁵⁶⁶ The discussion of Gauny occurs

⁵⁶⁴ Ross K "Historicizing Untimeliness" in Rockhill G & Watts p (eds.) (2009) 24-25.

⁵⁶⁵ Rancière J (1991).

⁵⁶⁶ Rancière J (1989).

alongside a discussion of certain aspects of Plato that Rancière engages with and criticises in *The Philosopher and His Poor*.⁵⁶⁷ I individually introduce these discussions in the sections below.

3.2 Joseph Jacocot

Rancière's reflections on equality and pedagogy were formulated in his book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.⁵⁶⁸ As mentioned, an analysis of Rancière's reflections on the figure of Joseph Jacocot will allow for a deeper understanding of the type of equality that he postulates. Davis notes that Badiou and May have both rightly insisted that the radical conception of equality that Rancière formulates in his book on Jacocot is one of the most important defining and original features of his work and has implications far beyond the field of pedagogy.⁵⁶⁹ It becomes clear in his discussions of Jacocot that his reflections on equality and politics are rooted in his explorations of what it means to learn and teach. Rancière's account of pedagogy and equality also echoes his earlier concerns with Althusserianism. *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* is profoundly sceptical of the professed interests of educational institutions in equality.⁵⁷⁰ As stated, Althusserianism, for all its promises of correct revolutionary practice, seemed to Rancière to come down to "a pedagogy of delay".⁵⁷¹ The moment of the revolution is infinitely postponed and in the meantime the social and institutional privileges of pedagogues are strengthened.⁵⁷² It was in the figure of Jacocot that Rancière found a way to react to some of his concerns around Althusserianism. He also found in Jacocot a way in which to conceptualise his highly original description of equality.

Whilst much of Jacocot's anti-method of teaching remains vague in Rancière's account, it is important to note, as Davis highlights, that Rancière does not devise

⁵⁶⁷ Rancière J (2003).

⁵⁶⁸ Rancière J *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (1991) trans. Ross K.

⁵⁶⁹ Davis O (2010) 27.

⁵⁷⁰ Davis O (2010) 29.

⁵⁷¹ As above.

⁵⁷² See section 2.2 above.

a “new curriculum or a pedagogical programme”.⁵⁷³ Jacocot’s pedagogical experiment rather provides a new understanding of the nature of equality.⁵⁷⁴ According to Davis, the book offers “an emancipatory reconfiguration of the idea of the lesson”.⁵⁷⁵ For May, Rancière puts into question the distance between teacher and taught subjects, knowledge and non-knowledge and the knowing master and the ignorant masses.⁵⁷⁶ Before explaining Rancière’s exploration of Jacocot, it should be mentioned that in his telling of Jacocot, Rancière’s voice mingles thoroughly with that of Jacocot’s. May explains that the book works assiduously to avoid any type of commentary and it also shies away from any devices that would separate the author and subjects or readers.⁵⁷⁷ In this regard, May explains that Rancière employs the present tense throughout the book and avoids phrases such as “Jacocot says”.⁵⁷⁸ Rancière also fully adopts Jacocot’s vocabulary. Swenson, for example notes that the key terms such as *émancipation*, *explication* and *abrutissement* are all Jacocot’s usages and Rancière gives the responses Jacocot gave to the objections he encountered.⁵⁷⁹ As Swenson further explains, the small number of authors referred to are all contemporaries whom Jacocot liked to read and the primary citations are largely drawn from Jacocot himself, his detractors, and his defenders.⁵⁸⁰ As Swenson notes, “there is no moment at which Rancière leaves Jacocot’s circle”.⁵⁸¹ Davis notes that the book is a philosophical tale that offers material resistance to easy conceptual analysis.⁵⁸² He argues that

[g]iven Jacocot’s suspicion of explanation, it is appropriate that - because of its complex conceptual-material texture - this is an especially difficult book

⁵⁷³ Davis O (2010) 29.

⁵⁷⁴ As above. Fénelon F *Les Aventures de Télémaque* published anonymously in 1699 and reissued by Fénelon’s family in 1717. Davis explains that the story fills out a gap in Homer’s *Odyssey*, recounting the educational travels of Telemachus, son of Ulysses, accompanied by his tutor, Mentor, who is revealed at the end of the story to be Minerva, the goddess of wisdom. Davis O (2010) 29.

⁵⁷⁵ As above.

⁵⁷⁶ May T “Rancière in South Carolina” in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 111.

⁵⁷⁷ As above.

⁵⁷⁸ As above.

⁵⁷⁹ Swenson J “*Style indirect libre*” in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 266.

⁵⁸⁰ As above.

⁵⁸¹ As above.

⁵⁸² Davis O (2010) 29.

to explain. [It] is a skillfully crafted material object, a textured work of art and artifice, as well as a book of ideas.⁵⁸³

Thus, it becomes difficult to fully capture Rancière's engagement with Jacocot. I therefore do not propose to fully explain Rancière's exploration and the implications thereof, but rather to shed some light on the most important arguments that Rancière puts forth through his analysis of Jacocot.

Joseph Jacocot (1770-1840) was an artilleryman in the Republican Armies and a partisan from the French Revolution. The Bourbon Restoration forced him into exile and it was while he was in exile that he obtained a teaching position at the University of Louvain in Flanders. He had to teach French to a group of Flemish students. The only problem was that Jacocot did not speak a word of Flemish and his students did not speak a word of French. This would normally present a problem when it comes effective teaching. However, as Davis explains, Jacocot devised a plan so as to not be exposed as a fraud.⁵⁸⁴ He came upon a bilingual copy of *Télémaque*, Fenelon's praised portrayal of the wanderings of Telemachus. He asked his students to learn the French by comparing it to the Flemish and his desperate attempt at teaching "yielded unexpected results".⁵⁸⁵ After some time, the students were not only able to read the French text, but they could compose essays on its meaning. Rancière states:

⁵⁸³ As above. In Rancière's account of him, Jacocot may be seen as emphasising the "materiality of the subjects" he is teaching and conversely the ideality, or intellectuality, of so-called "manual" labour. See Davis O (2010) 28-29. One of the principles of Jacocot's method for Rancière, is to establish a relation of equivalence between knowledge and the materials worked upon by the labourer: "Each citizen is also a man who makes a work, with the pen, with the drill, or with any other tool" (Rancière J *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991) 108). The intention, as Davis mentions, is to also persuade the manual worker who thinks learning is something he is unable to do that he is already exercising the same human intellect in his work. See Davis O (2010) 28-29. To understand Telemachus takes no special gift, or no gift more special than the intellect, which he is already using in his work. As will be explained, with regards to Rancière's discussion in *The Nights of Labour*, this undermines the assumption underlying the Platonic social hierarchy, which placed pedagogues in superior positions and posits occupations. For Rancière, no one person is especially suited or destined for writing books any more than any other is for making shoes. This notion carries over into the style in which *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* is written, in the sense that it "weaves a complex conceptual-material web". See Davis O (2010) 28-29.

⁵⁸⁴ Davis O (2010) 29.

⁵⁸⁵ As above.

He had given no explanation to his students on the first elements of language. He had not explained spelling or conjugations to them. They had looked for the French words that correspond to words they knew and the reasons for their grammatical endings themselves.⁵⁸⁶

Students were therefore learning without Jacocot's instruction and he soon employed this method of so-called "non-teaching" to other subjects in which he was not proficient, such as law, piano and painting.⁵⁸⁷ As Tanke explains, non-teaching somehow allowed Jacocot to see what is often concealed in traditional pedagogical practices namely, that one does not learn by internalising the knowledge of another, but through the exercise of one's own faculties.⁵⁸⁸ What he learned was ways of removing obstacles to student's abilities so that they can eventually, with time, make their own discoveries.⁵⁸⁹ From his experiences Jacocot draws the conclusion that people are equally intelligent or they have equal mental capacities. For Jacocot, the problem of education is not that people have different levels of intellectual abilities, but as Swenson notes, that some attend closely to what they are doing and others do not.⁵⁹⁰ There are therefore no natural divisions that prevent people from achieving academic success. One only has to engage with the material.⁵⁹¹ Jacocot's experiences led him to conceptualise a pedagogical theory of radical intellectual equality, affirming that all people are in possession of equal mental capacity. Rancière states:

The duty of Joseph Jacocot's disciples is thus simple. They must announce to everyone in all places and all circumstances, the news, the practice: one can teach what one doesn't know.⁵⁹²

Jacocot's experiences also led him to general scepticism about the function and effectiveness of explanation. Rancière states the following:

Explanation is not necessary to remedy an incapacity to understand. On the contrary, that very incapacity provides the structuring fiction of the explicative conception of the world. It is the explicator who needs the incapable and not the other way around; it is he who constitutes the

⁵⁸⁶ Rancière J (1991) 4-5.

⁵⁸⁷ As above.

⁵⁸⁸ Tanke J (2011) 35.

⁵⁸⁹ As above.

⁵⁹⁰ Swenson J in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 111.

⁵⁹¹ As above.

⁵⁹² Rancière J *On the Shores of Politics* (1995) 101.

incapable as such. To explain something to someone is first of all to show him he cannot understand it by himself. Before being the act of the pedagogue, explication is the myth of pedagogy, the parable of a word divided into knowing minds and ignorant ones, ripe minds and immature ones, the capable and the incapable, the intelligent and the stupid.⁵⁹³

For Jacocot, “all people are virtually capable of understanding what others have done and understood”.⁵⁹⁴ Everyone has the same intelligence and differences in knowledge are simply matters of either opportunity and/or motivation. Hallward explains that on the basis of this assumption, superior or having more knowledge than another ceases to be a necessary qualification of the teacher, just as the process of explanation ceases to be an important part of teaching.⁵⁹⁵ The usual supposition of education systems is that it should function in such a way that it eventually furthers social justice and equality between people.⁵⁹⁶ Jacocot however, as Tanke explains, begins with the assumption of intellectual equality and seeks to establish a different type of pedagogy on the strength of this assumption.⁵⁹⁷ Over time Jacocot defended his method and came to oppose traditional pedagogy on its grounds.

Tanke further clarifies that in order to maintain the position that people are equally intelligent what is required is the refusal to accept that intellectual inequality is the explanation for why some do better than others or why some achieve greater academic success than others.⁵⁹⁸ Intelligence needs to be separated from its material effects. He explains that it is obvious that some do better than others, that some are more successful than others and more quickly successful when it comes to the tests and trails put forth by educational institutions.⁵⁹⁹ But this cannot necessarily and should not be described in terms of intelligence. For Tanke, the question that Rancière puts forth with regards to Jacocot is the following: “How are we to move seamlessly from material facts to

⁵⁹³ Rancière J (1991) 6-7.

⁵⁹⁴ Hallward P in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 144.

⁵⁹⁵ As above.

⁵⁹⁶ As above.

⁵⁹⁷ May T in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 111.

⁵⁹⁸ Tanke J (2011) 36-37.

⁵⁹⁹ As above.

the immaterial of the mind?”⁶⁰⁰ For Jacocot, the juncture between thought and expression must be affirmed in order to do so.⁶⁰¹ As Tanke elucidates, thought is prior to language and all communication is first and foremost the will to communicate sentiments by means of arbitrary signs.⁶⁰² It is therefore possible to contend that intellectual activity is equal because of the fact that communication is sometimes difficult and it is within the process of communication, articulation and expression that problems may arise. What is therefore preferred is a different explanation for why some students learn faster than others. Tanke explains that dissimilar results should rather be attributed to different intensities of will.⁶⁰³ As Tanke further elucidates; the claim is not that all academic works are equal in quality, but rather that they do not originate from two different natures.⁶⁰⁴

Rancière states:

There aren't two sorts of minds. There is inequality in the manifestations of intelligence, according to the greater or lesser energy communicated to the intelligence by the will for discovering and combining new relations; but there is no hierarchy of intellectual capacity, emancipation is becoming conscious of this equality of nature.⁶⁰⁵

And

I will not say that one's faculties are inferior to other's. I will only suppose that the two faculties haven't been equally exercised.⁶⁰⁶

Jacocot named his method “universal teaching” and it basically involves the natural method by which one learns through comparing of two facts.⁶⁰⁷ Tanke explains that a student must identify a fact, relate it to something else and then relate or recount the connection between the two.⁶⁰⁸ In order to do this, no explanation is needed:

⁶⁰⁰ As above.

⁶⁰¹ As above.

⁶⁰² As above.

⁶⁰³ As above.

⁶⁰⁴ As above.

⁶⁰⁵ Rancière J (1991) 27.

⁶⁰⁶ Rancière J (1991) 50.

⁶⁰⁷ Tanke J (2011) 37.

⁶⁰⁸ As above.

All that is required is the confidence to venture forward into a world of unconnected facts, the will to focus the intelligence and the courage to find the language to communicate one's adventure.⁶⁰⁹

In his pedagogical experiment, Jacocot's role as teacher was reduced to the relentless and continuous questioning of students to ensure that they apply themselves to the task at hand.⁶¹⁰ When there were performances of uneven achievement, the teacher's role is not to use these performances to rank the students by intelligence or capacity, but rather to see weakness as evidence of a lack of application to the task. Davis notes that when students protested that they cannot do better, or cannot perform the task at all, the teacher was to become "an intractable master", as stubborn as possible.⁶¹¹ Jacocot therefore, according to Davis, took the protests of students as false modesty.⁶¹² A typically response from Jacocot was:

You must begin to speak. Don't say that you can't. You know how to say "I can't". Say in its place "Calypso could not", and you're off. You're off on a route that you already knew, and that you should follow always without giving up. Don't say: "I can't". Or then learn to say it in the manner of Calypso, in the manner of Telemachus, of Narbal, of Idomeneus [...] you will never run out of ways to say "I can't", and soon you will be able to say everything.⁶¹³

The ignorant teacher is therefore someone who validates the efforts of students and provides them with continuous encouragement, always keeping students on track to their intellectual emancipation.⁶¹⁴ Tanke states:

The master compels the student to make greater effort, to draw more connections, to recognise deeper patterns, and to communicate the results more elegantly. He does not for all that tell the student what to think about what he finds. He simply provides the occasion for the student to discover his own capacity.⁶¹⁵

⁶⁰⁹ As above.

⁶¹⁰ Davis O (2010) 27.

⁶¹¹ As above

⁶¹² As above.

⁶¹³ Rancière J (1991) 24 as quoted in Davis O (2010) 27.

⁶¹⁴ Tanke J (2011) 37.

⁶¹⁵ Tanke J (2011) 38.

Tanke further explains that universal teaching refuses to employ “explication”, which is the process whereby a teacher clarifies and explains text.⁶¹⁶ Explication supplements a text with commentary that is designed to make the meaning of the text clearer or apparent.⁶¹⁷ During the process of explication, as Tanke notes, the assumption exists that the text will not be properly understood without the teachers’ intervention.⁶¹⁸ The process therefore continuously reveals what a student would not have gathered without assistance.⁶¹⁹ For Rancière, explication institutes a relationship between intelligence and intelligence, thereby, as Tanke notes, convincing a student of the inferiority of her own.⁶²⁰ What is learned in this process is that one’s intelligence relies upon another’s and in Rancière’s view the intelligence of the student is subordinated and the relationship is termed “stultification”.⁶²¹ As Tanke further explains, the process whereby the mind realises its own powers without the reliance on another’s, is known as “emancipation” and emancipation is opposed to stultification.⁶²² Stultification therefore convinces the student that he is dependent on the intelligence of others whilst emancipation enables him to discover what he is capable of.⁶²³ Rancière through his exploration of Jacocot is contesting the belief that nature has distributed the gifts of the mind unequally:

What sustains the positions of educators, to say nothing of the social order, if not the notion that some are not capable of thinking as well as others?⁶²⁴

Universal teaching postulates the presupposition of intellectual equality and as Tanke further explains, the presupposition of intellectual equality is a hypothesis in search of proof.⁶²⁵ The point is shifting the terms of the debate and Tanke notes that whilst it might be difficult to establish the presupposition definitively, it

⁶¹⁶ As above.

⁶¹⁷ Tanke J (2011) 37.

⁶¹⁸ As above.

⁶¹⁹ As above.

⁶²⁰ As above

⁶²¹ As above.

⁶²² Tanke J (2011) 38.

⁶²³ As above.

⁶²⁴ Tanke J (2011) 36.

⁶²⁵ As above.

is a belief that is legitimate to hold.⁶²⁶ Rancière explains, “our problem isn’t proving that all intelligence is equal. It is seeing what can be done under that presupposition”.⁶²⁷

Davis argues that at times Jacocot’s method might be viewed as an elaborate form of “autodidacticism”, the process whereby a learner struggles alone with the content of a text, while the teacher at most seeks to keep the student focussed with relentless questioning.⁶²⁸ Jacocot’s method is further viewed by Rancière as a radical critique of the Enlightenment model of progressive pedagogy. For Rancière, Jacocot

derives the “mad” notion that all intelligence is equal and that this equality is a presupposition that requires demonstration and not a goal that needs to be attained [...] he derives the notion that the ideals of progress and the progressive moment are, in and of themselves, principles of inequality as a social end and entrusting certain education “experts” with the task of reducing the effects of the clash between an “equality to come” with existing inequality means, in short to institute inequality as principle whose reproduction is infinite.⁶²⁹

According to Davis, Rancière’s thoughts around Jacocot can therefore be seen as an early challenge to the progressivism which took hold of the nineteenth century and which still dominates thinking about education and social inequality today.⁶³⁰

According to Rancière:

An enormous machine was revving up to promote equality through instruction. This was equality represented, socialised, made unequal, good for being perfected- that is to say, deferred from commission to commission, from report to report, from reform to reform until the end of time. Jacocot was alone in recognising the effacement of equality under progress, of emancipation under instruction.⁶³¹

It should further be noted that Rancière’s assumption of equal intelligence amounts too much more than merely the idea to have the utmost of faith in the

⁶²⁶ As above.

⁶²⁷ Rancière J (1991) 46.

⁶²⁸ Davis O “The radical pedagogies of François Bon and Jacques Rancière” *French Studies* (2010) 183.

⁶²⁹ Panagia D “Dissenting words: A conversation with Jacques Rancière” *Diacritics* (2000) 122.

⁶³⁰ Davis O (2010) 30.

⁶³¹ Rancière J (1991) 134.

abilities of students.⁶³² Davis argues that it implies a profoundly different understanding of the relationship between student and teacher.⁶³³ The teacher's role is to place the student in a position or situation from which they can only escape by using their intellect.⁶³⁴ Universal teaching therefore involves somewhat of a paradox: "[I]f emancipation is something which can never be given, but only taken, to teach is to construct a series of puzzles from which the student can only escape by seizing knowledge".⁶³⁵ Universal also teaching involves relentless questioning in an attempt "to expose non-sequiturs and obscurities".⁶³⁶ For Davis, Jacotot's aversion to explanation is sometimes exaggerated to the limits of plausibility.⁶³⁷ He radically marks his stance from any type of common-sense thinking about education.⁶³⁸ However, as further explained by Davis, his suspicion of explanation is not incoherent. It should rather be understood in institutional and political terms.⁶³⁹ In his view, when students are taught in a "normal" way by being led from imperfect or incorrect explanations to less imperfect or correct ones, this promotes intellectual dependency and endorses the sense of intellectual inequality which is crucial to the survival of the institution and the maintenance of the *status quo*.⁶⁴⁰ Therefore, Davis explains, the intellectual inequality that is produced by institutions is thought of by Rancière in relation to other forms of social inequality.⁶⁴¹ According to Rancière it rationalises the division of society into those who are born to think and govern and their intellectual inferiors in intelligence that are fit only to follow instruction.⁶⁴² Educational institutions therefore seem to instil a sense of intellectual and political inequality through processes such as marking and examinations as well as

⁶³² Davis O *French Studies* (2010) 184.

⁶³³ As above.

⁶³⁴ As above.

⁶³⁵ As above.

⁶³⁶ As above.

⁶³⁷ As above.

⁶³⁸ As above.

⁶³⁹ As above.

⁶⁴⁰ As above

⁶⁴¹ As above.

⁶⁴² As above.

through the subtext of the everyday interactions between student and teacher, rather than instilling a sense of capability.⁶⁴³

Jacocot also argues that even though the aim of ordinary pedagogy is to bring about greater equality between student and teacher by way of a series of incrementally more sophisticated explanations, it is unacceptably slow.⁶⁴⁴ It is a hierarchal approach, which misunderstands the process of learning and the reality of human intellect.⁶⁴⁵ For Jacocot, one can obtain better results by assuming from the outset that students are the intellectual equals of their teacher.⁶⁴⁶ Davis explains that when a teacher presumes that a student is equal in intelligence it enables the student to retranslate his expression of incapacity into the very knowledge of which he thought himself incapable.⁶⁴⁷ This is the key point about Jacocot's method.⁶⁴⁸ Alain Badiou has formulated the following two theses with regard to this point:

1. Under the condition of a declared equality, ignorance is the point at which new knowledge can emerge.
2. Under authority of an ignorant master, knowledge can be a space for equality.⁶⁴⁹

As Davis notes, the radical conception of equality that Rancière derives from Jacocot is that equality must be presupposed, from the outset, within the pedagogical encounter; it is an equality that must be declared and verified within that encounter.⁶⁵⁰ This line of thinking of course permeates Rancière's politics. Equality is active and must be assumed and put to the test.

It is further important to mention that the method of universal teaching is essentially anti-institutional. Jacocot was deeply sceptical of all attempts to translate universal teaching into any type of hierarchical social arrangement. He

⁶⁴³ Davis O *French Studies* (2010) 188.

⁶⁴⁴ As above.

⁶⁴⁵ As above.

⁶⁴⁶ Davis O (2010) 25.

⁶⁴⁷ As above.

⁶⁴⁸ Davis O (2010) 27.

⁶⁴⁹ Badiou A in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 42.

⁶⁵⁰ Davis O (2010) 27.

therefore rejected the possibility of the incorporation of universal teaching into organised frameworks. As Tanke eloquently puts it, “for Jacocot, its institutionalisation will be its betrayal”.⁶⁵¹ As Tanke explains, Jacocot insists on the pedagogical being a site for the realisation of equality and institutions inevitably function by establishing hierarchies and inequality.⁶⁵² However, this is not a call to anarchism.⁶⁵³ Rancière emphasises that Jacocot’s students were more than ready and willing to engage in political argument, but they realised that its rhetoric is often competition for supremacy and that moments of reason are far and few in between.⁶⁵⁴ For Rancière it is rather about the fact that “every institution is an explication in social act, a dramatisation of inequality”.⁶⁵⁵

Further, *Télémaque* was necessary within Jacocot’s experiment. The text allowed Jacocot to distance himself from his intelligence and knowing, thereby allowing students to discover their own intellectual capabilities. According to the approach of radical intellectual equality the teacher no longer distributes knowledge to the student, but he rather encourages the student to acquire knowledge for him or herself through an encounter with a written text or some other demonstration or example from that field of knowledge.⁶⁵⁶ *Télémaque* formed the bond between Jacocot and his students and Jacocot’s role amounted to nothing more than continuously pointing students back to the text. Davis notes that “the schoolmaster can be ignorant because the text is savant”.⁶⁵⁷ Therefore, when Jacocot radicalised his experiment by teaching more subjects that he didn’t know anything about, the text or other example from that field is what, according to Davis, saves the ignorant schoolmaster from absurdity.⁶⁵⁸ *Télémaque*, or its

⁶⁵¹ Tanke J (2011) 40.

⁶⁵² As above.

⁶⁵³ Davis O (2010) 29.

⁶⁵⁴ Davis O (2010) 28-29.

⁶⁵⁵ Rancière J (1991) 105.

⁶⁵⁶ Davis 28-29.

⁶⁵⁷ Davis O *French Studies* (2010) 183.

⁶⁵⁸ As above.

equivalent, allows pedagogy to be simultaneously egalitarian *and* meaningful as “the teacher and the student are equal before the book”.⁶⁵⁹

Tanke explains that universal teaching works on the assumption that knowledge is simply there for the taking, based on the model of primary language learning.⁶⁶⁰ It is always a matter of learning a language, or using a familiar tool.⁶⁶¹ Anything can serve as a starting point. The idea that thought is before language allows us to transform knowledge into creative activity:

[W]e speak as poets when we recount the mind’s adventure with imperfect signs.⁶⁶²

According to Rancière/Jacotot, the most important virtue of intelligence is poetry, understood in a broad sense.⁶⁶³ Tanke explains that for Jacotot and Rancière, knowledge consists in drawing connections and inventing language in which we can communicate these findings.⁶⁶⁴ Rancière states that

[i]n the act of speaking, man doesn’t transmit his knowledge, he makes poetry; he translates and invites others to do the same. He communicates as artisan: as a person who handles words like tools.⁶⁶⁵

Communication is therefore a double creation and it consists of translating to signs one’s own experience of navigation.⁶⁶⁶ Jacotot and Rancière contend that the artist can probably more readily discover the language of equality than university professors, because “[t]hey renounce the tyranny of the fixed message, creating instead spaces for play, reciprocal engagement and negotiated meaning”.⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁵⁹ As above.

⁶⁶⁰ Tanke J (2011) 39.

⁶⁶¹ Rancière J (1991) 65 & 5-6.

⁶⁶² Tanke J (2011) 39.

⁶⁶³ As above.

⁶⁶⁴ As above.

⁶⁶⁵ Rancière J (1991) 65.

⁶⁶⁶ Tanke J (2011) 39.

⁶⁶⁷ Tanke J (2011) 39.

Ultimately, Rancière's work and exploration of Jacocot seeks to demonstrate the power of declarations of equality, intellectually and politically. Ross eloquently reiterates the role of equality in the context of Jacocot and I quote her at length.

At the heart of the pedagogical relation is the representation of inequality as evolutionary epistemology: the people who can never catch up with the enlightened elite, or who can never be completely modern. People who are trapped, without knowing it, at one stage along the trajectory of progressive time, and who are destined to remain there, imprisoned in this other time, that of the child, or that of the primitive. But, inequality can't be gradually whittled away, just as equality is not a goal to be one day attained, nor arrived at by dint of a series of concessions made by the state. Short-circuiting the temporality of pedagogy makes equality a point of departure, the point of departure, an axiom anterior to the constitution of a particular staging of politics and which makes such a staging possible. Rather than being the criteria that determines how long it will take for society as it is to become society as it might or should be, equality as an axiom enables, thought, experiment, invention.⁶⁶⁸

For Rancière, the idea that students learn on their own means that the hierarchal ordering and policing of society is constantly undermined by the absolute equality that characterises the human intellectual and always insures a potential for true political intervention. What does it mean to presuppose people are equally intelligent? In short, it has to do with the ability of people to shape their own lives.⁶⁶⁹ In this regard May states that

[s]urely there are things that others can teach us. But we are capable of cobbling those teachings together into a meaningful whole, and far more capable of teaching ourselves many of those things than the hierarchal order in which we live would lead us to believe.⁶⁷⁰

The employment of equality allows for previously suppressed capacities to emerge and the presupposition of equality is a destabilising force. Equality can disrupt any notion of the distribution of the sensible. It is not given, or claimed, but practiced and verified. Assuming radical intellectual equality bolsters capacities previously denied or not recognised and allows those deprived or silenced voices the ability to reconfigure the sensible configuration.⁶⁷¹ In the conclusion I elaborate on

⁶⁶⁸ Ross K in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 26.

⁶⁶⁹ May T in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 111.

⁶⁷⁰ As above.

⁶⁷¹ Tanke J (2011) 36-37.

Jacotot's equality as it pertains to voice. Below, I turn to the figure of Gabriel Gauny.

3.3 Gabriel Gauny in *The Nights of Labor* and Plato in *The Philosopher and His Poor*

*There is no point waiting for some moment in the future when everyone has the leisure to be by turns a shepherd, a fisherman and a critic at nightfall [...] the time is now for us to break the chains of the working day in which and against we struggle, the time to win for ourselves the body and soul of philosophical leisure.*⁶⁷²

Tanke mentions that one of the major political legacies of May '68 was to disrupt the boundaries thought to exist between manual and intellectual labour.⁶⁷³ The boundaries between manual and intellectual labour became of great interest to Rancière. His work of the 1970's around Althusserianism can be viewed as an attempt to displace the representational mechanisms through which intellectuals attempted to guide political movements.⁶⁷⁴ And the disruption of the boundaries between manual and intellectual labour became central to this displacement. His concern in this regard sent him into the archives of the French workers' movement. He would remain there for ten years. This experience was essential to the formation of many of Rancière's central notions, especially those pertaining to politics as the redefining of partitions of the sensible world. The insights he gathered in the archives continue to define his thought and, as Tanke mentions, its spirit shapes his general approach to political and philosophical questions.⁶⁷⁵

Rancière's archival work resulted in the publication of *The Nights of Labor: The Worker's Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* in 1981 and *The Philosopher and his Poor* in 1983.⁶⁷⁶ *The Philosopher and His Poor* can be viewed as a companion to *The Nights of Labor*. The latter charts the history of workers who refused to live their lives according to the prescriptions of work and therefore their strict identities as

⁶⁷² Rancière J *Louis-Gabriel Gauny: Le Philosophe Plébéien* (1983) 17 as quoted in and translated by Davis O (2010) 160.

⁶⁷³ Tanke J (2011) 22.

⁶⁷⁴ As above.

⁶⁷⁵ As above.

⁶⁷⁶ Rancière J (1989) & (2004).

workers. The former, as Davis notes, investigates the means by which philosophy has locked up workers through discourses about their nature.⁶⁷⁷ For Rancière, philosophy has historically defined itself against those people engaged in manual labour, arguing for its superiority and powers of discernment against those supposedly lacking the time for thought. Both of the books therefore interrogate the idea that thinking is a luxury of a few.

In this section, I discuss the historical figure of Gabriel Gauny that Rancière explores in his book, *The Nights of Labor*. Before focussing on Gauny and Rancière's engagement with him, I outline Rancière's engagement with Plato in *The Philosopher and His Poor*. When it comes to the relationship between power and knowledge and intellectual and manual labour, Plato becomes an important critical focus for Rancière. An outlining of Rancière's main concerns with regards to Plato becomes important as it allows for a proper appreciation of the figure of Gabriel Gauny. Rancière, at times, directly link Gauny's actions and words with Plato's assumptions in order to show that the latter is unfounded. The analysis of Plato is further central to Rancière's thinking as it directly relates to the notion that some are capable of thinking and others are not or that some are destined for contemplation and others for work. It therefore becomes important to shortly outline some arguments made by Plato.

3.3.1 Plato

Davis explains that for Rancière Plato's idea of the city in *Republic* is a political model of "philosophical-pedagogical tyranny".⁶⁷⁸ The *Republic* is a treatise on

⁶⁷⁷ Tanke J (2011) 22.

⁶⁷⁸ Davis O (2010) 18. Davis outlines the way in which Rancière's positive account of intellectual equality originated from his radicalisation of the critique of pedagogy in *Althusser's Lesson* to encapsulate Marx as well as Sartre and Bourdieu as thinkers in the French Marxist tradition. Rancière's work in the archives bolstered his belief that an Althusserian understanding of the relationship between Marxist intellectual and revolutionary struggle was wrongheaded. See Davis O (2010) 18-25. Davis explains that in *The Philosopher and his Poor*, he returns to explore the contours of this motif in Marx's work and its reappearance in that of Jean-Paul Sartre and Pierre Bourdieu and its prehistory that he finds in Plato's ideal state (Davis O (2010) 18-25). In this book, Rancière argues by suggestive juxtaposition that the scientific strand identified within the Marxist tradition (in Marx, Sartre

government as well as a treatise on education in which the educated rule and in turn educate their successors. Plato allows for three social classes in his ideal city namely; workers, who fulfil the material needs of a society as a whole, a military class of soldier-guardians and a governing class of philosopher-kings.⁶⁷⁹ Rulers must be trained in order to ensure that they have acquired the necessary knowledge to rule. As Davis explains, in this society, government is a product of a selective education system and the preserve of experts.⁶⁸⁰ It is a self-perpetuating system because of the fact that philosopher-kings must educate their successors and those whom education is offered to are preselected from among the children of parents in the military and the ruling classes.⁶⁸¹ The children of workers are not normally educated for government. According to Plato, the hierarchy of classes corresponds to a hierarchy of human character types. Davis explains that the assumption is that in members of the working class, appetitive desires such as hunger and sexual satisfaction will predominate, whilst in the classes of warrior-guardians and philosopher-kings, reason and honour will prevail over appetitive desire.⁶⁸² It is not difficult to see, considering Rancière's intense aversion to destined positions within the police order, why Plato, at times, becomes Rancière's enemy number one.

As Davis elucidates further, Plato is quite aware that the assumption of the hierarchy of human character types is exactly that, an assumption.⁶⁸³ However, he suggests that it should be taught as fact and in order to argue this, he takes recourse in the myth of three metals.⁶⁸⁴ According to this myth, there are three

and Bourdieu, as well as Althusser), is rooted in a certain conception of the relationship between power and knowledge first elaborated in Plato's autocratic model of the ideal city in *Republic*. It should be mentioned that I do not discuss Rancière's engagement with Jean-Paul Sartre and Pierre Bourdieu as an outline of the engagement with Plato will suffice in order to contextualise Gabriel Gauny properly and in order to demonstrate Rancière's contentions in this regard. For general discussions on these theorists and Rancière's engagement with them see Davis O (2010) 18-25 and Tanke J (2011) 28-35.

⁶⁷⁹ As above.

⁶⁸⁰ As above.

⁶⁸¹ As above.

⁶⁸² As above.

⁶⁸³ As above.

⁶⁸⁴ As above.

racess of people in the hierarchal relationships of society, namely, bronze, silver and gold races that correspond to the three social classes. The myth suggests that children will be born with roughly the same mix of metals in their soul as their parents. The main function of the selective educational system outlined by Plato is to deselect or to disqualify those offspring, so that the racial purity of the classes is preserved.⁶⁸⁵

The greatest threat to this system is the social climber, “the parvenu” or the worker with ideas above what his station requires.⁶⁸⁶ Davis notes that there is of course nothing especially outlandish about Rancière’s commentary on Plato.⁶⁸⁷ However, what makes Rancière’s criticisms significant is where he repeatedly places the emphasis, namely, on the fact that there is absolutely no rational basis for Plato’s elaborate, autocratic hierarchy.⁶⁸⁸ The section on Plato is titled “Plato’s Lie”, indicating that the entire system rests on a lie, myth or founding fiction. Plato was disturbed by the so-called “amateurishness” of Athenian democracy.⁶⁸⁹ He rather opted for aspects of the Spartan model of war-state ruling over a largely submissive population that provided for the material needs of the state as a whole.⁶⁹⁰ In Plato’s ideal model there is a hierarchy of specialists in which each class would do only one thing. The shoemaker will only make shoes and the farmer only grow crops and shoes and crops will be exchanged for the good of all.⁶⁹¹ Plato claims that only by devoting all our time to one activity, an activity for which our birth equips us, can the best results be achieved. And so it follows that workers do not have time to do anything but work.

Rancière doesn’t find the claim about innate character traits, nor the claim about the time required for perfecting a skill persuasive.⁶⁹² Rancière acknowledges that

⁶⁸⁵ Davis O (2010) 19.

⁶⁸⁶ As above.

⁶⁸⁷ As above.

⁶⁸⁸ As above.

⁶⁸⁹ As above.

⁶⁹⁰ As above.

⁶⁹¹ As above.

⁶⁹² As above.

Plato is merely making an assumption that specialisation is the only way to achieve the best results. Workers, it is assumed, are not able to do more than one thing at a time. For Rancière, this assumption about the worker translates into an arbitrary prohibition: “the simple prohibition against doing anything else”.⁶⁹³ For Plato, the climber who “trespasses” on the role or the position of others lies at the root of injustice and for him, justice means staying put.⁶⁹⁴

Rancière finds it significant that Plato, through introducing the myth of the three metals, admits to the arbitrariness of the distinction between those who rule, those who are capable of philosophy and the rest of the multitude or the workers that is not suited for thinking.⁶⁹⁵ For Davis, the originality in Rancière’s reading lies not in what he says about Plato in isolation, but rather in his argument by way of “parataxis” between Plato and the reputedly progressive work of philosophers such as Marx, Jean-Paul Sartre and Pierre Bourdieu.⁶⁹⁶ These thinkers are therefore tainted by association according to Davis.⁶⁹⁷ For Rancière, all four have in common the construction of a group he calls “the poor” which is also the proletariat, the workers or the dominated class who are constitutively incapable of thought.⁶⁹⁸ Rancière suggests that similar reasons are advanced in each case

⁶⁹³ As above.

⁶⁹⁴ As above.

⁶⁹⁵ See Rancière J in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 276.

⁶⁹⁶ As above.

⁶⁹⁷ As above. Davis notes that with regard to Sartre, Rancière concentrates on his later work that involves the question of the relation between workers and the Communist Party (Davis O (2010) 22-25). According to Sartre, workers are unable to think for themselves and need the Party because they do not have time and are too tired. Rancière thus aligns Sartre with the Platonic argument for “specialisation”. See Davis O (2010) 22-25. In suggesting that workers are too tired to think, Sartre unwittingly recreates the Platonic ban on doing more than one thing. He also, according to Rancière, articulates Marx’s assumption that people make history, but they do not know they do so. See Davis O (2010) 22-25. It should be mentioned that Rancière’s point is not that Sartre’s concern for workers is disingenuous, but rather that his emphasis on the worker’s inevitable tiredness deprives the worker of the power of thought. As Davis explains, for Rancière, what Sartre is ultimately doing is denying his tired poor the same capacity for “self-directing intellectual freedom”, which he as philosopher exercises. For a more detailed discussion, see Davis O (2010) 20-22. Davis notes that Rancière’s dispute with Bourdieu’s work on pedagogy and aesthetics is more involved than his engagement with either Marx or Sartre. Davis accurately summarises Rancière’s engagement with Bourdieu. See Davis O (2010) 22-25.

⁶⁹⁸ As above.

and that these reasons are all similarly unfounded.⁶⁹⁹ More importantly, in each case “the philosopher” is dependent on “his poor” who cannot think for themselves.⁷⁰⁰ Marx’s proletariat, for example, are held up as the embodiment of a common future. However, Davis explains, the proletariat are constitutively unable to understand that future and their role in it.⁷⁰¹ Such knowledge must be introduced by intellectuals, who stand in a relationship of mutual independence to their specific “poor”.⁷⁰² In *The Philosopher and His Poor*, Rancière calls for the recognition of the equal capacity of all for what Davis terms “sophisticated self-understanding and self-performance”; an understanding that goes far beyond conservative thinking such as that captured by the idea that the worker must do one thing at a time.⁷⁰³ Rancière’s biggest concern in *The Philosopher and His Poor* is the underestimation of understanding and imagination of those people or “poor” on whose behalf certain philosophers speak. As we have seen with his discussion on Jacocot, Rancière’s conception of radical intellectual equality is a reaction against pedagogical power. It is after *The Philosopher and His Poor* that he radicalises his critique of the assumption that some think and others do not into a pedagogy of equal intellectual capacities.

Rancière seeks to refute the idea that workers should perform only those functions that supposedly correspond with their natures.⁷⁰⁴ Some people are thought to be naturally capable of thought and others are destined only for work. Some have gold in their souls, others silver and bronze. Tanke mentions that the style and terrain of *The Philosopher and his Poor* is very different than *The Nights of Labor*.⁷⁰⁵ *The Philosopher and His Poor* is a critique of philosophy that attempts to show that philosophical thought, in order to demonstrate its difference from and superiority of other practices, denies the poor capacities for thought.⁷⁰⁶ In

⁶⁹⁹ As above.

⁷⁰⁰ As above.

⁷⁰¹ As above.

⁷⁰² As above.

⁷⁰³ Davis O (2010) 19.

⁷⁰⁴ Tanke J (2011) 28.

⁷⁰⁵ Tanke J (2011) 27-28.

⁷⁰⁶ As above

this book, Rancière argues that philosophy locks up the poor because it is interested in preserving its own purity.⁷⁰⁷ Tanke explains that the book traces the form that philosophy assumes when partitions the world on the basis of supposedly distinct natures. For Rancière, philosophy harbours a general disdain for the working classes.⁷⁰⁸

Plato's belief that each should perform the social function that best suit his nature, justifies a certain separation between theory and practice.⁷⁰⁹ Tanke explains that in *Republic*, philosophy regulates production, determines moments for reproduction, decides which spectacles are appropriate and generally assures that the division of labour remains intact.⁷¹⁰ The philosopher therefore promotes or demotes individuals based on judgements about their aptitudes.⁷¹¹ Rancière describes philosophy as a form of thinking that forcefully denies its birth and obsessively guards its lineage.⁷¹² For Rancière, philosophy is characterised by a fundamental and ultimately unsustainable desire for purity and this desire compels it to structure itself in such a way that it is separate from other practices.⁷¹³ As Tanke explains, whilst there are considerable differences between the thinkers that Rancière discusses, they all rely on a “conceptualisation of the poor as an inert mass whose passivity is the *sine qua non* of its would-be representatives”.⁷¹⁴ For Rancière, this conceptualisation is merely a variation of the Platonic distribution. The actions of certain philosophers restrict the business of thinking.⁷¹⁵ Workers require specialists that are dedicated to their cause and the traditional division of labour is affirmed.⁷¹⁶ For Rancière, certain thinkers fail to think of a radical alternative; the joining together of the realms of practice,

⁷⁰⁷ As above

⁷⁰⁸ As above.

⁷⁰⁹ As above

⁷¹⁰ Tanke J (2011) 29.

⁷¹¹ As above.

⁷¹² Tanke J (2011) 30.

⁷¹³ As above.

⁷¹⁴ Tanke J (2011) 31.

⁷¹⁵ As above

⁷¹⁶ As above

thought and equality.⁷¹⁷ Rancière finds in the figure of Gabriel Gauny a joining together of these realms. Gauny forcefully asserts the rights of the imagination - as a right that is not only available to philosophers, but rather to anybody who wants to practice such a right.

3.3.2 Gabriel Gauny

Rancière began his archival work during a period in which many intellectuals left their normal milieus in order to meet and engage with workers.⁷¹⁸ Certain intellectuals had hoped to find what can be described as an authentic working class culture uncorrupted and uncontaminated by Marxist theses.⁷¹⁹ As Tanke explains, *The Nights of Labor* began for Rancière under the assumption that it was possible to trace a coherent body of discourses from the history of the workers' movement into the present.⁷²⁰ Tanke further mentions that Rancière has explained that he intended to “counterpose” the workers' voice to the voice of its would-be representatives.⁷²¹ However, he was forced to abandon the initial lines of his project for the reason that he quickly came to the conclusion that no such culture or coherent workers' voice existed. Instead, he encountered a strange hybrid culture in which workers refused to behave as workers.⁷²² This resulted in a study that followed the lives of a few remarkable voices that wrote poetry and essays in defiance of the partitioning of their lives as workers. Rancière states:

I set out to find primitive revolutionary manifestoes, but what I found was texts which demanded in refined language that workers be considered as equals and their arguments responded to with proper arguments.⁷²³

Tanke elucidates:

⁷¹⁷ As above.

⁷¹⁸ Tanke J (2011) 22-23.

⁷¹⁹ As above.

⁷²⁰ As above.

⁷²¹ As above.

⁷²² As above.

⁷²³ Rancière J “Preface to the Hindi translation of *Nights of Labor*” as referenced in Tanke J (2011) 23 & 166.

Workers did not simply struggle, as a certain line of thought would expect, nor did they valorise the trades they were compelled to adopt out of economic necessity; they founded journals, composed poetry, and imitated “bourgeois” forms of aesthetic contemplation.⁷²⁴

For Rancière, this discovery demanded that he abandon the epistemology of Marxist historiography:

In many cases, we have a tendency to interpret as collective practice or class “ethos” political statements which are in fact highly individualised. We attach too much importance to the collectivity of workers and not enough to its divisions; we look too much at worker culture and not enough at its encounters with other cultures.⁷²⁵

The Nights of Labor relays the tale of workers in the aftermath of the July Revolution of 1830 and follows their traces of revolt up to 1848. Their story is weaved with poems, stories and essays published in various journals.⁷²⁶ The book describes the personal significance and meaning that these associations and publications had for many workers. As Tanke explains, on Rancière’s telling, it was precisely the speculative dimension of these publications that was of the greatest appeal and Rancière makes a long argument against the discursive-practical form the workers’ movement assumed in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁷²⁷ Rancière’s narrative, at that time, challenged many leftist notions about the supposed dignity of labour. He demonstrated that workers, rather than finding manual work a source of pride, described it as torment.⁷²⁸ However, they used their nights

[n]ot to simply replenish the machines that would report to work the next morning; they engaged in creative and scholarly pursuits.⁷²⁹

Rancière insists that these types of activities can hardly be seen as laying the foundations for the European workers’ movement.⁷³⁰ Far from affirming anything

⁷²⁴ Tanke J (2011) 23.

⁷²⁵ Rancière J “The myth of the artisan: Critical reflections on a category of social history” *International Labor and Working-Class History* (1983) 10.

⁷²⁶ Such the Christian Socialist journal *L’Atelier* and the various publications founded by Fourierites, Saint Simonians and Icarians, most notably *La Ruche populaire*. See Tanke J (2011) 24.

⁷²⁷ Tanke J (2011) 25.

⁷²⁸ As above.

⁷²⁹ As above.

like a proletarian identity, Tanke explains that these writings and the very activity of writing itself, was a means of refuting what is taken to be natural, namely, that workers have little time for anything else.⁷³¹ Their activities were, in the Rancièrian sense, a means of “disidentification” from police order identities. These activities allowed them to reject their assigned positions in the division of labour through the assumption of capacities they were not thought to possess. Further, as Tanke explains, Rancière, instead of contending to know in advance the nature of the object of his study, refuses in *The Nights of Labor* to categorise the texts composed by these workers.⁷³² He therefore deliberately avoids representing their voices, allowing the workers’ texts to circulate on their own, without correcting, classifying or explaining them.⁷³³ What is demonstrated is that the workers engaged in political discussions and speculations about alternative social conditions.⁷³⁴ They challenged their economic subordination and exclusion from political life. Tanke explains that the workers also immersed themselves in complicated aesthetic forms.⁷³⁵ They organised readings, composed poems, commented upon the works of others and adopted a generalised outlook.⁷³⁶ These interests demonstrate the myth of restricting aesthetic pursuits to the leisure classes:

These activities were, in a very real sense, a struggle over the delimitation of the economy of pleasures.⁷³⁷

Rancière states:

I assumed that those narratives were much more than descriptions of everyday experience. They reinvented the everyday.⁷³⁸

⁷³⁰ As above.

⁷³¹ As above.

⁷³² As above.

⁷³³ As above.

⁷³⁴ *The Nights of Labor* takes us through “poems composed by metal workers, letters written by builders who dream of being artists, interior decorators which aspire to a bourgeois aesthetics and newspapers written by carpenters in which they represent their work to themselves and respond to the images of work by others”. See Pelletier C “Rancière and the poetics of the social sciences” *International Journal of Research and Method in Education* (2009) 242-243.

⁷³⁵ Tanke J (2011) 25.

⁷³⁶ As above.

⁷³⁷ As above.

⁷³⁸ Rancière J in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 274.

Rancière took particular interest in a man named Gabriel Gauny.

Gabriel Gauny was a joiner who left the archives of his intellectual life.⁷³⁹ From the 1830's to the 1880's he wrote an impressive number of texts, most of which remains unpublished.⁷⁴⁰ Rancière focuses on a specific essay. It relates to Gauny's workday as a floor layer. It was one of the essays published in one of the numerous newspapers that blossomed during the French revolution of 1848. It came out as a contribution to a collective political affirmation. However, Rancière, instead of taking on the "collective meaning in a revolutionary context", emphasises passages that focuses on "the joiner's individual experience and his personal appropriation of the power of writing".⁷⁴¹ For Rancière, Gauny embodied a distinct form of aesthetic political action.⁷⁴² He laid floors in bourgeois interiors. However, he was also "composing a system of principles designed to convert his modest resources into the maximum quotient of freedom".⁷⁴³ Tanke explains that Gauny had a special knack for disassociating his mind from the torments the body endured on the job.⁷⁴⁴ Through his imagination he would transport himself into a realm of contentment.⁷⁴⁵ Gauny describes the labourer's aesthetic attitude in a specific way, thereby redistributing the particular distribution of the sensible. He shifted his gaze outside of the space and time of work.⁷⁴⁶ Rancière highlights the following passage by Gauny:

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 and glides in imagination toward the spacious view to enjoy it better than the possessors of the neighbouring residences.⁷⁴⁷

⁷³⁹ Rancière J in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 273.

⁷⁴⁰ As above.

⁷⁴¹ As above.

⁷⁴² Tanke J (2011) 26.

⁷⁴³ As above.

⁷⁴⁴ As above.

⁷⁴⁵ As above.

⁷⁴⁶ As above.

⁷⁴⁷ As above. See Gabriel Gauny *Le Philosophe plebeian* 45-46. This passage is frequently employed by Rancière in order to demonstrate the nature of aesthetics and its ability to free bodies from specific distributions of the sensible.

Rancière reads in this passage an exceptional aesthetic-political performance. He states the following and I quote him at length:

The tiny shift that I perceived in the little narrative of the joiner, and that I decided to develop as a large theoretical and political shift, consists in stripping the argument, in order to set forth its core. The schema of knowledge and ignorance, reality and illusion, actually covers up a mere tautology: people are where they are because they are where they are, because they are incapable of being elsewhere. This matter of incapacity must be stripped of its “scientific” disguise. People are not unable because they ignore the reason for being there. They are unable because unable means the same thing as being there. The point is that those who have the occupation of workers are supposed to be equipped for that occupation and for the activities that are related to it. They are supposed to be equipped for working, not for peripheral activities such as looking around and investigating how society at large works. This is what a distribution of the sensible means: a relation between occupation and equipment, between being in a space and time, performing specific activities, and being endowed with capacities of seeing, saying, and doing that “fit” those activities. A distribution of the sensible is a matrix that defines a set of relations between sense and sense: that is, between a form of sensory experience and an interpretation which makes sense of it. It ties and occupation to a presupposition.⁷⁴⁸

In the section from which the above quote is taken, Rancière refers to Plato and to the so-called reasons why workers must stay in their place.⁷⁴⁹ The first reason is that workers have no time to go elsewhere, because of the empirical fact that work does not wait. And Rancière indeed regards this as an empirical fact.⁷⁵⁰ The second is that God mixed iron in the makeup of workers and he mixed gold in the makeup of those who are destined to deal with the common good. The second reason, of course, is not an empirical fact. The second reason provides the *logos* that “sustain the empirical state of things by identifying the place where work does not wait with the place where universal thinking is expected to stay, the place of the particular”.⁷⁵¹ The inequality of the social ordering has to rest on an inequality in terms of nature. This is what Rancière says the *logos* provide.⁷⁵² But importantly; it provides it in the guise of a myth, of a lie about what “fitting”

⁷⁴⁸ Rancière J in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 275.

⁷⁴⁹ Rancière J in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 275-276.

⁷⁵⁰ As above.

⁷⁵¹ As above.

⁷⁵² As above.

means- the story of the deity who mixes gold, silver or iron in souls.⁷⁵³ The *logos* is therefore a *mythos*. The argument is a story and the story an argument: “The social distribution rests on the circle of the empirical and the prescriptive”.⁷⁵⁴

The reason for inequality has to be given in the guise of a story, but a story is the most egalitarian form of discourse. Rancière states that “it makes of the philosopher the brother of the children who enjoy stories and of the old women or the old slaves who tell them stories”.⁷⁵⁵ Here, Rancière is highlighting the contradiction that opens up the possibility of the affirmation of equality. The inequality of the workers has to be explained to them through a story, which they understand just as well as those who are telling the story. The very means, by which their inequality is established, requires the equal intellectual capacity to understand the story. Or put in Rancière’s political terms, in order to obey an order, you must understand it, making you equal to the one that is ordering you.

Rancière tells us that

[t]he *logos* must be represented as a story. And the story, Plato says, has to be believed. In order to understand what is at stake in the “belief” of our joiner, we have to define what it means to believe. Obviously, Plato does not demand that workers have the inner conviction that a deity truly mixed iron in their soul and gold in the soul of the rulers. It is enough that they sense it: that is, that they use their arms, their eyes, and their minds as if it were true”.⁷⁵⁶

For Rancière, the ordering of social occupations and orderings functions within this “as if”, which ties it to a belief.⁷⁵⁷ Inequality in this setting works out to the extent that one believes it- “[b]ut that belief can be conveyed only in the egalitarian mode of the story”.⁷⁵⁸

For Rancière, in the construction and the writing of his sensory experience, Gauny implements a different “as if”; and this “as if” overturns the whole logic which

⁷⁵³ Rancière J in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 276.

⁷⁵⁴ As above.

⁷⁵⁵ As above.

⁷⁵⁶ As above

⁷⁵⁷ As above.

⁷⁵⁸ Rancière J in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 277.

allotted him his place. However, this overturning is not the idea of the freeing power of awareness of his domination. The jobber frees himself by becoming less aware of his exploitation, pushing aside its sensory grip. He therefore frees himself by nurturing the power of self-delusion. As Rancière acknowledges, Gauny still works, he still works for the benefit of others against his own employment and his health:

But this counter effect, which results from his way of reframing the space and time of exercise of his force of labour, is the source of a new pleasure, the pleasure of a new freedom.⁷⁵⁹

Rancière explains it in the following way and I quote him at length:

The objection has it that, whatever our joiner may believe as he looks through the window; the room remain the possession of its owner and his force of labour the possession of his boss. The equal and disinterested pleasure of the gaze is just as delusive as the promises of equality written in the Declaration of Rights. Both are expressions of false equality that delude him and block the way that leads to true equality. I answer that the claim of “true” equality dismisses the reality of the operations of the verification of equality. It dismisses it at the same time that it grasps the struggle over the as if in the pincers of appearance and reality. Appearance and reality are not opposed. A reality always goes along with an appearance. For sure, the joiner remains in the world of domination and exploitation. But he is able to split up the tautology of the being-there. He is able to locate his ownership in the ownership of the master and the owner. He actually builds up a new sensible world in the given one. A verification of equality is an operation which grabs hold of the knot that ties equality to inequality. It handles the knot so as to tip the balance, to enforce the presupposition of equality tied up with the presupposition of inequality and increase its power. For instance, the perspective gaze, that has been long associated with mastery and majesty, can be assumed and verified as a power of equality. That verification contributes, thus, to the framing of a new fabric of common experience or a new common sense, upon which new forms of political subjectivation can be implemented.⁷⁶⁰

For Rancière, Gauny’s demonstration of equality is what is meant by the word, emancipation. It is a subversion of a given distribution of the sensible. What is

⁷⁵⁹ As above.

⁷⁶⁰ Rancière J in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 280. It is important to note here that Gauny does not engage in politics proper as described in Rancière’s mature politics. He is not involved in a collective affirmation of equality in the way in which Rancière describes politics. That is why Rancière uses the words “upon which new forms of political subjectivation can be implemented”; meaning that Gauny’s example is a redistributing of sensible time and place from where politics can be established.

overturned is the relationship between what is done by one's arms, what is looked at by one's eyes, what is felt as sensory pleasure and what is thought of as intellectual concern:

It is the relationship between an occupation, the space-time where it is fulfilled, and the sensory equipment for doing it. The subversion implies the reframing of a common sense. A common sense does not mean consensus but, on the contrary, a polemical place, a confrontation between opposite common senses or opposite ways of framing what is common.⁷⁶¹

This is what the relationship between aesthetics and politics means: “Politics is a polemical form of reframing of common sense”.⁷⁶² And in that sense, it is an aesthetic affair. In this context Tanke mentions that one virtue of the aesthetic is that it conducts one into an indeterminate zone where the destiny of class is thrown off.⁷⁶³ It neutralises the properties thought to inhere in a body; transporting it into a world where the distributions of places, times and capacities are not permanently fixed.⁷⁶⁴ It allows sense to be separated from the distribution of the sensible. The platonic assertion that “work does not wait” amounts to locking up workers in the space of their absence of time.⁷⁶⁵ And the experience of emancipation consists in “locating another time in that time, another space in that space”.⁷⁶⁶

Kristin Ross mentions that *The Nights of Labor* drew attention to a very powerful act of stealing time. She explains that Rancière's study relocated workers into another kind of time, outside the temporal regime established by Marx.⁷⁶⁷ Rancière demonstrated that Marx's workdays were actually exceeded by nights and all its possibilities.⁷⁶⁸ Ross notes that what becomes clear is that Marx's own perspective (as Rancière also puts forth in *The Philosopher and His Poor*) was closely aligned, not to that of the worker, but rather to that of capital- the

⁷⁶¹ As above.

⁷⁶² As above.

⁷⁶³ Tanke J (2011) 34.

⁷⁶⁴ As above.

⁷⁶⁵ Rancière J in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 282.

⁷⁶⁶ As above.

⁷⁶⁷ Ross K in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 23.

⁷⁶⁸ As above.

perspective of “the production of surplus value”.⁷⁶⁹ Gauny does not fit comfortably in the framework of the worker, neither Plato nor Marx’s. He rather asserts his rights to the imagination against temperance and beyond the context of proletarian recruiters.⁷⁷⁰

Gauny and the other workers used their Nights to engage in a different kind of labour, the labour of writing. Tanke eloquently states:

Writing for them, was part of a politics of world opening. It was not simply a vehicle for giving voice to their grievances; the activity itself was a means of removing themselves from a sensible order in which they had little part. It enabled them to create capacities, and there with the new space-time configuration in which to attest their equality.⁷⁷¹

According to Tanke, the act of writing is a symbolic and practical rupture that effaces the barriers thought to exist between those granted the luxury of thought and those thought to be held captive by the space-time of their employment.⁷⁷²

Their pleasure of writing was not a retreat from politics:

Theses hard-won bonuses of time and liberty were not marginal phenomena, they were not diversions from the building of the worker movement and its great ideals. They were a revolution, discreet but radical nonetheless.⁷⁷³

The aesthetic attitudes that these workers assumed, whether in writing or contemplating a view, allows them to move away from their habitual identities—the identities prescribed by police order categories and associations.⁷⁷⁴ Rancière explains how the identity of “worker” became something very different in the construction of the worker poets:

For a long time, I looked for a “proper” worker [...] in the corporatisation of crafts/cultures/forms of originary identities. This did not work. It was impossible to see working class speech constructing itself from a proper body emerging from its proper location. What instead manifested itself was a speech sought to drag itself away from these incarnations, no longer to

⁷⁶⁹ As above.

⁷⁷⁰ As above.

⁷⁷¹ Tanke J (2011) 64-65.

⁷⁷² As above.

⁷⁷³ Tanke J (2011) 64-65.

⁷⁷⁴ Tanke J (2011) 67.

... speak like a worker but to subjectivise itself under the name of the worker in the space of common speech.⁷⁷⁵

The worker poets rejected the identities that were stamped on their bodies, the assumptions made about their capacities and the “spatio-temporal locales” which they are forced to occupy.⁷⁷⁶ Gauny, in a very real sense, was not waiting for some point in the future to take for himself the leisure of philosophical contemplation. He did not wait for some or other revolution or change. Rather, he embodies in the here and now the possibility of a radical reconfiguration of speech.

3.4 Conclusion

It becomes clear that the figure of Joseph Jacotot allowed Rancière to glean a specific type of formulation of equality that he would later articulate within his mature politics. His engagements with the figure of Jacotot opened up a way of thinking about equality as a destabilising force. The lessons of education and universal teaching served as a means from where to conceptualise the political potency of equality declared and axiomatically assumed. The notion of radical intellectual equality leaves us speculating about what can be done under the presupposition of equality. In a very real way, Jacotot’s arguments also invokes a political opportunity:

Essentially what an emancipated person can do is to be an emancipator: to give, not the key to knowledge, but the consciousness of what an intelligence can do when it considers itself equal to any other and considers any other equal to itself.⁷⁷⁷

Against institutional and political power, equality postulates the freedoms of invention, poetry and thought. We see the same type of invention within Rancière’s politics- the invention of names for a “we”, the construction of the language within which arguments can be understood, the creation of worlds and scenes of dissensus. Politics is about new words, new meanings and new formulations made by new figures, or figures previously denied the capacity for

⁷⁷⁵ Rancière J (2005) referenced in Pelletier C *International Journal of Research and Method in Education* (2009) 242-243.

⁷⁷⁶ Tanke J (2011) 67.

⁷⁷⁷ Rancière J (1991) 39.

voice. For Rancière, declarations of equality hold open the possibility for true political intervention and for radical redistribution of the sensible. Equality's function is to reopen the space for politics, for contestation and redistribution. In Rancière's engagements with Jacotot and Gauny, he constantly undermines the notion that some can think and think better than others. He insists on displacing distinctions that determine who can think and speak, who can impart knowledge and who has time for philosophical leisure. When these distinctions are displaced, possibilities for voice are created. He affirms, over and over again, his aversion to predestined spaces, places, times and identities. For Rancière, Gauny becomes a figure that redistributes the sensible. His redistribution involves a politics of new forms of innovation that tears bodies and voices from their police order assigned places, thereby freeing up time, speech and expression; acting as if and demonstrating the lessons of equality. For Rancière:

Such lessons can be found everywhere. It is possible to find everywhere new examples of the disjunctive junction between being-there and the reason for being-there. It is possible to disentangle in every case the "as if" which is involved in the "that's the way it is". From this point on, it is possible to imagine a method of equality specifically aimed at detecting and highlighting the operations of equality that may occur everywhere at every time.⁷⁷⁸

Therefore, for Rancière, equality is in gestation around us all the time and equality makes it possible to redistribute spatio-temporal locales and identities; equality can introduce new voices into the sensible mix.

It was mentioned in the introduction of this chapter that a further aim of the chapter is to suggest ways in which to engage with and write about the notion of political voice. As mentioned, the question that arises for me is, when making sense of the notion of political voice, how are we to approach and think about voice? When reflecting on ways in which to think through voice within the context of a Rancièrian politics and against the background of the disconnect or difficulties of voice of many South African women, two important points should be mentioned: Firstly, I would like to highlight Rancière's choice of historical

⁷⁷⁸ Rancière J in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 280-281.

figures as a way of expanding the distribution of the sensible. As Ross explains, Rancière chooses marginal characters often drawn from the most obscure historical archives.⁷⁷⁹ The particular actions and points of view of these marginal individuals, when reframed and restaged, are mobilised by Rancière against the dominant categories and lines of thought.⁷⁸⁰ These readings can, along the lines of the redistribution of the sensible, renegotiate and expand perception and reconfigure what is thinkable. It is important to mention that from a Rancièrian point of view, these individuals are not used as spokespersons or sociological representatives, but are nevertheless mobilised to serve as a “diagnostic of the contemporary situation”.⁷⁸¹ Each person retains his or her individual singularity and historical contingency. Ross further mentions that Rancière writes against generalisations, systems and at times even against concepts.⁷⁸² His concern is first and foremost with what specific historical actors have said and written in contingent and contextual situations.⁷⁸³ Ross further highlights the fact that his historical figures are framed like literary characters in order to refute various myths and ideologies.⁷⁸⁴ The important point in this regard is that writing itself becomes a way of politically expanding perception. Rancière has termed this “literarity”, which refers to writing’s ability to disrupt the organisation of society.⁷⁸⁵ Rancière states:

The democracy of writing is the regimes of the letter which is free for anyone to take up for themselves, whether to make their own the life of

⁷⁷⁹ Ross K “Historicizing Untimeliness” in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 24-25.

⁷⁸⁰ As above. Further, the discussion of these characters also becomes important in order to demonstrate Rancière’s method of engagement in a more general sense. As mentioned, what is significant is the way in which he mobilises these historical figures so as to create spaces for the implementation of equality within his writing. To an extent I employ the same method of engagement in chapter 5. It is a method of equality that works between disciplines, which I will elaborate on in the introduction of chapter 5.

⁷⁸¹ As above.

⁷⁸² As above.

⁷⁸³ As above. As mentioned, Ross explains that Rancière also offers a “peculiar and powerful version of transdisciplinarity” (Ross K in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 24-25). His response to fixed knowledges is not to combine different knowledges, but rather to use one to undermine or contest another. In an effort to redistribute the sensible distribution of discipline, he uses history against philosophy or literature against political theory for example. See Ross K in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 24-25.

⁷⁸⁴ Ross K in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 24-25.

⁷⁸⁵ See Davis O (2010) 107-115.

heroes or heroines of a novel, or to become a writer, or as a way of joining in the discussion about affairs of common concern. This is not a matter of irresistible social influence, but rather of a new division of the sensory, of a new relationship between the speech act, the world it configures and the capacities of those who inhabit that world.⁷⁸⁶

Therefore, when it comes to making sense of the notion of voice, the way in which we approach political voice and write about political voice becomes important considerations as these engagements itself form part of a topography of the visible and sayable. These engagements can form new relations between the visible and invisible, audible and inaudible and voice and silence. The distribution of the sensible is itself a regime of presentation tied to a specific interpretation and as such the interpretation of events and their meaning either confirms the consensual distribution or form new dissenting interpretations of meaning.

Secondly, the engagements above highlight what can be described as the fragility and difficulty involved when it comes to thinking about politics and political voicing. Rancière's project around Gabriel Gauny demonstrated this. He started with the assumption that it was possible to trace a coherent political worker's voice. As mentioned, he soon abandoned this assumption, as what he found was voices that could not easily fit into any identifiable category of worker. Making sense of voice through Rancière's framework against the background of the difficulties and complexities surrounding voicing as it pertains to many South African women therefore points to a way of thinking about political voice that doesn't seek to coherently partition highly individualised political statements or moments of voicing. Rancière highlights the fact that political voice cannot emerge from a proper body in its proper location, tied to specific forms of speech. It therefore doesn't point to any type of analysis or way of thinking about voice that seeks to trace it along the lines of established categories. The suggestion is rather a rethinking and displacing of established distinctions. Joseph Jacocot and Gabriel Gauny as well as the other worker poets embody for Rancière the

⁷⁸⁶ Rancière J *Politique de la littérature* (2007) 21-22 trans. Davis O (2010) 112.

transgression of boundaries and the recasting of habitual identities. They point to dissensus and to vigilance when it comes to the openings of equality. What becomes central in Rancière's engagement with Jacocot is that equality as a point of departure creates a place from where to think about voice. What therefore becomes valuable in the discussion with regards to Jacocot is the question that he opens up and invites us to contemplate, namely, what can be done under the presupposition of equality, radically declared? Equality, rather than affirming occupations, identities and coherent orderings, provides a space from where new forms of political subjectivation can be established.⁷⁸⁷

Thus, when making sense of the notion of voice, Rancière's formulations points to the fact that the way in which we approach and write about political voicing, is itself political practice:

Democracy is first of all the invention of words, words with which those who do not count make themselves count and, in so doing, confuse the ordered division between speech in silence [...]⁷⁸⁸

The distribution of the sensible is reconfigured depending on the method, approaches and means of our engagement. Further, these methods and means put equality central and don't aim to trace and map moments of voicing in such a way that coherently locates established identities and categories. Making sense of voice within the framework of Rancière's politics rather invents new sensible forms and material structures from where to engage.

In the next chapter I explain Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's analysis of speaking in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" For Spivak, the question is not whether voices can be proclaimed or even recasted, but rather if voicing itself can actually occur in certain contexts. Below I discuss Spivak's essay and reflect on it through the lens of Rancière politics.

⁷⁸⁷ See Rancière J in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 280.

⁷⁸⁸ Rancière J *Politique de la littérature* (2007) 53 trans. Davis O (2010) 114.

CHAPTER 4

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: “The Subaltern Cannot Speak”

4.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the main aim of the research is an effort to understand the notion of political voice. In the previous chapters, I explained and shed light on Rancière’s notion of politics and reflected on what lines of thinking for political voice and ways of approaching political voice are opened up by his work. In this chapter I discuss Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”⁷⁸⁹ In this highly influential essay, Spivak engages with the notion of political speech. As will be explained, her focus in the essay is mainly on the possibility of the political voice of women within post-colonial settings. As my reflections on voice take place against the background of the precariousness and complexity of the political voice of many South African women, it can be argued that engagement with Spivak’s essay becomes necessary; firstly, because of the fact that Spivak rejects the possibility of the political voice of women within certain conditions and secondly, because of the fact that the essay revolves around the conditions that efface the voices of women within the global South. As will become clearer in the discussion below, Spivak answers the question that she poses in the title of her essay in the negative and she attempts to trace the causes of the economic impoverishment of rural-based women of colour within this setting. As such, her analysis becomes relevant to the plight of women, especially the plight of economically marginalised black women within the post-apartheid South African context.⁷⁹⁰ Below, I introduce Spivak and in the second section I explain the main arguments formulated in her well-known essay. From there, I critically reflect on her essay through the lens of the politics of Jacques

⁷⁸⁹ Spivak S in Nelson C & Grossberg L (1988) 271-313.

⁷⁹⁰ The consequences of Apartheid (as a system that strategically impoverished and politically disempowered the black majority of the country) and highly traditional and patriarchal cultures result in black women being the poorest of the poor. This is especially true for rural-based women that have limited political agency and access to education and healthcare. See for example Ruiters G (ed.) (2008).

Rancière. The aim is therefore to highlight her main concerns and to read them along the lines of Rancière's work so as to further make sense of and contemplate the notion of political voice. The aim is to see whether Rancière's work can provide different possibilities or lines of thinking when it comes to the idea of subaltern silencing. To what extent can his work frame Spivak's question in a different way, or, does his work identify moments within which the subaltern can speak?

Before explaining Spivak's main essay, I shortly introduce her in order to contextualise her essay.

Spivak has been described as an unsettling voice in literary theory and, especially, in post-colonial studies.⁷⁹¹ Her work is influenced by Marxism, feminism and deconstruction and she is known for her passionate analyses of the harm done to women, non-Europeans and the poor by the privileged West.⁷⁹² Spivak also persistently questions the very grounds on which radical critique is formulated.⁷⁹³ Morton explains that Spivak's work is characterised by an ongoing attempt to find a critical vocabulary that is appropriate to describe the experiences, voices and histories of individuals historically dispossessed and exploited by European colonialism.⁷⁹⁴ As Morton further highlights, Spivak's consistent focus on women, the working class, new immigrants and post-colonial subjects has led her to

⁷⁹¹ Leitch VB, Cain WE et al (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (2010) 2193.

⁷⁹² As above.

⁷⁹³ As above. As will be discussed below, Spivak criticises Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault in her essay. In the context of feminism, Spivak has criticised western feminist thought for not taking the lives and histories of "third world" women seriously in its account women's struggles against oppression. Spivak also challenged the universal claims of feminism to speak for all women during the 1980's, emphasising the importance of differences in race, class, religion, citizenship and culture between women. See Morton S *Routledge Critical Thinkers: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (2003) 75.

⁷⁹⁴ Morton S (2003) 45. Spivak often specifically focuses her attention on India in this regard. Morton explains that Spivak's literary criticism has greatly informed and influenced the practice of reading literary texts in relation to the history of colonialism. See Morton S (2003) 45. She repeatedly emphasises that the production and reception of nineteenth-century English literature in postcolonial nations as bound up with imperialism. See for example Spivak GC *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (1999).

challenge some of the dominant ideas of our contemporary era, specifically the notion that the western world is somehow more civilised, democratic and developed than the non-western world; and that the post-colonial era is more modern and progressive than the earlier historical period of European colonialism.⁷⁹⁵ For Spivak, the damaging effects of and harms done through European colonialism still remains and did not simply subside or stop when many former European colonies achieved independence in the second half of the twentieth century.⁷⁹⁶ She suggests that the political and economic structures and mechanisms that were established during colonialism continue to determine and shape cultural, political and economic life in post-colonial nations.⁷⁹⁷ Further, Spivak also emphasises how anti-colonial nationalism, specifically in India, assumed a bourgeois character and therefore in many ways only reproduced the social and political inequalities that dominated under colonial rule.⁷⁹⁸

Landry and Maclean describes Spivak's work as "following a complex intellectual trajectory through a deeply feminist perspective on deconstruction, the Marxist critique of capitalism and the international division of labour, the critique of imperialism and colonial discourse, the critique of race in relation to nationality, ethnicity and the status of the migrant and the question of what it means to identify with a nation or a cultural form as a postcolonial subject in a neo-colonial

⁷⁹⁵ Morton S (2003) 1.

⁷⁹⁶ As above.

⁷⁹⁷ Morton S (2003) 1-2. These nations range from Ireland to Algeria, from India to Pakistan to Jamaica and Mexico. Morton explains how the British Empire's policies on education in India encouraged educated, middle-class Indian subjects to internalise the cultural values of the British (Morton S (2003) 1-2). The teaching of British cultural values to the upper middle class in India was intended to instruct and enlighten the Indian middle class in the morally and politically superior culture of the British Empire. By using these practices, the British tried to persuade the Indian middle-class that colonial rule was in their best interest. Morton S (2003) 1-2. The teaching of English literature in colonial India therefore provided an effective, though insidious way of executing the so-called civilizing mission of western imperialism. Morton S (2003) 1-2. Spivak's literary criticism, as mentioned, has specifically worked to undermine the ideological function of English literature in the colonial context. She has contended, for example, that "it should not be possible to read nineteenth-century English literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English". See Spivak GC "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" *Critical Inquiry* (1985) 243.

⁷⁹⁸ Morton S (2003) 2.

world”.⁷⁹⁹ Her trajectory has gained her a relatively heterogeneous international audience and in the context of feminism, Spivak is recognised, as among the foremost feminist critics that has achieved international prominence.⁸⁰⁰ According to Landry and Maclean she is one of a few who can claim to have influenced intellectual production on a truly global scale.⁸⁰¹

Spivak’s earliest important work was her introduction to and translation of Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, the first of Derrida’s major books to be rendered in full into English.⁸⁰² She therefore played a significant role in

⁷⁹⁹ Landry D & Maclean G (eds.) (1996) 3.

⁸⁰⁰ As above.

⁸⁰¹ As above. Morton explains that in the context of feminism, Spivak has, for example, questioned the idea of a global sisterhood between women, rather pointing to the complicity of western feminism and imperialism in the oppression of women of colour. Morton S (2003) 2-4. She therefore expanded and complicated the critical terms and political objectives of feminism in a way that is more sensitive to differences between women. Morton explains that her continual interrogation of assumptions can make her difficult to read. Morton S (2003) 2-4. She represents her work in complex language and style in order to interrogate to common-sense assumption that clear, transparent language is the best way to represent silenced and oppressed groups and individuals. Morton S (2003) 2-4. Rather, she suggests that the opposite is true. The transparent systems of representation through which things are known and understood are also systems that dominate and control people. Morton further explains that her thought therefore emphasises the limitations of linguistic and philosophical representation and their potential to mask real political and social inequalities. Rather than simply presenting her arguments in inaccessible prose, Spivak’s writing carefully links “disparate histories, places and methodologies in ways that refuse to adhere to the systematic conventions”. See Morton S (2003) 2-4. Morton further argues that such a refusal is not merely a symptom of academic fashion, but a conscious strategy employed to engage the reader in critical interrogation of how we make sense of and understand literary, social and economic texts after colonialism. Further, Spivak believes that theoretical writings should be complex and flexible enough to reveal the complex and contradictory nature of social relations. Morton S (2003) 2-4.

⁸⁰² See Derrida J *Of Grammatology* (1976) trans. Spivak GC. Along with Spivak’s professor Paul de Man, Derrida was one of the most prominent advocates of deconstruction. Jacques Derrida can be described as the principal theorist of deconstruction. In 1967, three of his works that lay the foundations of deconstruction was published and these works (*Of Grammatology*, *Writing and Difference* and *Speech and Phenomena*) pushed Derrida to the forefront of the philosophical stage. Derrida’s deconstruction is a strategy of critical analysis in dialogue with the history of western philosophy. See Morton S (2003) 27-28. Commentators struggle to define deconstruction because of the fact that it cannot be reduced to a method, or defined as a theory with a clear set of objectives. See Morton S (2003) 27-28. Nevertheless, some key points can be identified. Norris defines it as “the vigilant seeking out of those “aporias, blindspots or moments of self-contradiction where a text involuntarily betrays the tension between rhetoric and logic, between what it manifestly means to say and what it is

introducing French theory into North American and British literature departments between 1975 and 1982.⁸⁰³ Besides introducing the influential French thinker to English-speaking audiences, it has been argued that Spivak's "Translator's Preface" set a new standard for self-reflexivity in prefaces and introductions.⁸⁰⁴ Landry and Maclean explains that it addressed, from every considerable angle, "the question of the preface" and what it meant to translate and explicate the work of Derrida.⁸⁰⁵ After introducing Derrida the scholar, she explored the question of preface as a form of writing and an occasion or event in writing, with particular protocols to be observed, which is one of the characteristic gestures of deconstruction.⁸⁰⁶

Indeed, Spivak was and remains heavily influenced by deconstruction. Morton notes that Derrida's deconstructive strategies have been particularly useful to postcolonial intellectuals such as Spivak because these strategies provide a theoretical vocabulary and a critical conceptual framework from where the very philosophical tradition that has also explained and in many ways justified the

nonetheless constrained to mean". See Norris C *Derrida* (1978) 19. Derrida argues for example that the process of making meaning, or signification, is structured in terms of how signs differ from other signs; a thing is defined in relation to what it is not. This notion is derived from Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Derrida takes this notion a step further and emphasises how meaning is also perpetually deferred across a spatial and temporal axis, so that a final point of stable meaning and knowledge is never reached in any signifying system. He uses the word "*différance*" to demonstrate that signs are never fully identical to the things they refer to- signs are structurally incomplete from the beginning and they require additional or supplementary terms to complete them. See Morton S (2003) 27-28. Morton explains that meaning is therefore radically unstable and "the need for supplementation to compensate for the lack of original self-identity reveals how all signs are by definition incomplete and lacking in identity or self-presence". See Morton S (2003) 27-28. In this way, Derrida's thought radically undermines the authority and centrality of the western humanist subject. See Morton S (2003) 27-28. Derrida also emphasises that the repression, exclusion and erasure of "impossible" concepts such as *différance* are the very conditions of possibility which ground and constitute philosophical meaning and truth. See Morton S (2003) 27-28.

⁸⁰³ Leitch V, Cain W et al (eds.) (2010) 2193.

⁸⁰⁴ Landry and Maclean argues that Spivak's preface set a new standard to the extent that the preface and her translation of it are by now considered required reading for any serious Derridean scholar. See Landry D & Maclean G (eds.) (1996) 1.

⁸⁰⁵ As above.

⁸⁰⁶ As above.

subjection of non-western societies can be interrogated.⁸⁰⁷ Spivak, specifically, has followed the Jacques Derrida's thought carefully and has in this way continually emphasised the potential usefulness of Derrida's work for making critical interventions.⁸⁰⁸ In this regard, she has highlighted how deconstruction's interest in the violence of traditional hierarchal binary oppositions (between male and female, the west and third world for example) has afforded a passage from literary theory to radical politics.⁸⁰⁹ Leitch *et al* explains that Spivak has enjoined feminism's involvement in the silencing of women to a Marxist global concern with the political, economic and cultural oppression of non-white people.⁸¹⁰ This resulted in a series of highly significant and acclaimed essays that contributed to setting the agenda for feminism and post-colonial theory in the 1980's and 1990's.⁸¹¹ "Can the Subaltern Speak?" was arguably her best-known essay and, as Leitch *et al* argues, certainly her most controversial that originated from that decade.⁸¹² In this essay, Spivak answers the question that she poses in the title in the negative. She suggests that the most oppressed and politically invisible individuals and groups in society cannot speak, meaning that they cannot be heard by dominant political frameworks and within dominant discourses of political representation. In the section below I examine "Can the Subaltern Speak?"⁸¹³

⁸⁰⁷ Morton S (2003) 27.

⁸⁰⁸ As above.

⁸⁰⁹ Leitch V, Cain W *et al* (eds.) (2010) 2193. It should be mentioned here that in the context of deconstruction, writing does not only refer to printed matter on a page, but to any text-visual, vocal, cinematic, historical, social or political. See Morton S (2003) 27-28. Text is made meaningful by a system of signs or code. Spivak, by emphasising how intellectuals are part of the larger social text that they describe, reiterates the political consequences of all reading practices. The radical challenge of the truth claims of western philosophy moves from textual analysis of literature or philosophy to include economic and political texts, "thereby questioning the opposition between philosophical or literary texts and the so-called real world." See Morton S (2003) 27-28.

⁸¹⁰ As above.

⁸¹¹ As above.

⁸¹² Her suggestion that the subaltern cannot speak created much controversy, as it was initially misinterpreted to mean that certain groups do not have any political agency or voice. As will be demonstrated, this was not Spivak's argument in her essay and is indeed a misinterpretation. See Leitch V, Cain W *et al* (eds.) (2010) 2193.

⁸¹³ Spivak GC in Nelson C & Grossberg L (1988) 271-313.

4.2 The Sexed Subaltern

In order to explain Spivak's main concerns in her essay, it is important to define and trace the term "subaltern". According to the dictionary, as Leitch *et al* explains, the term refers to a person holding a subordinate position.⁸¹⁴ Conventionally, the term refers to a junior ranking officer in the British army.⁸¹⁵ The Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci was the first to theoretically apply the term. He used the term in order to describe the unorganised masses that must be politicised for the workers revolution to succeed.⁸¹⁶ Gramsci used the term interchangeably with "subordinate" to denote "non-hegemonic groups or classes".⁸¹⁷ His focus was specifically on organised groups of rural peasants that were based in Southern Italy. For Gramsci, as Morton explains, these groups had no social or political consciousness as a group and were therefore vulnerable to the ruling ideas, culture and leadership of the state.⁸¹⁸ The term was later applied in the 1980's by a group of Indian historians that called themselves "The Subaltern

⁸¹⁴ Leitch V, Cain W *et al* (eds.) (2010) 2194.

⁸¹⁵ As above.

⁸¹⁶ Morton S (2003) 48.

⁸¹⁷ As above. See also Gramsci *A Selections from Prison Notebooks* (1978) trans. Hoare Q & Nowell Smith G. Antonio Gramsci was an Italian Marxist thinker and one of the principal representatives of western Marxism. He was active in the Italian Socialist Party and then the Italian Communist Party. Gramsci was arrested by Mussolini's police in 1928 and spent the rest of his life in prison. Macey notes that he produced thirty-three notebooks in prison, with a selection published. Gramsci was the most important influence on the development of Italian communism in the postwar period. See Macey D (2000) 165-166. One of his most important theoretical developments was the concept of "hegemony". Morton mentions that after the failure of a worker's revolution in Italy, Gramsci questioned the classic Marxist view that a proletarian revolution was the natural consequence of the economic division of labour between the worker and the capitalist and that ideology would somehow disappear once capitalism was overthrown. Morton S (2003) 65. Gramsci rather emphasised that dominant ideological institutions, such as political parties, the church, education, the media and bureaucracy also play an important role in maintaining the relations of ruling and power. Against the classic Marxist notion of ideology as false consciousness Gramsci proposed the term "hegemony" which signified a more complex and flexible term to emphasise how people's everyday lives and identities are defined in and through dominant social structures that are relatively autonomous of economic relations. Morton S (2003) 65. Morton further explains that the crucial difference between classic Marxist accounts of ideology and Gramsci's definition of hegemony is that classic Marxist accounts of ideology as "false consciousness" suggest an element of manipulation, deception and even coercion; whereas hegemony depends on the consent and agreement of the individual. See Morton S (2003) 65.

⁸¹⁸ As above.

Studies Collective”.⁸¹⁹ They developed the term in order to define the “general attribute of subordination in South Asian society, whether expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way”.⁸²⁰ Leitch *et al* explains that the term held particularly rich connotations for the Indian subcontinent as imperialism was often considered from the ambivalent and contradictory position of the subaltern, “or of the socially subordinate person that is situated within a complex system of colonial hierarchies”.⁸²¹ For the Studies Collective, Gramsci’s discussion of the rural peasantry in Southern Italy aptly and usefully described the continued domination of the rural peasantry and the working class in post-independence Indian society.⁸²² The concern of the group was that India achieved political independence from the British Empire without a corresponding revolution in the class system.⁸²³ The Studies Collective attempted to retrieve what can be referred to as a history of subaltern agency and resistance from the perspective of the people rather than the state. They thereby appropriated the term to focus their attention on the disenfranchised and economically dispossessed peoples of India.⁸²⁴ As Morton explains, for the Studies Collective, elite and dominant social groups traditionally recorded the histories of the rural

⁸¹⁹ As above.

⁸²⁰ Morton S (2003) 49. Members of the collective include Shahid Amin, David Arnold, Partha Chatterjee, David Hardiman, Ranajit Guha and Gyanendra Pandey.

⁸²¹ Leitch V, Cain W *et al* (eds.) (2010) 2193.

⁸²² As above. It is argued that Gramsci’s account provides a key theoretical resource for understanding the conditions of the poor, the lower class and peasantry in India because of the fact that he drew parallels between the division of labour in Mussolini’s Italy and the colonial division of labour in India. Morton S (2003) 49. Gramsci also emphasised that the oppression of the rural peasantry in Southern Italy could be subverted through an alliance with the urban working class, or through the development of class-consciousness among the peasants. Morton S (2003) 49. Gramsci’s account of the subaltern resembles Marx’s earlier proclamation in the nineteenth century that the industrial working class in Europe carried the future potential for collective social and political change. However, as Morton explains, unlike Marx’s model of change, Gramsci stressed that the social and political practices of the rural peasantry were not systemic or coherent in their position to the state. See Morton S (2003) 49-50. And it is this lack of coherence that distinguished Gramsci’s notion of the subaltern from the traditional Marxist perception of the industrial working class as unified and coherent. Furthermore, it is argued that this lack of coherence when it comes to political identity in Gramsci’s description of the subaltern is crucial to Spivak’s argument of the subaltern in the post-colonial world that will be discussed below. Morton S (2003) 49

⁸²³ Morton S (2003) 48.

⁸²⁴ Leitch V, Cain W *et al* (eds.) (2010) 2194.

peasantry and the urban working class.⁸²⁵ Subaltern histories were documented in the archives of British colonial administrators under colonial rule and were later rewritten in the historical reports of the educated, Indian middle-class elite during and after the struggle for national independence.⁸²⁶ Morton elucidates:

The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism. Both originated as the ideological product of British rule in India, but have survived the transfer of power and have been assimilated to neo-colonialist and neo-nationalist forms of discourse in Britain and India respectively.⁸²⁷

Therefore, the historical representation of various lower-class subaltern groups was and is framed in the terms and interests of the ruling power and dominant social classes.⁸²⁸ Morton explains further that the British historical archives rendered the lives and political agencies of the rural peasantry in India subordinate to the larger project of imperial governance.⁸²⁹ Therefore, in the elite narratives of bourgeois national independence, “the localised resistances of the peasants were subordinated to the larger nationalist project of decolonialisation”.⁸³⁰ The Studies Collective thus attempted to recover the histories and voices of subaltern groups before, during and after British colonial rule in India by critiquing the colonial and elite representation of subalterns.⁸³¹ Whilst the Studies Collective appropriated the term to denote the economically disenfranchised and politically disempowered peoples in India, Spivak draws on the nuances of the term in her essay, insisting that the subaltern subject is “irretrievably heterogeneous”.⁸³²

⁸²⁵ Morton S (2003) 49.

⁸²⁶ As above.

⁸²⁷ Morton S (2003) 50.

⁸²⁸ As above.

⁸²⁹ As above.

⁸³⁰ Morton S (2003) 50-51.

⁸³¹ As above.

⁸³² T Leitch V, Cain W *et al* (eds.) (2010) 2194. Leitch *et al* further explains that the term always stands in an ambiguous relation to power in the sense that subalterns are subordinate to it, but never fully consents to its rule. Subalterns therefore never adopt the dominant point of view or vocabulary as expressive as its own identity. T Leitch V, Cain W *et al* (eds.) (2010) 2194.

In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak critically engages with the Subaltern Studies Collective. Although Spivak highlights the important points and achievements of the Collective in their work of recovering the histories of subaltern groups, she criticises them on two points. Firstly, Spivak argues that the Collective’s classic Marxist methodology does not allow them to read the history of women’s resistance in India.⁸³³ Therefore, as Morton explains, although Spivak agrees with their arguments in general, she argues that the use of a classic Marxist approach to social and historical change overlooks the lives and struggles of women before, during and after India’s independence.⁸³⁴ Further, she argues that anti-colonial nationalist leaders originally invoked the Marxist model of historical change in order to try to mobilise the subaltern, but it clearly failed in changing the economic, political and social circumstances of subalterns.⁸³⁵

Rather than a classic Marxist definition of the term, Spivak proposes a more nuanced, flexible, post-Marxist definition of the subaltern; “one informed by deconstruction and that takes the lives and histories of women into account”.⁸³⁶ Indeed, gender becomes central to her argument on the subaltern. For Spivak, “women’s interception [in subalternity] can be staked out across strict lines of definition by virtue of their muting by heterogeneous circumstances”.⁸³⁷ Therefore, for Spivak, the question of subalternity, of the most oppressed groups and individuals, cannot be conceived of only in terms of imperialistic oppression and bourgeois nationalism, but must also be conceived of in terms of gender because of the historical and persistent patriarchal oppression of women through various mechanisms:

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. The question is not of female participation in

⁸³³ Morton S (2003) 47.

⁸³⁴ As above.

⁸³⁵ As above.

⁸³⁶ As above.

⁸³⁷ Morton S (2003) 50. The expansion of the term “subaltern” complicates the lower-class associations of the term because it includes women from the upper middle class, as well as peasantry and the sub-proletariat. Spivak’s crucial argument is however that the active involvement of women in the history of the anti-British-colonial insurgency in India has been excluded from the official history of national independence. Morton S (2003) 50.

insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labour, for both of which there is “evidence”. It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construct of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in the shadow.⁸³⁸

Therefore, the dominant point of view holds the male position and women experience marginalisation in India by virtue of patriarchal discourses of religion, family and the state, which results in economic disadvantage and gender subordination. The sexed subaltern is therefore doubly marginalised and in the shadow, not only in terms of race and economic position, but also in terms of gender. Spivak therefore expands and complicates the term. For Spivak, the term should be flexible enough to include an array of social positions and to denote the most oppressed and invisible constituencies in society.⁸³⁹ Her insistence on a nuanced and flexible definition, one that does not fall prey to the reductive terms of strict-class analysis, relates to the second point of critique with regards to the Studies Collective.

Spivak’s second point of criticism involves her concern over the Collective’s attempts to retrieve a subaltern voice or consciousness, or put differently, to recover “the will of the subaltern”.⁸⁴⁰ For Spivak, such an approach results in establishing a false coherence on what can be regarded as much more complex and differentiated struggles of subaltern groups.⁸⁴¹ As Morton explains, for Spivak there is a risk that general claims or theoretical statements made on behalf of disempowered subaltern groups by educated, metropolitan based intellectuals will overlook or marginalise the crucial differences between subaltern groups and individuals.⁸⁴² For Spivak, any model of political consciousness will paradoxically

⁸³⁸ Spivak GC in Nelson C & Grossberg L (1988) 287.

⁸³⁹ Morton S (2003) 47. Although Spivak, in the different versions of the essay and in numerous interviews refer to different definitions of the term, she, as will be demonstrated later, appropriates subalternity to encompass a range of different social positions that are not predetermined by dominant political discourses

⁸⁴⁰ Morton S (2003) 53.

⁸⁴¹ As above.

⁸⁴² Morton S (2003) 46.

work to objectify the subaltern, or, “control her through knowledge”.⁸⁴³ Indeed, the idea of speaking for disempowered people is a central concern for Spivak. In her engagement with the Studies Collective, she identifies risks attached to this idea and she expands her critique to post-colonial intellectuals and in the beginning of her essay, engages in a rigorous critique of the western academy in general.⁸⁴⁴

Spivak attempts to argue that post-colonial critics that attempt to give silenced people a voice, might repeat the very silencing that they are writing against.⁸⁴⁵ Spivak highlights, for example, that even colonialists thought of themselves as well intentioned and in this regard she refers to the British outlawing of *sati* under

⁸⁴³ See Morton S (2003) 56. In this regard Spivak uses the term “epistemic violence” in order to demonstrate how western knowledge or epistemology has been used to justify “the violent exercise of political and military force over non-western cultures”. Morton S (2003) 18-19. The relationship between western knowledge and the violence of colonial dispossession can best be illustrated by the following passage from Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*: “The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only”. Conrad J *Heart Of Darkness* (1973) 10 as quoted in Morton S (2003) 19. Morton explains that Conrad’s correlation of the violent exercise of colonial dispossession and the redemptive idea of imperialism as a civilising mission illustrates the damaging effects that western knowledge continues to have on non-western cultures. Morton S (2003) 19. For, in emphasising the moral and intellectual superiority of western cultures, Europeans were able to justify the violent project of imperialist expansion as a civilising mission. Morton S (2003) 19. Spivak also uses the term “worlding” to refer to the way in which writing in general has provided a rhetorical structure to justify imperial expansion. See Morton S (2003) 18. Spivak does not claim to avoid such violence herself; rather she “self-consciously explores the structures of violence without assuming a final settled position”. See Leitch V, Cain W *et al* (eds.) (2010) 2193. The notion of *terra nullius* can also be mentioned here in the context of the damage of colonialism. As Morton explains, there are frequent historical references to colonial territories being unscripted or empty territories and references to indigenous people without culture, writing or political sovereignty. Morton S (2003) 19. These descriptions of colonial territory as empty and indigenous people as people without writings are persuasive metaphors employed to justify colonial expansion. As Morton further notes these metaphors illustrate how people and territory have been controlled, subjected, dispossessed and exploited through dominant systems of western writing, textuality and knowledge. See Morton S (2003) 19.

⁸⁴⁴ Spivak specifically focuses on the writings of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze and their attempts of radical criticism involving the notion of a “sovereign subject”. See Spivak GC in Nelson C & Grossberg L (1988) 271-272.

⁸⁴⁵ Leitch V, Cain W *et al* (eds.) (2010) 2193.

colonial rule.⁸⁴⁶ *Sati* is the Hindu practice of widows killing themselves on their husband's funeral pyres, in other words, self-immolation. While the British's intervention can be said to have saved lives and may have given some free choice to women when it came to the practice, it also served to secure British power in India and to underscore the difference between Indian "barbarism" and British "civilisation".⁸⁴⁷ The British effectively drove Hindu culture underground. It was denied legitimacy and written out of law. Morton notes that for many British colonial administrators, the practice of *sati* epitomised the repulsive and inhumane characteristics of Hindu society.⁸⁴⁸ Therefore, by representing *sati* as a barbaric practice, the British were able to justify imperialism as a civilising mission in which white British colonial administrators believed that they were rescuing Indian women from the reprehensible practices of a traditional Hindu patriarchal society, or in Spivak's terminology, the British were "saving brown women from brown men".⁸⁴⁹ For Spivak, rather than defending the choice and agency of Hindu women, the British used "the body of the widow as an ideological battleground for colonial power".⁸⁵⁰ Spivak's question is whether intellectuals, and specifically post-colonial critics, can avoid a similar condescension when they try to represent post-colonial subjects, or oppressed peoples in general?⁸⁵¹ As will become clear later, she seems doubtful. By using the example of *sati*, Spivak also makes an important point with regards to the agency of women or the possibility of the subaltern woman "speaking".

Spivak considers how the voice of Hindu women was represented in descriptions of *sati*. Morton explains that in terms of ancient Hindu texts, the practice of self-immolation is coded as an exceptionally sacred practice or pilgrimage, rather than an act of suicide.⁸⁵² Suicide was strictly forbidden, but was permissible as stated in

⁸⁴⁶ As above. Also See Spivak GC (1988) 298- 302.

⁸⁴⁷ As above.

⁸⁴⁸ Morton S (2003) 63.

⁸⁴⁹ Spivak GC in Nelson C & Grossberg L (1988) 296.

⁸⁵⁰ Morton S (2003) 63.

⁸⁵¹ Leitch V, Cain W *et al* (eds.) (2010) 2193.

⁸⁵² Morton S (2003) 62.

the *Dharmasastra* if it was part of a sacred, religious pilgrimage.⁸⁵³ This pilgrimage or privilege was only reserved for men. However, as Morton further explains, exception was made for the practice of widow sacrifice or *sati* -the practice of a woman physically repeating her husband's death in a sacred place.⁸⁵⁴ Women were therefore, within this context, given some agency by patriarchal Hindu religious practices. They could perform the sacred ritual if they wished to do so, a privilege usually only reserved for men. Spivak argues that *Sati* can therefore symbolise an exemplary moment of woman's free will and moral conduct as the practice of widow self-immolation is not prescribed or enforced by Hindu religious codes.⁸⁵⁵ It can therefore, rather than being interpreted as a signifier of the woman's moral conduct as a good wife, be seen a signifier of her own desire. It is this sense of *sati* that was lost to British colonial legislation. The colonial representation of *sati* therefore overlooked the voice and agency that may be found within the practice, within the "choosing" of a woman to enact the practice. But, interestingly, the agency allowed by Hindu religious law, is the agency to kill oneself. It is therefore, as Morris explains, a self-negating agency.⁸⁵⁶ In other words, it is an agency that recognises women's non-identity.⁸⁵⁷ The exception made for women thus engenders a patriarchal structure of domination within Hindu religious codes.⁸⁵⁸ It can also be argued that from a patriarchal perspective, women did not necessarily have a "free" choice. Hindu women were expected to be good wives. In circumstances where she inherited her husband's property, it might have been expected of her to perform *sati* and act morally, so that other male heirs might inherit her husband's property. Here her voice or agency is ignored by Hindu religious expectations. For Spivak then, within the context of this problematic, it is hard to see how the subaltern as woman can

⁸⁵³ As above.

⁸⁵⁴ Morton S (2003) 62-63.

⁸⁵⁵ As above.

⁸⁵⁶ Morris R (ed.) *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea* (2010) 6. Morris states that: "The entire ideological formation seems designed to foreclose the possibility of woman acceding to the position from which she could actually speak- as political subject". See Morris R (ed.) (2010) 6.

⁸⁵⁷ As above.

⁸⁵⁸ Morton S (2003) 63.

speak.⁸⁵⁹ She demonstrates that in both Hindu and British discussions of widow sacrifice, the voice and political agency of women is effectively repressed from official historical discourses and political representation.⁸⁶⁰ Women's agency or voice is not discussed within those texts. As Morton argues, the Hindu religious codes as well as the British constitution of the widow as "passive victim of patriarchal violence", both ignore the political agency of the subaltern woman.⁸⁶¹ It is within this context that Spivak therefore argues that the sexed subaltern cannot speak because of the fact that the voices of subaltern women were so embedded in Hindu patriarchal codes of moral conduct and the British colonial representation of women as victims of a barbaric culture.⁸⁶² This results in subaltern women's voices being impossible to recover. There is nothing that remains or nothing to be detected in terms of the voices of the women within this context. Their voices therefore effectively disappear under the practices of patriarchy and imperialism. Spivak's discussion of *sati* also operates as an important counterpoint to western theories of representation and serves to argue her point on the Studies Collective's attempt to give voice to the subaltern.

Spivak relates the desire of British colonisers to "save brown women from brown men" to the desire of western intellectuals to give a voice to the oppressed. As Morton explains, she claims that radical intellectuals can paradoxically silence the subaltern when claiming to represent and speak for their experience, in the same way the colonialist silenced the voice of the widow "choosing" to die.⁸⁶³ In this regard, Spivak engages within her essay in a severe interrogation of those western writers who, at the time of Spivak's first writing of the essay, were attempting to produce a radical critique of the western subject, namely Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault.⁸⁶⁴ Spivak criticises them for the incapacity to recognise the non-universality of the western position from within which their

⁸⁵⁹ Spivak GC in Nelson C & Grossberg L (1988) 299.

⁸⁶⁰ Morton S (2003) 64.

⁸⁶¹ As above.

⁸⁶² As above.

⁸⁶³ Morton S (2003) 56.

⁸⁶⁴ Morris R (ed.) (2010) 4.

writing takes place as well as not recognising the “constitutive place of gender within the formation of the subject”.⁸⁶⁵

First, it should be explained that in the context of post-colonial studies and the political struggle for national independence, Spivak has criticised the use of so-called “master words”, such as “the colonised”, “the worker”, and “women”.⁸⁶⁶ Morton explains that although these master words may seem to provide a coherent political identity for disempowered groups in order to struggle against an oppressor, they do not do justice to the lives and histories of those people who are and were frequently marginalised and oppressed by anti-colonial national independence movements.⁸⁶⁷ Instead of using these master words, Spivak suggests the word “subaltern” as it can encompass a range of different subject positions that are not predetermined by dominant political discourses.⁸⁶⁸ However, as mentioned within her critique of the Studies Collective, the term must remain flexible enough to accommodate different social identities, without falling under the reductive terms of strict-class analysis.

Further, according to Spivak, theorists and advocates of political transformation have looked to oppressed peoples as a potential source of change or transformation.⁸⁶⁹ Marxists speak of and for the proletariat, feminists of and for women and anti-colonialists of and for third world peoples for example.⁸⁷⁰ Spivak reacts against what she sees as the tendency of radical political movements to romanticise the so-called other (for instance, as Leitch *et al* explains, the notion that third world people should lead the fight against multinational global

⁸⁶⁵ As above. Morris refers here to “the subject of language, not only in the grammatical sense, but also in the sense of having a voice that can access power”. See Morris S (ed.) (2010) 4.

⁸⁶⁶ Morton S (2003) 45.

⁸⁶⁷ As above.

⁸⁶⁸ As above.

⁸⁶⁹ Leitch V, Cain W *et al* (eds.) (2010) 2194.

⁸⁷⁰ As above.

capitalism).⁸⁷¹ As Leitch *et al* further elucidates, to assign disempowered people certain roles, is to repeat colonialism's violence, which views non-European people as important or relevant only to the extent that they follow western scripts.⁸⁷² Intellectuals, who romanticise the oppressed, can therefore ironically repeat the colonialist discourse that they want to critique. In the context of Spivak's discussion of Deleuze and Foucault, she argues that the use of master words is essentialist. It assumes cultural solidarity or coherence of a group of people that are heterogeneous in nature and the use of such terms by intellectuals puts the intellectual in the role of a transparent medium that merely represents the oppressed.⁸⁷³

In order to elucidate Spivak's critique on this point, it should be mentioned that when it comes to specific disempowered groups such as subalterns, it should be recognised that there is no "pure" subaltern, or for that matter other. The other always exists in relation to the discourse that would name it as other.⁸⁷⁴ Leitch *et*

⁸⁷¹ As above. The notion of the "other" in its most general sense refers to one pole of the relationship between a subject and a person or thing defined or constituted as a non-self that is different or other. See Macey D (2000) 229. In the context of postcolonial theory the term refers to the discursive production of (an) other, which is a process that is characterised by the way in which Europe produces an Orient-as other through the discourse of orientalism as analysed by postcolonial theorist Edward Said. See Macey D (2000) 229. This has also been described as "othering". Europe functions as subject that asserts its control over the means of communication and interpretation, and at the same time constitutes its colonial peoples and nations as other. See Macey D (2000) 229. According to postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha the dominant discourse constructs otherness in an ambivalent way. Whilst it attempts to construct the other as radically different from itself, it must also ascribe to the other an element of its identity in order to valorise or justify the control it exerts. See in general Macey D *Dictionary of Critical Theory* (2000) 285-286. See also Bhabha H *The Location of Culture* (1994) and Said E *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1977). The notion of "alterity" also refers to otherness. Originally formulated by Emmanuel Lévinas, in a postcolonial context it refers to the process of becoming altern or different from the dominant view. See also Macey D (2000) 229.

⁸⁷² As above.

⁸⁷³ Morton S (2003) 45. Spivak refers to Deleuze and Foucault using terms such as "Maoist" and "the workers struggle" to refer to collectives. Spivak in GC Nelson C & Grossberg L (1988) 272.

⁸⁷⁴ Leitch V, Cain W *et al* (eds.) (2010) 2193. French philosopher Michel Foucault originally developed the study of "discourse". In his view discourse is not simply a body of words and sentences, but "the very structure in which the social world is constructed and controlled as an object of knowledge". Morton S (2003) 85. What is more, Foucault argues that "it is in

al explains that Spivak is emphasising the fact that research or any knowledge acquirement are always defining the “over there”, making it an object of study, something that knowledge can be subtracted from and “brought back here”.⁸⁷⁵ The researcher preserves him- or herself as subject and any discourse is, for Spivak, eventually about the discoursing agents or intellectuals themselves.⁸⁷⁶ Leitch *et al* explains further that postcolonial studies are a feature of the West’s intellectual tradition and therefore relates to the other or the subaltern with what can be called a hegemonic vocabulary.⁸⁷⁷ If viewed in this way, representing the subaltern becomes highly problematic. As Lazarus notes, the danger is thought to reside in the fact that in speaking for others we might unintentionally and unwittingly objectify those people we are speaking for and superimpose our own elite and western cognitive maps on them whilst we do so (it is of course, as Lazarus further notes, our relative privilege, such as our schooling for example, that has put us in a position to do so, or to even think of doing so).⁸⁷⁸

discourse that power and knowledge are joined together”. See Foucault M *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1978) 100. The study of discourse can therefore not be separated from the study of institutional power, discipline and domination of western societies. Morton S (2003) 85. In *Orientalism* (1977) Edward Said expanded Foucault’s analysis of regimes of discourse, power and knowledge in western societies by applying this model to what he calls orientalism, or “colonial discourse”. Said, along the lines of Foucault, emphasised how the will to know and understand the non-western world in colonial discourse is inseparable from the will to power over that world. Morton S (2003) 85. Said argues that western colonial power over the non-western “oriental” world is maintained in and through the discourses of the arts, humanities and social sciences as well as through the more direct forms of domination such as political rule and military repression. Colonial discourse analysis dissolves the simple distinction between cultural texts and institutional or political discourses, rather pointing to the fact that all texts that represent the colonial world are implicated in a structure of colonial power and knowledge. Postcolonial theorist Robert Young explains: “Said’s deployment of the concept of ‘discourse’ for his analysis of Orientalism enabled him to demonstrate a consistent discursive register for particular perceptions, vocabularies and modes of representation common to a wide variety of texts extending across the humanities and social sciences- from travel accounts to history, from literature to racial theory, from economics to autobiography, from philosophy to linguistics. All these texts could be analysed as sharing a consistent colonial ideology in their language as well as their subject matter, a form of knowledge that was developed simultaneously with its deployment and utilization in a structure of power, namely colonial domination”. See Young R *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001) 388. Also see Morton S (2003) 85.

⁸⁷⁵ As above.

⁸⁷⁶ As above.

⁸⁷⁷ As above.

⁸⁷⁸ Lazarus N *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (2011) 43.

What is more, writing about the subjectivity or the will of the subaltern takes place within dominant discourses. There are no universal frameworks or concepts available to us to investigate different cultures. These investigations always take place within structures of power and domination. In the context of postcolonial studies, the will of the subaltern is, for Spivak, constructed by the dominant discourse as an effect of elite nationalism.⁸⁷⁹ This discourse effectively contains the subaltern within the grand narrative of bourgeois national liberation and ignores the different local struggles of particular subaltern groups.⁸⁸⁰ And within the broader global context, Spivak's historical and political analysis describes western capitalism and colonialism as immensely powerful dominant discourses.⁸⁸¹ Leitch *et al* argues that for Spivak the whole world is organised economically, politically and culturally along the lines of western discourses.⁸⁸² Of course, no discourse can completely suppress all alternative discourses. Intellectuals have frequently tried to create counter-discourses that contest dominant discourses in order to connect with oppressed people's struggles.⁸⁸³ However, the point that Spivak attempts to make is that although dominant western discourses aren't perfectly aligned, their "multiplicity generally reinforces rather than undercuts the marginalisation of non-white people and the dual marginalisation of non-white women".⁸⁸⁴ Therefore, it is not possible for critics or intellectuals to write about colonial subjects without sustaining colonialism. Post-colonial critics therefore write from within the same power structures and discourses that help maintain colonialism. Research is always in a way colonial and

⁸⁷⁹ Morton S (2003) 54.

⁸⁸⁰ As above. Spivak contends that local and particular struggles such as the role of Muslim weavers in Northern India during the 1857 mutiny, the industrial action of Jute workers in early twentieth century Calcutta, or the Adwah peasant rebellion of 1920 are ignored. See Morton S (2003) 54.

⁸⁸¹ Leitch V, Cain W *et al* (eds.) (2010) 2195.

⁸⁸² As above

⁸⁸³ For Spivak, postcolonial studies is another attempt to "liberate the other and to enable the other to experience and articulate those parts of itself that falls outside what the dominant discourse has constituted as its subjecthood". See Leitch V, Cain W *et al* (eds.) (2010) 2194.

⁸⁸⁴ Leitch V, Cain W *et al* (eds.) (2010) 2195.

the political and economic interests of the west, always already taint knowledge about the so-called third world.⁸⁸⁵

Spivak refers to Sigmund Freud in order to argue some of her points on colonialism. Freud helps us to see how the very identity of whiteness itself is created in part through the self-proclaimed benevolence of colonial action.⁸⁸⁶ Freud implicitly cautions against the idea of scapegoating, or creating saviours. Spivak's phrase "white men are saving brown women from brown men" serves as a justification of colonial interventions if white men are taken to be the saviours and brown men are scapegoated as the oppressors (of brown women).⁸⁸⁷ Postcolonialist discourse could just as easily scapegoat white men, with the inevitable consequence of presenting either brown men or brown women as the saviours.⁸⁸⁸ Spivak argues that Freud can aid in reminding to explore the dynamics of human relationships without foreclosing narratives by assigning determinate and fixed roles.⁸⁸⁹ It is along these lines that Spivak remains cautious of any attempt to fix and celebrate the subaltern's distinctive voice "by claims that the subaltern occupies the position of victim, abjected other, scapegoat, saviour and so on".⁸⁹⁰ This is one of the reasons why Spivak insists in defining the subaltern flexibly; to such an extent that she points to the subaltern as that which inevitably gets excluded by and from all systems, defining the subaltern as "the sheer heterogeneity of decolonised space".⁸⁹¹ I will return to this point below.

Spivak is postulating the argument that although it might seem as an obvious goal for subaltern groups to escape their exploitation and oppression, the historical and structural conditions of political representation do not guarantee that the interests of particular groups will be recognised or that their voices will be

⁸⁸⁵ As above.

⁸⁸⁶ Leitch V, Cain W *et al* (eds.) (2010) 2196.

⁸⁸⁷ As above.

⁸⁸⁸ As above.

⁸⁸⁹ As above.

⁸⁹⁰ As above.

⁸⁹¹ See Spivak GC *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) 310.

heard.⁸⁹² In her critique of Deleuze and Foucault, she starts from the premise that the structure underpinning aesthetic representation (in artistic, literary or cinematic texts for example) also underpins political representation. The general difference between aesthetic and political representation is that aesthetic representation tend to foreground its status as re-presentation.⁸⁹³ It therefore self-consciously declares itself as representation. Morton explains that for Spivak then, the problem with Deleuze and Foucault is that they efface their role as intellectuals in re-presenting the disempowered groups they describe. Spivak compares this effacement to a masquerade in which the intellectual as an “absent non-representer [...] lets the oppressed speak for themselves”.⁸⁹⁴ Therefore, despite all the energy that Foucault and Deleuze invest in showing how subjects is constructed through discourse and representation, when it comes to real, historical examples of social and political struggle, they fall back on a transparent model of representation, in which “oppressed subjects speak, act and know their own conditions”.⁸⁹⁵ Spivak attempts to clarify this criticism through a discussion of political representation in *Karl Marx’s Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. In this text, Marx’s offers a description of peasant proprietors in nineteenth-century French agrarian society.⁸⁹⁶ He argues that these proprietors did not collectively represent a coherent class as their conditions of economic and social life prevented them from having class-consciousness.⁸⁹⁷ For this reason, Spivak argues that the “absent collective consciousness of the small peasant proprietor” is symbolically depicted by a political representative or proxy from the middle-class, who speaks on their behalf.⁸⁹⁸ For Marx, the representation of the peasant proprietor has double meaning, which in German is distinguished by the terms *darstellen* (representation as aesthetic portrait) and *vertreten* (representation by

⁸⁹² Morton S (2003) 57.

⁸⁹³ As above.

⁸⁹⁴ As above.

⁸⁹⁵ As above.

⁸⁹⁶ Morton S (2003) 57. See Marx K *Surveys from Exile* (1974) 239 trans. Fernbach D as referenced in Spivak GC in Nelson C & Grossberg L (1988) 275.

⁸⁹⁷ As above.

⁸⁹⁸ As above.

political proxy).⁸⁹⁹ Spivak argues in the Deleuze-Foucault conversation that the two meanings of representation are conflated because of the fact that in the constitution of disempowered groups as coherent political subjects, the process of aesthetic representation is subordinated to the voice of the political proxy who speaks on their behalf. As a consequence of this conflation, the aesthetic portrait – symbolically representing disempowered people as coherent political subjects – is often taken as a transparent expression of their political desire and interests.⁹⁰⁰

What is important is that Spivak argues that the act of rhetorical conflation can have potentially damaging effects on and consequences for the oppressed groups that certain intellectuals claim to speak for.⁹⁰¹ In Foucault and Deleuze's case, these groups include factory workers and people who were incarcerated in prisons or psychiatric institutions in the west. For Spivak, when this model of political representation is mapped onto the third world, the gap between aesthetic and political representation is even more pronounced.⁹⁰² Spivak is attempting to highlight the limitations of applying European theories of representation to the lives and histories of disempowered groups in the third world. Unless western intellectuals take the aesthetic dimension of political representation into account, Spivak argues that these intellectuals will continue to silence the voice of subaltern women.⁹⁰³

Spivak calls for intellectuals to involve themselves in a project of “unlearning our privilege as our loss” in order to strive towards having an ethical relationship with the subaltern.⁹⁰⁴ Unlearning one's privilege or loss involves a double recognition; firstly, as Landry and Maclean explains, it requires that we recognise that our

⁸⁹⁹ Spivak GC in Nelson C & Grossberg L (1988) 275-276.

⁹⁰⁰ See Morton S (2003) 57.

⁹⁰¹ Morton S (2003) 58.

⁹⁰² As above.

⁹⁰³ Intellectuals such as Benita Parry have accused Spivak of repeating the very silencing she criticises. For Parry, Spivak effectively writes out “the evidence of native agency recorded in India's 200 year struggle against British conquest and the Raj” with the phrase “the subaltern cannot speak”. Parry B “Problems in current theories of colonial discourse” *Oxford Literary Review* (1987) 35.

⁹⁰⁴ Spivak GC *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (1990) 9.

privileges, whatever they may be in terms of class, race, nationality, gender and the like, prevents us from gaining a certain kind of Other knowledge. This knowledge is not simply information that we have not yet received, but is rather knowledge that we are not equipped to understand by reason of our social positions.⁹⁰⁵ To unlearn one's privilege means to, on the one hand, work hard at gaining knowledge of others who occupy spaces that are most closed to the privileged view and, on the other hand, it means attempting to speak to those others in such a way that they might be able to answer back.⁹⁰⁶ Spivak:

It seems to me that finding the subaltern is not so hard, but actually entering into a responsibility structure with the subaltern, with responses flowing both ways: learning without this quick-fix frenzy of doing good with an implicit assumption of cultural supremacy which is legitimised by unexamined romanticisation, that's the hard part.⁹⁰⁷

In the last part of the essay, Spivak invokes the story of Bhubaneswari Bhudari, a young middle-class Indian woman who took her own life in her father's apartment in Calcutta in 1926.⁹⁰⁸ It was later discovered that she was a member of one of the many groups involved in the armed struggle for Indian independence.⁹⁰⁹ She had been entrusted with a political assassination, which she was unable to do. She subsequently committed suicide in order to avoid capture by the British colonial authorities and to, speculatively, safeguard the members of her group.⁹¹⁰ Spivak reads Bhubaneswari's suicide as an attempt to cover up her involvement in the anti-colonial insurgency movement by disguising her suicide as a modern example of *sati*. Yet, in doing so, her voice and agency as a real historical woman freedom fighter disappeared from the official, male-centred historical records.⁹¹¹ Technically, her suicide did not conform to the codes of *sati* because she was not a widow and the suicide did not take place in the sacred site of the husband's

⁹⁰⁵ Landry D & Maclean G (eds.) (1996) 4.

⁹⁰⁶ As above.

⁹⁰⁷ "Sublateral Talk" Spivak GC in interview with Landry D & Maclean G in Landry D & Maclean G (eds.) (1996) 288.

⁹⁰⁸ Spivak GC in Nelson C & Grossberg L (1988) 306-308.

⁹⁰⁹ Morton S (2003) 65.

⁹¹⁰ As above.

⁹¹¹ As above.

funeral pyre.⁹¹² However, as Morris elucidates, on Spivak's account Bhubaneswari at least foreclosed any possible that her suicide might be interpreted as an illegitimate pregnancy as she was menstruating at the time of her suicide.⁹¹³ For Spivak, there is no question that Bhubaneswari was a politically committed and courageous member of the national independence struggle. But, she argues that Bhubaneswari's attempt to rewrite the text of sati-suicide is a "tragic failure" because the "subaltern as female cannot be heard or read" in the male-centred terms of the national independence struggle.⁹¹⁴ Spivak explains that supplementary narratives and retellings erased Bhubaneswari's story.⁹¹⁵ Her exceptional act of women's resistance was later re-coded as a case of an illicit love affair and a source of shame for the subsequent generations of her family.⁹¹⁶ Everyone, including her own family, misunderstood Bhubaneswari's suicide and no one in India seemed interested in Spivak's return to and reinterpretation of the event at the time of writing the essay.⁹¹⁷ "Unnerved by this failure of communication", Spivak wrote her passionate lament: "the subaltern cannot speak!"⁹¹⁸ For Spivak, Bhubaneswari's suicide is not an example of an Indian women's inability to speak within western discourse, but she rather shows how Indian discourse has been so battered by colonial history that it too offers no resources for successful communication.⁹¹⁹

Fifteen years later Spivak mentioned that her remark "the subaltern cannot speak" was inadvisable because she reminded herself that "speaking" always occurs within the nexus of actions that include listening, responding, interpreting

⁹¹² It should be mentioned here that there is of course no way in which Bhubaneswari's intentions can really be proved, nevertheless, Spivak reads Bhubaneswari's story as an attempt to rewrite "the social text of sati-suicide in an interventionist way". Spivak GC (1988) 307.

⁹¹³ Morris R (ed.) (2010) 6.

⁹¹⁴ Spivak GC in Nelson C & Grossberg L (1988) 307-308. See also Morton S (2003) 65-66.

⁹¹⁵ Spivak GC in Nelson C & Grossberg L (1988) 307.

⁹¹⁶ Morton S (2003) 66.

⁹¹⁷ Leitch V, Cain W et al (eds.) (2010) 2195.

⁹¹⁸ Spivak GC in Nelson C & Grossberg L (1988) 307.

⁹¹⁹ Leitch V, Cain W et al (eds.) (2010) 2195.

and qualifying.⁹²⁰ One's words can be taken up in a number of possible ways: "The ongoing effects of an utterance, not its singular expression or any one response, produces its character as a speech-act".⁹²¹ Spivak, however, remains weary of all representations and she insists on the inevitable silences in all discourses.⁹²² She still seems doubtful that political speech can occur within certain frameworks and she also still reserves the term "subaltern" for that which gets excluded by systems of representation or, as she puts it, "the sheer heterogeneity of decolonised space".⁹²³ Before concluding this point should be discussed. In her original essay, Spivak appropriated the term subaltern, against the Subaltern Studies Collective, to refer to the gendered position of the most oppressed individuals within Indian society. She insisted that the subaltern should be understood as a flexible term in order to avoid the trappings of master words and dominant political descriptions. After her essay and in the different and abridged versions of her essay, she developed and expanded the term in order to affirm and explain some of her arguments (presumably because of the impact of the essay as well as the praise and criticisms that the essay provoked). She has given several definitions of the term in subsequent interviews and has described the term in different ways in her writings after her original essay.⁹²⁴

⁹²⁰ Leitch V, Cain W *et al* (eds.) (2010) 2196.

⁹²¹ Leitch *et al* explains that Spivak recognises that much of the point of revisionist history or of returning to instances of oppression, is to reactivate attempts at speaking that other forces tried to obliterate and keep from having effects. See Leitch V, Cain W *et al* (eds.) (2010) 2196. To deny this retelling as a form of speaking will hold on to a criterion of "authenticity" that runs counter to Spivak's whole argument about identity. For her the historian can sketch "the itinerary of trace" that the silenced subaltern left. They should also mark the sites where the subaltern was effaced and should delineate these discourses that did the effacing. See Leitch V, Cain W *et al* (eds.) (2010) 2196.

⁹²² Leitch V, Cain W *et al* (eds.) (2010) 2196.

⁹²³ Spivak GC *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) 310.

⁹²⁴ For example, "you have the foreign elite and the indigenous elite. Below that you will have the vectors of upward, downward, sideward and backward mobility. But then there is a space that is for all practical reasons outside those lines". See Spivak GC in Nelson C & Grossberg L (1988) 284. Another definition refers to the subaltern as "the part that remains most excluded from the circuits and benefits of social capital". See "Subaltern Talk" Spivak GC interview with Landry D & Maclean G in Landry D & Maclean G (eds.) (1996) 288. See also "Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa" with De Kock L in *A Review of International English Literature* (1992) 29-47.

Ultimately, in postcolonial terms, Spivak uses the term to refer to everything that has no or limited access to cultural imperialism. The term has developed in such a way as to denote something of a non-speakingness.⁹²⁵ As Morris elucidates:

Subalternity is less an identity than what we might call a predicament, but this is true in a very odd sense. For, in Spivak's definition, it is the structured place from which the capacity to predicate is radically obscured.⁹²⁶

This results in the idea that if anyone escapes the muting of subalternity, she ceases to be subaltern (something that, as Morris explains, is absolutely to be desired according to Spivak).⁹²⁷ Thus, the term developed to denote those people that are constitutively beyond or outside of representation, so much so that what is subaltern has “always-already been made over, not only translated but traduced, not only appropriated, but expropriated”.⁹²⁸ This has resulted in some criticism.⁹²⁹ Although Spivak has attempted to refine her original argument, the expansion of the term results in a circuitry: that which is subaltern cannot speak and that which cannot speak is subaltern. In Spivak's ultimate formulation, subalternity as a singular state or “a position without identity [...] where the social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognisable basis for action” has become that which is unrepresentable.⁹³⁰ Colin Graham has described it as “a theoretical site of disempowered purity”.⁹³¹ In this way, subalternity becomes an end in itself. For the purposes of my discussion, I read the term “subaltern” within the context of her original essay. In other words, I read the term to refer to economically oppressed and politically marginalised individuals, irreducible to singular analysis and as including an array of social positions and identities. Spivak's most important and significant points in

⁹²⁵ Landry D & Maclean G (eds.) (1996) 289.

⁹²⁶ Morris R (ed.) (2010) 8.

⁹²⁷ As above.

⁹²⁸ Lazarus N (2011) 144.

⁹²⁹ See for example in this regard Lazarus N (2011) 144-145.

⁹³⁰ Spivak GC “Scattered Speculations on the subaltern and the popular” *Postcolonial Studies* (2005) 476.

⁹³¹ See Graham C *Deconstructing Ireland* (2001) 106. See also Lehner S “‘Dangerous Liaisons’: Gender Politics in the Contemporary Scottish and Irish Imagination” in Gardiner M, Macdonald G & O’Gallagher N (eds.) *Scottish Literature and Postcolonial Literature: Comparative Texts and Critical Perspectives* (2011) 229.

her original essay was firstly, her warnings against describing subalterns along the lines of coherent groups in ways that would objectify them and secondly, reading the term through the lens of gender and highlighting the silencing of women by way of heterogeneous circumstances. Spivak suggests that we should engage with the histories and social texts of subalterns through careful reading strategies and deconstruction.⁹³² Such an engagement will acknowledge the complicity of theory with its object of critique and thereby ensure a more nuanced and ethical engagement that does not objectify or romanticise groups, but rather seeks to trace the silences and exclusions present in all discourses.

4.3 The Sexed Subaltern: Concluding Remarks

In her discussion of *sati* and the suicide of Bhubaneswari Badhuri as well as the surrounding contexts of those events, Spivak brilliantly demonstrates how the ideological formations of those events seemed designed to foreclose the possibility of woman acceding to a position from which she could actually speak or have a voice as political subject.⁹³³ Spivak further passionately warns against the dangers in any attempt to speak for the politically invisible and disempowered. With regards to subalternity, Spivak insists on the role of gender within its formation and she demonstrates how the notion of subaltern resistance is always already filtered through the dominant discourse within which writing, speaking and the occurrence of voice takes place. When Spivak states that the subaltern cannot speak, she means that the subaltern cannot be heard by the dominant political discourses or by the privileged in the third and first world. Her speech or voice falls short of fully authorised political speech, specifically as constrained by imperialist, masculinist colonial and postcolonial structures of apprehension. The dominant political discourses that Spivak discusses in her essay are the discourses of western imperialism, elite representations of national independence in India as well as masculinist and patriarchal ideological forms.⁹³⁴

⁹³² See Morton S (2003) 40-42. See also Spivak GC 1(978) 201.

⁹³³ Morris R (ed.) (2010) 6.

⁹³⁴ The discourses of masculine hegemony and patriarchy becomes important within the context of South Africa as South African women have traditionally and historically been

The meaning of Spivak's contention should not be taken out of context to mean that disenfranchised peoples have no agency. Such a reading will be contrary to the situated framework that she establishes in her essay.⁹³⁵ Morton, for example, states that Spivak would certainly not want to deny the social agency and lived realities of disempowered women. What Spivak objects to in the early research of the Subaltern Studies Collective is the idea that the subaltern "is a sovereign political subject in control of her own destiny".⁹³⁶ The crucial point for Spivak is that "speaking" belongs to an already existing structure of domination. Further, for Spivak, even when the subaltern "speaks", it should be recognised that she has received her political and discursive identity within historically determinate systems of political and economic representation.⁹³⁷ Therefore, such a speaking is also already an effect of dominant discourses of apprehension. Ultimately, Spivak's arguments should be seen as valuable in enabling an investigation of what conditions obtrude to mute the speech of subaltern women and render their speech-acts or voices as unimportant to those who occupy dominant patriarchal spaces.⁹³⁸

It can therefore be said that Spivak highlights reasons why certain phenomena of political invisibility, voicelessness, or difficulties with regards to political voice might occur. She reminds of the fact that "voice" and "speaking politically" are filtered through dominant discourses that might serve to render such voices as

subjected to highly patriarchal cultures. The prevalence of sexual violence and rape further denotes the existence of hegemonic masculine orders and ways of life. Spivak's analysis of the way in which women are muted by different circumstances still remains relevant in the context of gender oppression. Further, importantly, Morris notes that since the writing of Spivak's essay, much has changed. Morris highlights that the international division of labour currently is organised to permit the effective exploitation of women and girl children in the urban and rural peripheries (in sweatshops, factories, and brothels). The imperial project today is mainly interested in liberating women for labour, which refers to "surplus value extraction". Human rights have often provided the alibi for this process. For Morris, we can therefore be as cautious now of the promise for women's salvation being proffered through war and imperial domination as when Britain made the abolition of *sati* the mask and means of its own imperialism. Morris (ed.) (2010) 7.

⁹³⁵ Morton S (2003) 60.

⁹³⁶ Morton S (2003) 53.

⁹³⁷ As above.

⁹³⁸ Morris R (ed.) (2010) 3.

politically irrelevant or illegible. There is no guarantee that such speech-acts or utterances will be heard within dominant discourses. What is more, even when the subaltern “speaks”, her discursive identity, as mentioned, renders such an utterance as an effect of the dominant political and economic discourses.⁹³⁹ “She” is therefore not left untouched by the hegemonic discursive formations that surround her. Spivak further highlights how attempts of speaking for certain people might serve to silence their voices and she also points to the dangers of attaching coherent political identities to heterogeneous groups.

In the section below, I reflect on Spivak’s essay through the lens of the politics of Jacques Rancière.

4.4 Subaltern Equality

As mentioned in the introduction, in this section I reflect on Spivak’s essay through the lens of Rancière’s politics. The goal here is not to embark on a step-by-step comparison, but rather to critically contemplate some of Spivak’s main arguments. As Spivak’s arguments in her original essay result in her concluding that subalterns cannot speak, it becomes important to reflect on her essay so as to understand the notion of political voice against the background sketched in the first chapter. Rancière sees people voicing political claims through staging a scene of dissensus on which their equality can be declared. And he indeed argues that people in various circumstances can speak politically against the police order and its distributions of the sensible. I therefore aim to open Spivak’s claim up to contestation in order to further investigate what political voicing means.

The first point that can be mentioned in this regard relates to Spivak’s criticism of the use of master words. It was mentioned above that Spivak disparages the use of master words such as “women” or “the worker” for example. Her criticism with regards to this point is related to her critical engagements with the Subaltern Studies Collective and her warnings against objectifying and silencing voices by

⁹³⁹ Spivak GC in Nelson C & Grossberg L (1988) 204.

attaching coherent political identities to individuals. Such objectification, it was argued, ignores the real differences between people. Rancière is, as mentioned, highly critical of identity and specifically identity categories associated and appropriated by the police order. Therefore, Rancière and Spivak both highlight in their own way the dangers of notions of identity or identity categories. However, important differences need to be highlighted.

Rancière demonstrates that word “worker” for example, can serve as the name under which people can subjectivise themselves. “Worker” can become the heading under which subjects can tear their bodies away from the positions assigned by the police and its representations and discourses. Rancière highlights the fact that people in struggle sometimes use universal syllogisms, names and constructions in the forming of a “we”. He does not care whether “man” for example, is from bourgeois derivation (in colonialist, imperialist, or patriarchal terms for that matter). The only thing that matters is whether it can serve the self-emancipation of people. The point is how and if subjectivation occurs through equality and whether it redistributes the sensible police interpretations of the name that the “we” goes by. Further, such theorisation is not an attempt to objectify a group of people. Politics and the political subject in struggle is provincial, localised and temporary. The struggle of the *demos* under the name of the “we” does not deny the real differences between people, but rather seeks a temporary “coming together”. The use of certain master words in a process of subjectivation and in the redistribution of the sensible can therefore become a heading under which equality is assumed, practised and verified.

It should be mentioned that although Spivak heavily criticises the use of master words, she did however concede to the idea of “strategic essentialism”. “Essentialism” refers to the belief that certain people or entities share some essential nature that secures their membership within a category. In the 1980’s essentialism was the target of feminist criticism because activists recognised that

generalisations about women inevitably excluded some women.⁹⁴⁰ Spivak suggested that it was important to, in some instances, strategically make essentialist claims, whilst being aware that these claims were at best crude generalisations.⁹⁴¹ An example is the publicising of the feminisation of poverty. This refers to the way in which employment practices, wages and social policies ensure that in many societies women make up the majority of poor adults.⁹⁴² Of course not all women are poor, but in order to battle the poverty of some women, strategic essentialism can highlight the gendered nature of economic inequality.⁹⁴³ Although Spivak later disassociated herself from the notion of strategic essentialism because she felt that it had “been taken as an excuse for just essentialism which is an excuse for just identitarianism”, she still argues, in the same text, that strategic essentialism can work as a context-specific strategy, but it cannot provide long-term political solutions to end oppression and exploitation.⁹⁴⁴

In the context of Rancière’s politics some claims, rather than being “essentialist” claims, would be “universal” claims and rather being long-term solutions, would overturn the sensible logic, which can have a number of effects on the police order. Although I agree with the notion that essentialist claims can serve to silence or exclude, it might be interesting to ask in what way theorising in this regard serve to close off opportunities or occasions for a politics of equality. The theoretical point might be that the claim of equality that occurs under a universal heading or under a master word is, as mentioned, localised and temporary. It is within a particular scene of dissensus. Although this scene might occur under a universal heading, the point of politics is not to make claims about the universal, but rather to break it apart. It involves problematising, from different angles, the dominant police interpretations of such master words or headings. The point is exactly to reject the implicit assumptions made about this category or identity, to

⁹⁴⁰ Leitch V, Cain W et al (eds.) (2010) 2194.

⁹⁴¹ As above.

⁹⁴² As above.

⁹⁴³ Leitch V, Cain W et al (eds.) (2010) 2195.

⁹⁴⁴ Chakravorty P et al *Conversations with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (2006) 64.

disidentify and to reconfigure the identity category in a different way. An impossible identification is an identification that cannot be embodied by the person/people who is identifying and as such cannot signify a coherent collectivity. Master words or headings are names with sufficient generality, already recognisable within a dominant discourse and as such they can be given new content through politics. What matters are the poetical linguistic configurations that occur alongside names or headings; demonstrating logical argument, demonstrating another world. The fact that these master words are already part of the distribution of the sensible means they can actually help with the demonstration of an argument and the world in which that argument counts. Its recognisability is what can help to make it legible. However, this heading or name under politics is exactly what doesn't become a coherent collectivity. Although it might be recognisable within the current police order or distribution of the sensible, its police-meanings become contested. Through Rancière's lens, in the moment of politics, this name is made up of impossible, confusing identifications that become incoherent and they therefore involve the "indetermination of identities, the delegitimation of speaking positions, the deregulation of divisions of space and time."⁹⁴⁵ Further,

Political-being-together is a being-between: between identities, between worlds [...] between several names [...].⁹⁴⁶

The relevant question is: can the name or the master word facilitate in the creation of a polemical scene?

Another very important point that Spivak refers to in her analysis of subalternity is the idea that speaking politically becomes problematic when considering the dominant political discourses within which such a speech-act occurs. Spivak refers to the imperialistic, patriarchal and elite nationalist discourses in India in her discussion of *sati* as well as the death of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri that served to silence women. These discourses therefore served to foreclose any possibility of

⁹⁴⁵ Rancière J *Partage du Sensible* (2000) 15 as quoted in Hallward P in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 144.

⁹⁴⁶ Rancière J (1999) 137-138.

women within that context actually speaking or making their voices heard. After considering Rancière's thought, what can be mentioned and reflected upon is the idea that there are always useless, supplementary words at our disposal. As mentioned no discourse can ever obliterate all alternative discourses. For Spivak however, the discourses of western imperialism and masculinity, although not perfectly aligned, mutually reinforce the oppression of non-white peoples and especially non-white women. Along the lines of Rancière's theorising, this may be viewed in the light of Rancière's point that politics is always a renegotiation of the police order we must live in. All we can do is to attempt to renegotiate the sensible distribution. However, and this is an important point, such a renegotiation is possible. It does not mean that people cannot politically speak. The point is exactly that there are more words at our disposal and Rancière's examples show that a contradiction within the dominant discourse can mobilise an obligation to hear. My discussion of Olympe de Gouges within the next chapter takes this argument further to illustrate this point. The dominant language, manipulated, handled and redistributed can open up the space for equality to be declared and for the redistribution of the given. People or political speech acts in Rancière's view of them aren't just simply within a dominant discourse. The point is that they can be between dominant identities, spaces and places and it is within the "in-between" that equality, verified, might occur. Further, it is exactly maybe instances of the naming of all-encompassing discourses and the idea that everything is an after-effect of such discourses that can result in local and particular struggles declaring equality and unique in complexity, not being detected. It theoretically positions people within discursive formations that they cannot escape from.

Further, Spivak is indeed correct in stating that there is no guarantee that the claims of certain groups of people will be heard. The struggles and voices of oppressed and invisible constituencies more often than not fall short of fully authorised political speech. This is exactly Rancière's point with regards to politics, that is, that there have been prior decisions of who will be heard within what times and what spaces and that politics is at once the entering into a realm

of visibility, audibility and perceptibility. Politics for Rancière doesn't occur often, but the possibility of a universal equality is in gestation around us all the time. The possibility of laying the contingency of the prior decisions bare is always there and this might be exactly Rancière's invitation; not to romanticise everywhere what we see as the subaltern "speaking", but rather to continuously contest the lines of sensible intelligibility.

Spivak further warns against the dangers of representation and she highlights that even the most benevolent efforts at representation can result in silencing the people that is (or would be) represented. She illustrates this point masterfully with the colonial impulse to "save brown women from brown men" and equates this desire to the desire of post-colonial intellectuals to speak for certain groups of people. Representation is also highly problematic for Rancière. For him it enforces the inferiority of the people that must be represented by others who can think "better" or do things better. Within these efforts lies a presumed inferiority and dependency on those with the expertise to represent and to engage in politics. Combating inequality on behalf of others assumed to be incapable of emancipating themselves simply reproduces the logic of subordination or inferiority.⁹⁴⁷ Further, Rancière highlights the fact that certain intellectuals rely on a conceptualisation of the poor as an inert mass whose passivity is the *sine quo non* of its would-be representatives whilst Spivak reminds of the limited and potential harmful effects of representation or of intellectuals speaking for disempowered groups.⁹⁴⁸ The point is that for Rancière, representation dramatises the world in a certain way, locating voices and bodies in certain locales, times and places, thereby implicitly making assumptions about their capacities. It is important to mention that for Rancière people can meaningfully organise political revolt and understand their circumstances and their world without the instruction of intellectuals, or anyone for that matter. On this point Spivak and Rancière seems to have certain similarities in their theorising. However, the point that Spivak makes with reference to Deleuze and Foucault is

⁹⁴⁷ See Tanke J (2011) 36.

⁹⁴⁸ Tanke J (2011) 31. See also Rancière J (2004) 48.

that even when people “speak for themselves”, something that Rancière would insist upon, they have, along the lines of post-structuralist thought (that Spivak remains heavily influenced by), received their discursive identities within dominant structures of domination. In the context of her essay, the voices or speech acts of women are so embedded in Hindu patriarchal codes of moral conduct and British colonial representation that this speaking is impossible to recover. Rancière, on the contrary, does not view speech acts as ideological artefacts or as after effects of dominant discourses, rather he takes these acts on the surface of things, as an act that can reconfigure the situation in which it is enunciated. This position has to do with Rancière’s rejection of post-structuralism in general. Rancière refuses to theorise “the subject”, rather focussing on the process of subjectivation as the process of making other or impossible identifications in the precarious temporality of politics.⁹⁴⁹ His position rather points to temporary and unstable subject positions. Rancière rejects notions of theorising subjects as well as the notion that speech acts are effects of discourse as for him such notions contain implicit assumptions about the capacities of people and who and what can appear in what times and places; and what’s more, these notions can produce imposing counter-discourses of subject formation.⁹⁵⁰

⁹⁴⁹ The term “subject” is usually used in work deriving from continental philosophy, the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan and the Marxism of Louis Althusser. See Macey D (2000) 203 & 368-369. It points towards all those descriptions of decentering that displace the source of meaning away from “the individual” and towards structures, impersonal or unconscious processes and ideology. See Macey D (2000) 203 & 368-369. For most of these theories the individual is a product rather than a source of meaning. Rancière’s refusal to theorise the subject is also closely related to his criticism of Althusserianism. Althusser uses “the subject” in a broadly similar way to Lacan (“the subject” is the subject of the unconscious and it is therefore the subject that enters into the dimension of the symbolic which produces a splitting or decentering of the subject by subordinating it to the laws of language). See Macey D (2000) 203 & 368-369. For Althusser “the subject” does not exist prior to its interpellation, but is summoned into its being by it. The process of interpellation refers to the mechanisms that produces subjects in such a way that they recognise their own existence in terms of the dominant ideology of the society in which they live. The idea of interpellation demonstrates that subjects are always already the products of ideology. See Macey D (2000) 203 & 368-369.

⁹⁵⁰ See for example Dasgupta S “Words, bodies, time: Queer theory before and after itself” *Borderlands* (2009) 1-20. In this article the author demonstrates in what way the critiques of identity in the context of queer theory have served to created counter-discourses of subject-formation.

Further, as Rancière illustrates with his discussions of Gauny and the worker-poets, speech-acts are never simply straightforward (whether seen as a discursive product or not). The redistribution of the sensible is not just about an utterance that is heard or not heard as political speech. It is rather about words, bodies and actions in places that all combine polemically. Gauny best illustrates this example where time and place becomes as important than specific utterances or speech-acts. The worker poets, it is interesting to note, borrowed words, images and speeches from the elite bourgeois intellectual discourse of their time. However, the manifestation of their will to transgress the limits of the discourse that would see them as workers (with only time to work and their bodies incarnating the worker's revolution) violates the very "order of discourse".⁹⁵¹ Rancière states the following with regards to their writing:

By stealing away to wander aimlessly without knowing who to speak to or what to speak to, writing destroys every legitimate foundation for the circulation of words, for the relationship between the effects of language and the positions of bodies in shared space.⁹⁵²

The worker-poets with their borrowed intellectual words, images and notions, by not staying put and simply working and taking pride in that work, but by writing; acts in the complete opposite to the discourse that would name them as workers. The idea that voices are so embedded in the discourse that would oppress them and produce identities (which these people cannot know, but cannot help to manifest with their words and actions) comes down to a counter-discourse that would lock them up in a specific distribution of the sensible, a specific "the way things are". This is Rancière's objection. The worker poets borrow words and images and speeches and notions from the dominant bourgeois intellectual discourse or paradigm, effectively taking aspects of it on, but, the relationship between those words and their bodies in specific (or other) times and places reconfigures and destabilises the dominant discourse on workers completely. Therefore, for Rancière the situation is more complex and it is not about speech-acts or voices as products of discursive identities, but rather about the "counter-

⁹⁵¹ See Rancière J *La Parole Ouvrière: 1830-1851* (1976) as reference in Dasgupta S *Borderlands* (2008) 8.

⁹⁵² Rancière J (2004) 13.

intuitive relation between bodies and worlds” or the “disembodiment of ‘the people’ from the discourse that produces it”.⁹⁵³

It should be mentioned that the discussion above is not to suggest that we should not attempt analyse the discourses that efface the possibility of speaking. Indeed, Rancière states that the distinction between the police order and politics can help us discern how politics encroaches on matters of the police and the police on matters of politics. We can understand the form of their intertwinement.⁹⁵⁴ However, such theorising should not create counter-discourses that prescribe who can do what in what times and places, nor should it diminish the complexity of matters of the spatio-temporal actions of bodies that disrupt and overturn the order of the discourses that surround them.

Another point that can be discussed with regards to representation is Spivak’s insistence on the idea that representation as aesthetic portrait and representation by political proxy should not be conflated. The representation of people as coherent subjects should not be taken as transparent expressions of their political desires and interests. With regards to Rancière’s politics, Citton makes an interesting point. He argues that in Rancière’s formulation of politics, representation does occur, but it is the political subjects themselves who is involved in these representations.⁹⁵⁵ Citton elucidates:

Rancière thus answers Gayatri Spivak’s question: yes, within certain historical junctures, the subaltern can speak. These moments are relatively rare [...] but it has occurred in the past [...]. Subalterns however, in Rancière’s theatrical politics, never speak directly for themselves: it is they who speak, but they do so from under a mask that they have painted upon their face, from under a costume they have collectively designed for themselves, on a carnivalesque stage they are building with each of their interventions.⁹⁵⁶

⁹⁵³ Dasgupta S *Borderlands* (2009) 8.

⁹⁵⁴ Rancière J “Afterword: The method of equality: An answer to some questions” in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 288.

⁹⁵⁵ See Citton Y “Political Agency and the Ambivalence of the Sensible” in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 132-133. For Citton one always speaks from within certain position within complex structures of social dominance and oppression and as a result one always has to pose as this or that persona.

⁹⁵⁶ As above.

Citton therefore refers to the inner distance and separation between the representative and the represented, even when both are located within the same body.⁹⁵⁷ He refers to the persona, or the acting “as if” that Rancièrian political subjects stage during politics, which is brought on by the making of impossible and paradoxical identifications. The point is that people can pose as things they are not; they can act as if they have the equality they have not and according to Rancière, as mentioned, what is staged is not an identity, but a gap between the “we” and “the people” in whose name the “we” purports to speak.

From one point of view, it can appear that Spivak’s claim that the subaltern is a discursive effect removes the very ground for effective political struggle. Indeed, Neil Lazarus argues that Spivak is not really concerned with “native agency [...] but [rather with] a theory of the way in which the social and symbolic practice of the disenfranchised elements of native population are represented (or rather not represented) in colonialist elitist discourse”.⁹⁵⁸ It is therefore argued that what Spivak focuses on is not so much examples of the struggles of people or groups, but rather the way in which intellectuals construct groups and speaking positions and it is within this context that the subaltern cannot speak. In her essay, she insightfully demonstrates how subaltern women have no discursive space from which to speak in the context of *sati* and the suicide Bhubaneswari Bhaduri. However, she goes on to emphasise that not only is there no discursive space that can emerge from which the subaltern could formulate an “utterance”, but also that “no scene of speaking” can arise for the subaltern women (the example that she usually uses are economically marginalised third world women).⁹⁵⁹ It is within this regard that Spivak has been criticised for contributing in the silencing of third world women.⁹⁶⁰ From a Rancièrian point of view the question that can be asked is to what extent does such a description close off opportunities for the detection of instances of the verification of equality and to what extent it involves making

⁹⁵⁷ As above.

⁹⁵⁸ See Lazarus N *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in a Postcolonial World* (1999) 112.

⁹⁵⁹ Shetty S & Bellamy E “Postcolonialism’s archive fever” *Diacritics* (2000) 25-48.

⁹⁶⁰ See for example Parry B *Oxford Literary Review* (1992) 27-58.

assumptions about the bodies of people, in this case the bodies of subaltern women? For Rancière, descriptions that lock people up in certain discourses and that sees them theoretically positioned within a specific time, place, discourse and capacity, is as damaging as the objectification or romanticising of people or others.

Further, as mentioned above, Spivak's suggests that intellectuals should engage with the social texts and histories of subalterns through deconstructive and careful reading strategies so as to ensure an ethical engagement. Such readings can help us to refrain from the objectification or romanticisation of subalterns. From a Rancièrian point of view, this will only serve a "discourse of mastery and the logic of hidden truths."⁹⁶¹ Spivak will become here "the master who knows" how to theorise the conditions that oppress subalterns and how to put forth a more situated articulation of particular subaltern histories. And it is these particular deconstructive readings that will do justice (as much justice as can be done) to the lives and struggles of specific subalterns, especially third world women. What becomes apparent here is again a notion of the "the way things are". It can also be asked to what extent this theorising serves to divide the world up into people that can do deconstructive readings and communicate to others the conditions of their own oppression and domination *and* those that must be told about their own conditions of oppression, or, those who know how to ethically engage with material and subaltern peoples *and* those who do not? Although Spivak's call for an ethical engagement with certain materials and subaltern struggles is well intentioned and important, Rancière's thought might be able to add an extra element or question when it comes to the engagement with social texts and histories: To what extent it is thought under the condition of an egalitarian maxim, in a relationship with ignorance so as to open up and create new space for equality.⁹⁶²

⁹⁶¹ Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2000) 2.

⁹⁶² See Badiou A "The Lessons of Jacques Rancière" in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2000) 48.

If we had to answer the question that Spivak poses in the title of her essay through the lens of Rancière politics, it has to be yes: The subaltern can speak; temporarily, rare and localised, she can within certain circumstances tear words from her body in other spaces and times, giving incoherent, confusing and paradoxical content to names of sufficient generality, disembodied from the discourses that produce her. For Spivak, the subaltern discursively formed and as effect of dominant political and economic discourse cannot be “a sovereign political subject in control of her own destiny”.⁹⁶³ For Rancière, the subaltern can meaningfully know her own circumstances and conditions and have “voice” and it is only under the assumption that she is in control of her own destiny that we can “take seriously the equality that, at various points in history, has been declared, and [...] act relentlessly from within the sensible mode of being that challenges the distribution of the sensible”.⁹⁶⁴

4.5 Conclusion

In reflecting on the notion of voice against the background sketched in the first chapter, what becomes significant in Spivak’s analysis is her highlighting of the discourses of masculinity and patriarchy. She emphasises that when it comes to the voice of women, especially those in the global South that are impoverished, these discourses will have an impact on whether women can be heard politically. Women in South African society suffer under highly traditional and patriarchal cultures. This becomes evident when considering the number of rapes perpetrated against women and their persistent economic inequality. The sensible distributions of masculinity and patriarchy point to South African women truly being doubly in the shadow. What therefore becomes valuable in Spivak’s postulations in her famous essay is the fact that she highlights that when it comes to voice, non-white women in the post-colonial settings experience a particular set of difficulties. More recently, Spivak has vocalised her criticism of global

⁹⁶³ Morton S (2003) 53.

⁹⁶⁴ De Boever A “Feminism after Rancière: Women in J.M. Coetzee and Jeff Wall” *Transformations* (2011) “The Politics of Photography”.

developmental policies that focus on women in the so-called third world.⁹⁶⁵ Spivak has warned against the rhetoric of United Nations declarations on women's rights that seem to confuse access to global telecommunications and the right to bear credit with women's political empowerment as such. For Spivak, the rhetoric on women's rights paradoxically overlooks the poorest women of the South, the very women the United Nations are claiming to represent.⁹⁶⁶ It is argued that the imperial project today is mainly interested in liberating women for labour, which refers to "surplus value extraction".⁹⁶⁷ Human rights have often provided the alibi for this process.⁹⁶⁸ Against the background of South African policy directives on gender equality and women's rights these arguments become significant. Spivak's analysis, just as Rancière's formulation of the police order, helps to ask to what extent the mechanisms of human rights and gender equality contributes to the maintenance of the *status quo*, rather than contributing to the creation of spaces where voices can be revealed. Ultimately Spivak's essay points to the notion of a gendered muting of political voice, denoting how the voices of women within certain conditions are effaced by the surrounding discourses of the police order. She therefore also draws our attention to the way in which voice hinges on the practices of listening, responding, interpreting and qualifying. She also underlines the dangers and problems with identity categories and political representation and the fact that "speaking" or voice already belongs to an existing structure of domination and it is from within this formulation that she argues that the subaltern cannot speak.

As mentioned above, if one has to answer the question of whether the subaltern can speak through the lens of Rancière's politics, the answer would be yes. A reading of Spivak's essay from Rancière's perspective opens up the question and her proposed answer to contestation and dispute. My reading of Spivak's essay through the lens of Rancière's politics points to the fact that the subaltern can

⁹⁶⁵ Morton S (2003) 138-139.

⁹⁶⁶ As above.

⁹⁶⁷ Morris R (ed.) (2010) 7.

⁹⁶⁸ As above.

speak through radical forms of equality. One of Spivak's important points in her essay is her warning of the use of master words or identity categories that can serve to exclude and silence others, or erase the differences between people when a coherent political identity is attached to groups of individuals. Rancière's formulations demonstrate how certain so-called universal names for a "we" can become a heading under which equality is declared. It can become a name under which people can tear away their bodies from police order assigned positions. The relevant point is how equality manifests under these headings or even master words. Politics is rare, temporary, provincial and localised and rather than being about identity or the name under which equality is declared, it is about disidentification, the indetermination of identities and the delegitimation of speaking positions. For Spivak the presence of certain conditions, specifically imperialist, masculinist and patriarchal discourses means that these discourses mutually reinforce oppression and therefore efface the possibility of women speaking. From a Rancièrian point of view one might react by stating that when it comes to voice, we can only renegotiate the police order and its distribution of the sensible that we must live in. However, the possibility of the declaration of equality is in gestation around us all the time and these declarations can have a number of effects on the police order and in certain cases mobilise an obligation to hear. The point is not that we can somehow be beyond or outside of the limits of dominant language or discourse, but rather that the order of discourse can be overturned. The dominant discourse, handled correctly and manipulated can give rise to paradoxical, confusing identities in the in-between of names and worlds. When it comes to the possibility of voice, the question is not simply about the way in which discourses work to efface voice, but rather also about the disembodiment of the subaltern from the discourses that produce her. Speech acts are never merely ideological artefacts or after effects of the dominant discourse, they are also acts that can renegotiate the situation in which they are enunciated - the way in which words, bodies, actions, places and times combine polemically in the precarious temporality of politics can renegotiate the sensible of a situation. From a Rancièrian point of view, the assertion that subaltern women within certain conditions and junctures cannot speak, is to lock the

subaltern up in a counter discourse, in a position where she is defined by the discourses that surround her. The question that becomes relevant is to what extent such a theorising closes off opportunities for a politics of equality. With regards to the reading above, it should be mentioned that Rancière should not be read as to suggest that if we just look hard enough, politics and declarations of equality could be found everywhere. This is contrary to Rancière's project. As mentioned, moments of politics are rare for Rancière. The moments within which the sensible is distributed do not happen every day. However, it is possible. Equality has been declared at various points in history and importantly:

Political statements [...] produce effects in reality. They define models of speech or action but also regimes of sensible intensity. They draft maps of the visible, trajectories between the visible and sayable, relationships between modes of being, modes of saying, and modes of doing and making [...] They thereby take hold of unspecified groups of people, they widen gaps, open up space for deviations, modify speeds, the trajectories and the ways in which groups of people adhere to a condition, react to situations, recognise their images.⁹⁶⁹

Ultimately, reading Spivak's essay through the lens of Rancière's politics results in a shift in the question that she poses in the title of her essay. Rather than "Can the subaltern speak?" Rancière's politics points to "If the subaltern could speak, what would she say?" This shift does not represent a way of *speaking for* the subaltern or coming to a definitive conclusion about what she would say. But, rather than closing off possibilities of voice, this question points to the basic spirit of Rancière's politics namely, the assertion of the rights to the imagination - against theoretical limits.

In the next chapter, I attempt to map and trace some redistributions of the sensible. The figures that I explore blur political boundaries and overturn their distinctive frameworks. My aim is to contemplate their significance and meaning as a way of thinking through political voice.

⁹⁶⁹ Rancière J (2004) 30.

CHAPTER 5

Practicing a “Method of Equality”: Reacting Against Sensible Intelligibility

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss some examples of political statements and historical and literary figures. The discussion of these examples is not only a reaction against the difficulties surrounding voice outlined in chapter one, but it is also a way of considering further possibilities of voice. These examples can be regarded as declarations of equality and as reconfigurations of the distribution of the sensible. The examples that I explore are: the figure of Olympe De Gouges that Rancière uses to illustrate some of his arguments on politics; the character of Lucy in J.M Coetzee’s novel *Disgrace*; the figure of Bhaduri Bhubaneswari invoked in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”; and comments and political statements made by the South African Shack-dweller’s Movement.⁹⁷⁰ I read these historical and literary figures and statements from the perspective of Rancière’s politics in order to contemplate their meaning and significance as it relates to the idea of political voice. This chapter represents a way of thinking through the theory discussed in the previous chapters and I also discuss these figures so as to expand certain lines of thinking or to form new relations of the visible and sayable. Writing itself, as mentioned, is a way of expanding perception and these discussions therefore become a way of disrupting certain forms of organisation or they can also be considered as a way of making use of a democratic writing practice as explained in the chapter three.⁹⁷¹ I also employ or practice a “method of equality” along the lines of Rancière’s description of politics. Before ensuing with the exploration of the literary characters and figures, I shed some light on what a “method of equality” entails.

⁹⁷⁰ Rancière J “Who is The Subject of the Rights of Man?” *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2004) 103, JM Coetzee *Disgrace* (1999), Abahlali baseMondjolo (South African Shack-dweller’s Movement) (See Abahlali.org. (accessed 28/12/2014)), Spivak GC in Nelson C & Grossberg L (1988) 313.

⁹⁷¹ See section 3.4 above.

In her discussion of Rancière's argument for a democratic research practice in the context of methodological debates in the social sciences, Caroline Pelletier gives some direction of what a method of equality might look like.⁹⁷² She indicates how Rancière's writings frame research as a particular kind of enterprise namely, to make visible what has been denied and to argue with widely used systems of categorisation in order to enact equality.⁹⁷³ In his writings Rancière aims to defend the possibility of politics on the basis of the equality of speaking beings.⁹⁷⁴ Pelletier explains that Rancière has critiqued the social sciences by referring to what he calls the "aesthetics of knowledge".⁹⁷⁵ He discusses the ways in which discourses of knowledge or discourses that claim to know the world (including research accounts), constitute themselves as coherent, valid and credible

⁹⁷² Pelletier C *International Journal of Research and Method in Education* (2009) 253-248. Published online 10 November 2009 available at Taylor and Francis Online-www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17437270903259741?journalCode=cwse20. The pages referenced are the pages as cited within the online publication. Pelletier reviews the significance of Rancière's work for methodological debates in the social sciences. She explores the implications of framing methodology as an aesthetic endeavor, rather than as the applied technique of research. For Pelletier, what is at stake in this distinction is the means by which research intervenes in a social order and how it assumes political significance. Pelletier situates Rancière's argument for a democratic research practice organised around a "method of equality" in relation to openly ideological feminist ethnography.

⁹⁷³ Pelletier C (2009) 4.

⁹⁷⁴ Pelletier C (2009) 3. Rancière's position here, as Pelletier notes, is not relativistic in the sense of all claims to knowledge being equally valid. It is rather a defense of the possibility of politics on the basis of the equality of speaking beings. Making this equality visible means interrogating the basis on which discourses legitimate themselves as epistemologically superior to one another. Pelletier explains further that this is the basis of Rancière's accusation against the paradigm of social science, which defines its object of study in terms of its social attributes (gender, ethnicity, occupation and so on) or position in the social order (Pelletier C (2009) 3). This order is unequal precisely because it is an ordering. Therefore, Pelletier explains, by defining its object in terms of its social attributes, social science restricts its object of study to its social location and effectively denies the possibility of collectivity on the basis of a lack of social attributes or on the basis of equality as Rancière defines it. See Pelletier C (2009) 3. So-called "reflexive" social science discourses that address the problems of "critical theory" by being aware of and announcing and recognising their own location in the social order, simply reconfirms (from the perspective of Rancière) its hegemony, or its lack of difference from itself. The solution is not to reflect on the sociological location of one's own position or scientific discourse, but rather by challenging the "equivalence established between discourse and social location in both the object and the subject of study". See Pelletier C (2009) 3.

⁹⁷⁵ See Rancière J "Thinking between disciplines: An aesthetics of knowledge" *Parrhesia* (2006) 1-12.

accounts in opposition to “ignorance or forms of ignorance”.⁹⁷⁶ As Pelletier explains, Rancière puts forth the following question: When knowledge is proffered, what form of ignorance is thereby produced?⁹⁷⁷ Pelletier asks further: When social science research accounts claim to generate scientific knowledge of social groups, how do they generate a category of research accounts that are non-scientific?⁹⁷⁸ What role is therefore ascribed to ignorance or non-science and under what condition is ignorance/non-science transformed into knowledge?⁹⁷⁹

Pelletier elucidates:

“[I]gnorance” here is not clearly defined in terms of the bad thing which science fights to eradicate, but is instead treated as a necessary corollary of knowledge production insofar as knowledge implies a certain relation to ignorance.⁹⁸⁰

In this regard, Rancière refers to two traditions that created the occasion for him to develop his own working method against traditional knowledge production and research. A central question to both of these traditions, as Pelletier explains, is how can someone at a particular time and place perceive their world?⁹⁸¹ One way of answering this question is in relation to ideology as described in Marxism, which refers to a set of false beliefs. This is the first tradition. I elaborated on Rancière’s objections in this regard in the second chapter of this research. In this section, I focus on the second tradition, or second way of answering the question. The second tradition refers to as a set of practices, which, post-Althusser, bring “about false judgments, perceptions, sensibilities and actions”.⁹⁸² Pelletier explains that in the latter tradition “false” does not mean untrue, but rather refers to that which sustains domination or dispossession.⁹⁸³ This distribution of domination, which Rancière traces from German ideology to Pierre Bourdieu’s entire corpus, sees that people are characterised as having only certain

⁹⁷⁶ Pelletier C (2009) 5.

⁹⁷⁷ As above.

⁹⁷⁸ As above.

⁹⁷⁹ As above.

⁹⁸⁰ As above.

⁹⁸¹ As above.

⁹⁸² As above.

⁹⁸³ As above.

perceptions.⁹⁸⁴ These perceptions are determined by their place in society and by their incapacity to “see” or to name/signify/know their place within the social order. In other words, “the perceptions are determined by their ignorance of the means and fact of their domination”.⁹⁸⁵ Pelletier explains that within this critical tradition what is produced is precisely the ignorance of domination and its corresponding reasons.⁹⁸⁶ Pelletier notes that what the social order therefore produces is ignorance of how the social order really, in essence, works. To make this claim means that one must remove oneself from that social order or extricate oneself from the source of ignorance. This is how Rancière reads Bourdieu’s concept of reflexivity for example; it partitions knowledge from ignorance by placing knowledge as that which is in difference to the social order and then claims ignorance as the object of knowledge.⁹⁸⁷ Pelletier explains that Rancière treats Bourdieu’s discourse as “performative” rather than descriptive in the sense that “ignorance or the logic of practice which Bourdieu’s discourse posits, exists in the first instance as a product of that discourse”.⁹⁸⁸ This type of figuration of

⁹⁸⁴ Pelletier explains that the second tradition that Rancière seeks to counter focuses not so much on the incorporation of domination as on the finding of “a true and authentic popular culture defined in terms of its autonomy from dominant values”. See Pelletier C (2009) 6. The target of his readings in this tradition is social histories produced in the 1970’s and 1980’s, which conceptualised a “working class culture in terms of resistance or agency”. See Pelletier C (2009) 6. Celebrations of popular authenticity, he suggests, function as injunctions that “popular people” should remain authentic to their own culture and by implication avoid becoming tainted by middle-class “intellectualism”- or what he calls “exclusion by homage”. See Rancière J (2004) xxiv. Pelletier explains that Rancière’s argument here suggests that when “intellectual” readings by “popular people” are classified as “popular ventriloquism” what is effectively claimed is the incapacity of “popular people” to think “authentically” (See Pelletier C (2009) 6). Popular people are therefore granted their “own” domain of knowledge and this is all for the better to preserve the domain of “intellectual knowledge” from intrusions by non-scientists. See Pelletier C (2009) 6. Popular knowledge is therefore defined in opposition to science. In other words, “it is constituted by ignorance of science”. See Pelletier C (2009) 6. See also Rancière J (2004) xxiv and Bourdieu P (1991). As Davis explains, Rancière’s dispute with Bourdieu’s work on pedagogy and aesthetics is extremely involved. See Davis O (2010) 22-25. Rancière reacts against the sociologist’s self-interest and he is at times unforgiving in his commentary in this regard. I do not explain his engagement with Bourdieu here as it goes beyond the scope of explaining a method of equality. For a general discussion on Rancière’s engagement with Bourdieu, see Davis O (2010) 22-25.

⁹⁸⁵ Pelletier C (2009) 5.

⁹⁸⁶ As above.

⁹⁸⁷ As above.

⁹⁸⁸ As above.

domination creates a domain of knowledge from which the ignorant are, by definition, excluded. Pelletier explains that:

Rancière reads the modelling of ineluctable social reproduction in Bourdieu's discourse not as a description of the state of affairs, but as a performative securitisation of a domain of knowledge. Sociological discourse can safely critique domination whilst "knowing" it can never change, since this knowing is precisely of other people's ignorance.⁹⁸⁹

Rancière's concern is that this tradition claims knowledge of "the poor" on the basis of "the poor's" ignorance. Or as phrased by Ross, Rancière points to the fact that the scientist gives himself the task "of speaking for those who's presumed ignorance grants [him his] domain".⁹⁹⁰ This notion is of course captured by the title of Rancière's book *The Philosopher and His Poor*. For Rancière, such theorisation is effected in the alignment between sensibilities (judgments, perceptions, ways of doing, being, seeing, saying) and social location. Therefore, as Pelletier explains further, what is claimed is that people in a social location can only "be" in a way that is determined by their social location.⁹⁹¹ This ordering establishes "stable relations between states of the body and the modes of perception and signification which correspond to them."⁹⁹² Pelletier explains further that this ordering sets the scene for a dramatisation that ensures that a certain location coincides with a certain type of thought.⁹⁹³ As we have seen in the previous chapters, Rancière rejects notions of determined locales, positions and times that correspond with specific bodies and voices.

The "aesthetics of knowledge" refers to the way in which discourse performatively divides the world into

people who speak and people who merely ventriloquize, people who can think the social order and people who can only obey its logic, people who can contribute to discussions about how society should be organised and people who are too caught up in their own economic occupation/culture to apply themselves authentically to the affairs of society.⁹⁹⁴

⁹⁸⁹ As above.

⁹⁹⁰ Ross K "Introduction" in Rancière J (1991) xviii.

⁹⁹¹ Pelletier C (2009) 5.

⁹⁹² Rancière J *Parrhesia* (2006) 9.

⁹⁹³ Pelletier C (2009) 6.

⁹⁹⁴ Pelletier C (2009) 7.

Pelletier explains that “knowing” a situation of domination can therefore become a way of participating in it.⁹⁹⁵ What is submitted in this distribution of knowledge and ignorance is the idea that the objects of science (the poor) can do nothing else than that which has already been ordered by science - a science which, as Pelletier explains, is precisely a knowledge of domination.⁹⁹⁶ Knowledge is therefore aesthetic in that a research-based account dramatises the world in a particular way.⁹⁹⁷ It constitutes an act, a way of configuring and dividing the domain of the sensible. Knowledge/scientific statements produce effects that

draft maps of the visible, trajectories between the visible and the sayable, relationships between modes of being, modes of saying and modes of doing and making.⁹⁹⁸

The question that arises is how one is suppose to practice equality in one’s own writing without establishing this type of relationship between ignorance and knowledge. Firstly, as Pelletier explains, the verification of equality has little to do with “respecting” the words of others or trusting their rationality or even celebrating their existence.⁹⁹⁹ It is therefore not a matter of being faithful to the content. It is about declassifying words and re-ordering the way in which words take on meaning through a category or body to which they are assigned in the social order.¹⁰⁰⁰ This includes the time and place of utterances and the activity to which these utterances are related. Pelletier elucidates:

It is about reading/producing words against the guarantees, or modes of legitimation, offered by the social location of the speaker. One can for instance treat scientific statements as literary prose, opinion as philosophy, and historical words as speaking in the present, in the texture of the historian’s narration.¹⁰⁰¹

⁹⁹⁵ As above.

⁹⁹⁶ As above. It should be noted that Rancière’s disagreement with social history and sociology is not with the quality of their research. Pelletier notes that he doesn’t highlight shortcomings or contradictions in how some researches go by collecting data. It is rather the way in which a discipline positions its own discourse in relation to other discourses and the object of study. Pelletier C (2009) 9.

⁹⁹⁷ Pelletier C (2009) 9.

⁹⁹⁸ See Rancière J (2004) 39.

⁹⁹⁹ Pelletier C (2009) 8.

¹⁰⁰⁰ As above

¹⁰⁰¹ As above.

Verifying equality therefore involves equality as action, rather than as the consequence of that action.¹⁰⁰² The question that Rancière puts forth according to Pelletier is what makes one's research practice political, or what can we do in the context of research practices in order to open up the possibilities of equality? As noted by Pelletier, in some ways, not very much.¹⁰⁰³ One can enact equality in one's own writing.¹⁰⁰⁴ This would involve reconfiguring the field of knowledge to undo the partitions that divide people into territories of competence and territories by which people are assigned certain social attributes.¹⁰⁰⁵ Equality, therefore, has to be figured differently. Rather than a state to be worked towards, Pelletier elucidates that it becomes in Rancière's politics a disruption of inequality.¹⁰⁰⁶ Verifying equality can also be concerned with "valorising" certain actions namely, those actions that are characterised by the way in which they transgress the boundaries of categories.¹⁰⁰⁷ Pelletier notes that it is about making prominent in one's own analytical strategy those discursive practices which lays the contingency of inequality bare and which demonstrate and reconfigure ways of doing, being and saying.¹⁰⁰⁸ In the section below I discuss Olympe de Gouges that Rancière may be said to "valorise". From there I attempt to valorise or describe certain characters that transgress boundaries and disrupt inequality with equality in the South African context.

5.2 Olympe de Gouges

In the context of his article "Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?" Rancière discusses the figure of Olympe de Gouges.¹⁰⁰⁹ De Gouges was a woman who

¹⁰⁰² Pelletier C (2009) 9.

¹⁰⁰³ As above.

¹⁰⁰⁴ As above.

¹⁰⁰⁵ As above.

¹⁰⁰⁶ As above.

¹⁰⁰⁷ As above.

¹⁰⁰⁸ As above.

¹⁰⁰⁹ See Rancière J *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2004) 297. In this article, Rancière discusses De Gouges in relation to a critique of Hannah Arendt. In her influential discussion of the plight of stateless people in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) Arendt invokes "the right to have rights" as the one true human right. Arendt observes that "the rights of man" or human rights proved to be a mere illusion in the inter-war period where European states was forced to deal

with refugees who had been deprived of citizenship and who were for all intents and purposes stateless. They did not belong to the community that they fled from and neither to the community that they fled to. The idea of human rights therefore came apart at the very moment when they were most needed, for it is only by virtue of citizenship that one could say to have a claim to rights. For Arendt, these people were “people that lost all other qualities and specific relationships except that they were still human”. See Arendt (1951) 297-198. The plight of stateless people revealed that the modern conception of human dignity was a mere abstraction. For Arendt, to live outside of a political community amounted to a deprived form of existence in which individuals were thrown back on the givenness of their natural situation. Andrew Schaap explains that in the exceptional inter-war period in which stateless people had nothing left to appeal to except their rights as human beings, they were barely recognisable as human. See Schaap A “Enacting the right to have rights: Jacques Rancière’s critique of Hannah Arendt” *European Journal of Political Theory* (2011) 23-45 at 23. Schaap explains that as a consequence of this experience, we became aware of a primordial human right, a right more important than the rights to justice and freedom, namely, the right to belong to a political community, which amounts to the right to politics. Schaap A *European Journal of Political Theory* (2011) 23. Therefore, for Arendt, what was at stake were not particular rights, but rather membership to a political community. Arendt’s analysis of the perplexities of the rights of man or human rights provoked widespread debate in contemporary political theory. In “Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?” Rancière criticises the problematic that Arendt established. For Arendt, the deprivation of citizenship to a particular community means that a person has no means of redress; there is no basis on which to claim “the right to have rights”. One is outside of legal structures, outside of politics and outside of humanity because of the fact that for Arendt it is only by virtue of historical institutions that we can be said to be human. Rancière argues that Arendt depoliticises human rights as Arendt identifies the human with mere life and the citizen with the good life. Rancière J *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2004) 297-299. For Rancière, Arendt establishes an aporia when it comes to rights, as there is no basis, according to her, on which one can claim the right to have rights. Rancière J *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2004) 298. This aporia is for Rancière a product of the ontological presuppositions on which her analysis relies rather than being a defining aspect of the actual experience of statelessness. See Rancière J *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2004) 297. Rancière insists against Arendt (and her appropriation of Aristotle) that it is a political mistake to deduce a conception of what it means to lead a fully human life from an understanding of the human as a speaking animal. See Schaap A *European Journal of Political Theory* (2011) 23-24. For Rancière, as discussed earlier, what counts as human speech and as animal noise is a political question from the outset. Rancière rejects Arendt’s conception of the political as a “world-disclosing public action through which individuals reveal their humanness in the presence of equals”. See Schaap A *European Journal of Political Theory* (2011) 23. Instead Rancière conceives of the political as the staging of a scene of dissensus in which those who lack speech make themselves heard as political subjects. For Rancière, the human in human rights does not correspond to a form of life. The human is a litigious name, another heading under which equality can be confirmed. See Rancière J *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2004) 299-304. Schaap explains that Arendt understands ordinary rights as a precondition for politics since they institutionalise an artificial equality that is constitutive of a public sphere, which is the sphere that politics takes place in. See Schaap A *European Journal of Political Theory* (2011) 23-24. This is why the right to have rights amounts to the right to politics. For Rancière, politics is contesting the political, it is about contesting what is perceived as political and what is not, who has speech and who doesn’t, in what place and time: “[...] Arendt views ‘the human’ in human rights ontologically as a life deprived of politics, Rancière views ‘the human’ polemically as the dismissal of any difference between

during the French Revolution famously stated that if women were entitled to go to the scaffold, they were entitled to go to the assembly.¹⁰¹⁰ Women could be (and were) sentenced to death as enemies of the Revolution and De Gouges used this point to demonstrate that there was at least one instance where women's private life was political. Rancière explains that "equal-born women were not equal born citizens" because they could not fit what was deemed the purity of political life of the time.¹⁰¹¹ Women belonged to the domesticated and the public life and common good had to be kept apart from the activities, feelings and interests of the private life.¹⁰¹² De Gouges' point was that if women could lose their lives, sentenced to death as enemies of the state out of public judgment based on political reasons, then their private life (their life doomed to death) was political. De Gouges was the author of the text *The Declaration of the Rights of Women and the Female Citizen*. Rancière states:

If, under the guillotine, they were as equal, so to speak, "as men", they had the right to the whole of equality, including equal participation to political life.¹⁰¹³

He further explains that the lawmakers of the time could not even hear this. Nevertheless, it could be enacted in the construction of a scene of dissensus and he states that:

A dissensus is not a conflict of interests, opinions, or values; it is a division put in the "common sense": a dispute about what is given, about the frame in which we see something as given [...] This is what I call dissensus: putting two worlds in one and the same world.¹⁰¹⁴

those who are qualified to participate in politics and those who are not". See Schaap *A European Journal of Political Theory* (2011) 23. Therefore, as Schaap further notes, for Arendt, the sphere of implementation of rights is the public sphere or the sphere of citizenship. For Rancière, politics is a process, the process of the enactment of equality and the sphere where it takes place or when it takes place can be the very question of politics- the time and space of politics is a political question. See Schaap *A European Journal of Political Theory* (2011) 23. Politics is about the line that is drawn between the spheres of politics and so-called other spheres. Politics is about the activity that brings into question where politics can take place and by who it can be practiced. For a thorough and insightful discussion of Rancière's engagement with Arendt, see Schaap *A European Journal of Political Theory* (2011) 32-45.

¹⁰¹⁰ Rancière J *The South Atlantic Quarterly* (2004) 303.

¹⁰¹¹ As above.

¹⁰¹² As above.

¹⁰¹³ Rancière J *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 304.

¹⁰¹⁴ As above. I have quoted this passage before, but quote it again so as to properly explain Rancière's point with regards to De Gouges.

A political subject for Rancière is, as mentioned, a subject with the capacity to stage a scene of dissensus.¹⁰¹⁵ As a woman De Gouges had no qualification to make the claims that she did. She was not a party with equal membership to the political table. Yet, she made the claims. She therefore presupposed her equality in making political claims. De Gouges becomes here the *demos*, representing the part that has no part according to the police order or according to the sensible distribution of women as private beings. By constructing a scene of dissensus (making political statements which she is not qualified to do and authoring the declaration) she challenges the overall distribution of the sensible, the distribution of roles, places and tasks. De Gouges puts together what Rancière calls “a relation of inclusion and exclusion”.¹⁰¹⁶ She is excluded from political participation, yet included as she can lose her life on political grounds. De Gouges therefore demonstrates and highlights a contradiction within the dominant political discourse or framework of the given. For Rancière, De Gouges was not merely making a claim for inclusion. Her claim rather embodied the contradictions of the police order arrangements that exclude her. She mobilises this contradiction within the dominant discourse of the time and handles the knot of this contradiction, disrupting the police order and illuminating its contingency.

It should be mentioned here that although De Gouges makes her claim under the heading of “women” and she does this as a woman and to the ends of women, this “identity” operates on two different levels: woman is both associated with the police order that she is challenging and also with the position that marks this challenge.¹⁰¹⁷ It is associated with both the distribution of the sensible and also with its redistribution. It is associated with the world where women are not qualified to participate in politics and where there are roles and tasks and places

¹⁰¹⁵ As above.

¹⁰¹⁶ As above.

¹⁰¹⁷ See Jooste Y “Thinking two worlds into one: The ‘distribution of the sensible’ and women’s renegotiation” *Stellenbosch Law Review* (2013) 528-537.

designated to them and the world where they are equal.¹⁰¹⁸ De Gouges can here be located as being in-between identities and identifying with the impossible namely, a category of woman that does not yet exist. It can be said that she disidentifies herself from the category of woman as understood and seen within the police order namely, a privatised, non-political designation and demonstrates through the process of subjectification (through declaring a wrong and staging a contradiction) another category of woman, identifying with the impossible somewhere in-between:

It is the measure of a relationship between a particular social group identifiable within the order of the police (woman as a social category with the expected set of tasks to perform and roles to assume) and the ability of its name to be appropriated by anyone, the ability of its name becoming the inscription of a wrong (women as the subject of a political struggle as the name with which the declaration of a wrong takes place).¹⁰¹⁹

As Arsenjuk notes, for Rancière, politics lives off the difference between the name as a rigid designation of a social entity and everything that goes along with it and a name as an anonym that can stand for the equality of everyone.¹⁰²⁰

Rancière uses De Gouge in order to show how the relationship between the universal and particular can be divided anew.¹⁰²¹ Women were denied the rights of citizens on account of the principle that states that citizenship is part of the sphere of universality while woman's activities belonged to the sphere of the particular of domestic life. Women occupy the sphere of the particular and as a result they could not be included in political life, the sphere of the universal. Against this statement De Gouges made her argument about the scaffold. Her argumentation, for Rancière, blurred the boundaries separating two realms by setting up a universality entailed in the life of the particular. On the scaffold

¹⁰¹⁸ As above.

¹⁰¹⁹ Arsenjuk L "On Jacques Rancière" *Fronesis* (2005) 19-20. Published online 2007/03/05 and available at *Eurozine Journals* www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-01-01-arsenjuk-en.html (accessed 28-12-2014).

¹⁰²⁰ As above.

¹⁰²¹ Rancière J (2010) 56-57.

everyone was equal: women were “as men”.¹⁰²² Men and woman could be sentenced to death for treason out of public reasons:

This is what a democratic process entails: creating forms of subjectivation in the interval between two identities; creating cases of universality by playing on the double relation between the universal and the particular.¹⁰²³

De Gouges’ declaration about the scaffold can be seen as a poetic linguistic device. The poetry or invention is within the making of new connections and relations. She connects the life of the body that can die on grounds of political reasons with the right to participate in politics. In this instance she connects the private with the public and the public with the private, dividing these two notions anew and blurring and confusing the boundaries between them. Her configuration of the scaffold and the private life further indicates a demonstration of an argument as well as the world in which that argument can count- she invents a way in which to present a logical argument by demonstrating in what way women might be included in the public life. In the text “Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?”, Rancière makes an interesting point with regards to the notion of rights that is worth discussing.¹⁰²⁴ He demonstrates how they can be used to stage a scene of dissensus. He makes the following point with regards to the so-called “subject of rights”:

The subject of rights is the subject, or more accurately the process of subjectivization, that bridges the interval between two forms of existence of those rights.¹⁰²⁵

The two forms of existence that he refers to are the following: Firstly, rights are written rights or inscriptions of a community as free and equal.¹⁰²⁶ They are incorporated within constitutions and international treaties and standards. As such, Rancière states, these rights are not just abstract ideals far from a given situation.¹⁰²⁷ They are part of the distribution of the sensible. What is therefore given to us is not only a situation of inequality, rights are also an inscription or a

¹⁰²² As above.

¹⁰²³ As above.

¹⁰²⁴ Rancière J *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2004) 302-303.

¹⁰²⁵ Rancière J *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2004) 302.

¹⁰²⁶ As above.

¹⁰²⁷ As above.

“form of visibility of equality”.¹⁰²⁸ Secondly, the rights of “Man” are the rights of those who make something of them- of this or that inscription. They are the rights of those who use their rights to build cases for verification of the power of that inscription.¹⁰²⁹ For Rancière, it is not only a matter of checking whether a situation confirms or denies those rights: “The point is about what confirmation or denial means”.¹⁰³⁰ “Man” and “citizen” and “human” are not designated collection of individuals. They are political names or surplus names that set out a question or a dispute about who is included in their count and accordingly, freedom and equality are not predicates belonging to definite subjects, they are political predicates or predicates that can open up a dispute about what they exactly entail and whom they concern in which cases.¹⁰³¹ Rancière is not referring here to a court process or going through the necessary legal procedures in order to get a specific outcome. The point is that rights can be politicised or made political. They are part of the current distribution of the sensible and as such they can be mobilised in a process of subjectivisation. They can open up a dispute or a dissensus about what they mean and who should be included in their count. It is a standard inscribed within the community, not as an ideal or as something to measure our progress against; in Rancière’s terms it is rather an example that can be utilised in the verification of equality. The tailor’s strike of 1833, discussed in chapter two, is such an example.¹⁰³² The strikers claimed that either their working conditions should change or the French Charter of Rights should be changed to something like “not all the French people are equal before the law”. Rights can therefore be employed to make new connections or to fashion linguistic formulations. De Gouges made such new connections - she connected the particular with the universal, the public with the private and the scaffold with the assembly, thereby blurring the lines, mobilising contradictions and putting two worlds into one. The next figure that I discuss is the figure of Lucy in J.M

¹⁰²⁸ Rancière J *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2004) 303.

¹⁰²⁹ As above.

¹⁰³⁰ As above.

¹⁰³¹ As above.

¹⁰³² See section 2.3.5 above.

Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*. Lucy may be said to live out the idea of putting two worlds into one.

5.3 Lucy

In J.M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*, Lucy is a white lesbian woman who lives in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa.¹⁰³³ Lucy makes a living by selling flowers at the local market and by taking care of other people's pets. In the novel, David Lurie, Lucy's father comes to stay with her after he has resigned from his teaching job in Cape Town because of a charges involving sexual harassment. One morning Lucy and David take the dogs that are in Lucy's care out for a walk. They walk past two black men and a boy and when they get back to the farmhouse, the same two men and boy are waiting for them. The men claim that they come from Erasmuskraal, where there is no electricity or water and they ask if they may make a phone-call as the sister of one of them is having a baby. Lucy allows one of the men into the house, but when the other immediately follows without invitation, David knows that something is wrong. David makes his way into the house through the kitchen as the front door is locked and there he receives a hard blow to the head. The men lock him in the bathroom and while he is locked up, they rape Lucy. They are robbed and all except one of Lucy's dogs are killed. Before taking off, the men douse David with methylated spirits and set him on fire. He manages to extinguish the flames with water from the toilet bowl.

In the aftermath of the horrific attack, a disagreement develops between David and Lucy. David wants to call the police and tell them what happened. Lucy agrees, but she does so on the condition that David tells his side of the story and

¹⁰³³ JM Coetzee *Disgrace* (1999). As Arne De Boever notes, much has been written on *Disgrace*, especially within the branch of literary criticism called "ethical criticism". Some of this work has revolved around the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and the challenge to Levinas' ethics that *Disgrace* puts forth. As De Boever notes, it can be argued that in the novel, and arguably within Coetzee's work in general, women occupy a problematic position. De Boever attempts to read Lucy through Rancière's politics so as to cast another light on the aesthetic politics of *Disgrace*. See De Boever A "Feminism after Rancière: women in JM Coetzee and Jeff Wall" *Transformations: Journal of Media and Culture* (2011) "Lucy's Politics" available at www.transformationsjournal.org/journalissue_19/article_032.shtml. See also Jooste Y *Stellenbosch Law Review* (2013) 528-537.

only his. She will tell the police what happened to her. The police take Lucy and David's testimonies and during hers, Lucy does not mention anything about the rape. This confuses and infuriates David:

Lucy, my dearest, why don't you want to tell? It was a crime [...] You did not choose to be the object. You are an innocent party [...] Can I guess? Are you trying to remind me of something? [...] Of what women undergo at the hands of men?¹⁰³⁴

The implicit reference to his trial with regards to the sexual harassment scandal in Cape Town invokes a harsh answer from Lucy:

This has nothing to do with you, David. You want to know why I have not laid charge with the police. I will tell you, as long as you agree not to raise the subject again. The reason is that, as far as I am concerned, what happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place, it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business, mine alone.¹⁰³⁵

David asks: "This place being what?" and Lucy answers: "This place being South Africa".¹⁰³⁶ De Boever notes how the statement made by Lucy that her rape is a private matter might seem profoundly conservative because of the fact that she is affirming women's association with the private life.¹⁰³⁷ However, Lucy's refusal to report the rape happens within a very specific context. Many commentators have read her statement against the background of the processes of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was established in order to deal with transition, reconciliation and forgiveness.¹⁰³⁸ Victims as well as perpetrators under the apartheid regime could come and testify and tell their story.¹⁰³⁹ The TRC

¹⁰³⁴ Coetzee JM (1999) 111

¹⁰³⁵ As above.

¹⁰³⁶ Coetzee JM (1999) 112.

¹⁰³⁷ De Boever A *Transformations: Journal of Media and Culture* (2011) "Lucy's Politics". See also Jooste Y *Stellenbosch Law Review* (2013) 533-534.

¹⁰³⁸ See for example Boehmer E "Not saying sorry, not speaking pain: Gender implications in *Disgrace*" *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* (2002) 342-351. See also the Promotion of the National Unity and Reconciliation act 34 of 1995. The TRC was given the task of dealing with issues of transition, reconciliation and forgiveness. The commission's assignment included addressing the trauma of the past, repairing trust and restoring humanity, building a moral basis and new values for the South African society and legitimising the new dispensation. The Truth and Reconciliation hearings were established as part of the mandate of the TRC to get as complete picture as possible of the causes, extent and nature of politically motivated gross violations of human rights.

¹⁰³⁹ As above.

established a “culture of confession” or a politics of confession.¹⁰⁴⁰ In response to this politics of confession, Lucy does not tell and she insists on women’s association with the private.¹⁰⁴¹ At a later point, Lucy tells David after he brings up the rape again:

This is my life. I am the one who has to live here. What happened to me is my business, mine alone, not yours, and if there is one right I have it is the right not to be put on trial like this, not to have to justify myself- not to you, not to anyone else.¹⁰⁴²

De Boever explains that Lucy therefore disclaims the right that she has. In a culture of sensible distribution of confession, she chooses “non-confession”.¹⁰⁴³ Commentators have called Lucy’s association with the private life a revolutionary position when considering women’s historical exclusion from the political life in South Africa.¹⁰⁴⁴ Her words “not to be put on trial like this” also arguably refers to a refusal to have to represent what occurred, a refusal to, as De Boever notes, stand before the violence that consists of asking for accounts and justifications to the police and courts of law.¹⁰⁴⁵ De Boever describes Lucy as challenging several distributions of the sensible that are at work in Coetzee’s novel.¹⁰⁴⁶ She challenges the historical context in which the novel is situated specifically, the aftermath of apartheid and the problematic and complicated relationships between black and white people. Lucy announces that she will continue to live on the farm where the attack took place. Her decision becomes extremely difficult for her David to understand, especially after, as De Boever explains, Lucy’s black assistant Petrus becomes the co-proprietor of Lucy’s farm through a land transfer that aims to restore land to the native South African black population.¹⁰⁴⁷ Lucy stays on, deciding to become a “bywoner” (a poor tenant labourer who works for the

¹⁰⁴⁰ De Boever A *Transformations: Journal of Media and Culture* (2011) “Lucy’s Politics”. See also Jooste Y *Stellenbosch Law Review* (2013) 533-534.

¹⁰⁴¹ As above.

¹⁰⁴² Coetzee JM (1999) 133.

¹⁰⁴³ De Boever A *Transformations: Journal of Media and Culture* (2011) “Lucy’s politics”.

¹⁰⁴⁴ As above.

¹⁰⁴⁵ As above.

¹⁰⁴⁶ As above.

¹⁰⁴⁷ As above.

landowner, but is also allowed to make some profit for him or herself).¹⁰⁴⁸ In order to give Lucy some protection Petrus asks via David to marry her. To her father's surprise she accepts the proposal. She explains that he is not offering her "a church wedding followed by a honeymoon on the Wildcoast", but rather "an alliance, a deal"- "I contribute from the land in return for which I am allowed to creep under his wing. Otherwise, he wants to remind me, I am without protection, I am fair game".¹⁰⁴⁹ De Boever notes the following and I quote him at length:

What Lucy thus realises is the "impossible" community of a white lesbian woman living under a black man's wing/ of a black man taking a white, lesbian woman under his wing. It is neither the future for South Africa that her father imagined, nor the one that Petrus imagined. Her position marks instead the country's radically "democratic" future: a future that would lie beyond the established framework of identification and classification- race (black/white), gender (male/female), class (owner/tenant), and sexuality (straight/gay)- in which South Africa, from Lucy's perspective , is caught up.¹⁰⁵⁰

Lucy's position here indeed marks a radically democratic future as De Boever notes. She mixes the categories and blurs the sensible boundaries at work in this context. *Disgrace* also realises this particular politics at the level of the novel's aesthetic.¹⁰⁵¹ De Boever explains that Spivak has noted that the novel is focalised "relentlessly" through David Lurie. Spivak draws an important conclusion about the aesthetic:

The reader is provoked for he or she does not want to share in Lurie-the-chief-focaliser's inability to "read" Lucy as patient and agent. No reader is content with acting out the failure of reading [...] This provocation is the "political" in political fiction, the transformation of a tendency into crisis.¹⁰⁵²

It is precisely then Lucy's internally excluded position of the part of those who have no part that becomes *Disgrace's* aesthetic.¹⁰⁵³ The novel focuses through Lurie, thereby provoking the reader to counter-focalise and take up Lucy's cause.

¹⁰⁴⁸ As above.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Coetzee JM (1999) 203.

¹⁰⁵⁰ De Boever A *Transformations: Journal of Media and Culture* (2011) "Lucy's Politics".

¹⁰⁵¹ As above.

¹⁰⁵² See Spivak GC "Ethics and politics in Tagore, Coetzee and certain scenes of teaching" *Diacritics* (2002) 32.

¹⁰⁵³ De Boever A *Transformations: Journal of Media and Culture* (2011) "Lucy's Politics".

While Lucy is thus, according to De Boever, “an empty operator”, her emptiness “resists”, “making its own disappearance impossible”.¹⁰⁵⁴ De Boever further interestingly notes that the closing paragraph in Judith Butler’s book, *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*, almost reads like a summary of Rancière’s political subject. I think it is worth quoting:

Who then is Antigone within such a scene, and what are we to make of her words, words that become dramatic events, performative acts? She is not of the human, but speaks in its language. Prohibited from action, she nevertheless acts, and her act is hardly a simple assimilation to an existing norm. And in acting, as one who has no right to act, she upsets the vocabulary of kinship that is a precondition for the human, implicitly raising the question for us of what those preconditions really must be. She speaks within the language of entitlement from which she is excluded, particularly in the language of the claim with which no final identification is possible. If she is human, then the human has entered into catachresis: we no longer know its proper usage. And to the extent that she occupies the language that can never belong to her she functions as chiasm within the vocabulary of political norms. If kinship is the precondition of the human, then Antigone is the occasion for a new field of human, achieved through political catachresis, the one that happens when the less than human speak as human, when gender is displaced and kinship founders on its own founding laws. She acts, she speaks, she becomes one for whom the speech act is a fatal crime, but this fatality exceeds her life and enters the discourse of intelligibility as its own promising fatality, the social form of its aberrant, unprecedented future.¹⁰⁵⁵

It is Lucy’s insistence on distributing otherwise in this specific material and spatio-temporal locale that allows for alternative capacities and ways of being. The place within which Lucy positions herself is exactly where she shouldn’t be according to the specific context and it is exactly this place that holds the possibility of an unprecedented future. Within the established Apartheid-aftermath framework, she locates another time, an impossible time that points to different relationships and she also lives impossibly within this time. In a sense, she identifies with an impossible South African democratic future - imagining that things can be different or otherwise. But, Lucy does not only imagine that things can be otherwise, she also embodies this. She stays and works on the farm as labourer-tenant, married to the black Petrus. Lucy is a white lesbian woman that marries

¹⁰⁵⁴ As above.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Butler J *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (2000) 82.

the black Petrus for “protection”. If she is married to a local man, she is safe from rape by other men. It is therefore not only the refusal to report the rape that might be controversial, but also the undercurrent of this arrangement namely, a woman that is now married to a man and therefore becomes his property and as such cannot be sexually used anymore. Lucy thereby enters into marriage within highly patriarchal terms. She tears her body from various sensible distributions. Lucy insists on another account and she thereby defines differently and acts in a way that paradoxically embodies a transformation thought to have not yet been attained.

It should be mentioned here that some readings of *Disgrace* within the context of post-apartheid thought, rather than viewing Lucy’s actions as actions that represent the embrace of a radical reconfiguration of the South African democratic future, reads her actions as highly problematic within patriarchal South African culture.¹⁰⁵⁶ When it comes to Lucy’s silence and passivity in her refusal to report the rape and her retreat into working the land as a *bywoner*, Lucy can be seen as assuming the generic and stereotypical position of woman suffering in silence.¹⁰⁵⁷ Lucy serves the needs of others and Boehmer asks: “Is reconciliation with a history of violence possible if woman [...] is as ever biting her lip?”¹⁰⁵⁸ When it comes to having a political voice, Lucy can indeed be read in some instances as lacking voice and although refusal to speak or silence can establish political speaking or claims, when read within the context of patriarchy

¹⁰⁵⁶ See Boehmer E *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* (2002) 342-351. See also Sanders M “Disgrace” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* (2002) 363-373.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Van Marle et al explains that within the highly patriarchal traditional South African landscape oppression through silence was one of the characteristic ways in which to keep women in constrained political spheres. See Van Marle, De Villiers I, Beukes E M “Memory, space and gender: Re-imagining the law” *South African Public Law* (2012) 570. As Van Marle et al further explains, during the apartheid era women did not speak of the atrocities that were done to them and when they did, they were silenced by the state and marked as liars unsupported by family as their confessions brought shame to the family name (Van Marle, De Villiers I, Beukes E M *South African Public Law* (2012) 570). The silence of women and daughters also influenced the voices of all those around them. See Van Marle, De Villiers I, Beukes E M *South African Public Law* (2012) 570.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Boehmer E *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* (2002) 351.

and masculinity, Lucy's silence – rather than pointing to political voice - points to an affirmation of the distribution of the sensible and its cycles of female domination.¹⁰⁵⁹

As illustrated by the discussion above, I read Lucy as redistributing a certain sensible distribution and as, to a certain extent, having a voice. When Lucy in no uncertain terms declares: “It is my business and mine alone” she is not silent, she is not biting her lip.¹⁰⁶⁰ The point may be that Lucy resists any easy readings. She is silent in one sense and she speaks in another. She is therefore problematic and it is in within this logic that she redistributes the sensible as a contradictory, alternative character that inhabits an in-between space. Rather than reading Lucy as speaking or not speaking, as having a voice or not having a voice, I read her as a figure of division. Therefore, the possibility of political voice is not opened up by the fact that she can be seen as having a voice or not having a voice. Rather, it is opened up by the fact that she can be read as both and neither.

5.4 Abahlali baseMjondolo

Abahlali baseMjondolo is a social movement that consists of South African shack-dwellers. The movement began in Durban in early 2005 and it is the largest organisation of the militant poor in post-apartheid South Africa.¹⁰⁶¹ As mentioned in the introduction, the majority of South Africans live impoverished lives. As Selmeczi notes, the inherited apartheid topography results in the spatial and

¹⁰⁵⁹ Refusal to speak can be read as a powerful instance of political subjectivity. Rather than being seen as embodying passivity, refusal can be read as a counter-hegemonic action, imbued with challenge and the beckoning of alternatives. See for example Van Marle K (ed.) *Refusal, Transition and Post-Apartheid Law* (2009).

¹⁰⁶⁰ Coetzee JM (1999) 111.

¹⁰⁶¹ See Abahlali's official website: <http://abahlali.org/a-short-history-of-abahlali-basemjondolo-the-durban-shack-dwellers-movement/> (accessed on 20/12/2014). Instead of explication and lengthy discussion, my aim here is to rather let these statements be read as is so as to avoid speaking for or any implicit assumptions about the capacities of the movement.

infrastructural segregation of the black poor.¹⁰⁶² It effectively renders them spatially and materially marginalised, living on the peripheries of the national cities. Abahlali has practiced numerous forms of dissent in an effort to transform the socio-economic fate of the poor and to oblige government to attend to their plight.¹⁰⁶³ The majority of their forms of dissent and efforts have been defined by governmental political discourse as criminal action.¹⁰⁶⁴ Members of the movement as well as academics, activists and journalists have produced a large amount of research, publications and various other forms of writing on the movement and their activities.¹⁰⁶⁵ I therefore do not recount their whole story here. It is also important to mention that I do not intend to speak for Abahlali in any way. The movement insists on a protocol that interested researchers should visit them and talk to them- “talk to us, not about us”.¹⁰⁶⁶ I therefore only make

¹⁰⁶² See Selmeczi A “Dis/placing political illiteracy: The politics of intellectual equality in a South African shack-dweller’s movement” *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* (2014) 230.

¹⁰⁶³ As above. The movement began when a road blockage was organised in the Kennedy Road settlement in protest to the sale of a piece of land to a local industrialist. The local municipal counselor promised the shack-dwellers the land for housing. The movement grew quickly and now has tens of thousands of supporters from more than 30 settlements around the country. Within the last couple of years, more than 300 hundred of the members have been arrested and subjected to police assaults, death threats and intimidation from local ruling parties. The movement has tried to develop a sustained voice for shack-dwellers and have marched to the offices of local councilors, police stations, municipal offices, newspapers and the City Hall in Durban against governmental actions that have resulted in thousands of people living on the street. The movement organised a successful boycott of the March 2006 local governmental elections under the slogan “No Land, No House, No Vote”. Abahlali have also stopped evictions in a number of settlements, won access to schools and stopped the industrial development of the land promised in Kennedy Road and forced numerous government officials, offices and projects to visit Abahlali in the shanty towns. The movement has struggled for land, housing, for an end to forced removals, access to education and the provision of water, electricity, sanitation and health care. The movement has also set up projects such as crèches, gardens, sewing collectives as well as support structures for people living with HIV and AIDS.

¹⁰⁶⁴ See Selmeczi A “Dis/placing political illiteracy: The politics of intellectual equality in a South African shack-dweller’s movement” *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* (2014) 230-265.

¹⁰⁶⁵ These engagements have included undergraduate essays, post-graduate theses, research reports and work published in peer reviewed academic journals. See the list of publications on Abahlali’s official website: <http://abahlali.org/node/3204> (accessed on 20/12/2014).

¹⁰⁶⁶ See <http://abahlali.org/node/3204> (accessed on 20/12/2014).

use of literature that is accepted by Abahlali.¹⁰⁶⁷ I also explicate as little as possible in an effort to let the movement's words circulate on their own. The point is not to represent Abahlali or tell their story for them, but rather to attempt to practice a method of equality that valorise words and instances of the verification of equality.

It has been argued that the prevailing political discourse sees the poor black majority as unable to practice and conceptualise their own politics.¹⁰⁶⁸ People that demonstrate or strike are often seen as politically illiterate.¹⁰⁶⁹ As mentioned, the spatial order of apartheid still remains and most people are left to live in spaces of infrastructural decay.¹⁰⁷⁰ In their discussion of the municipal practice of illegal evictions, Mark Butler and Richard Pithouse have stated the following:

[T]he local state acts in a systematically criminal manner towards its poorest residents on the assumption that this behaviour is within the norms of a shared social consensus amongst the social forces and institutions that count. That elite consensus is that rights formally guaranteed in abstract principle should not, in concrete practice, apply to the poor.¹⁰⁷¹

Abahlali has struggled in various forms against the living conditions of the poor and the manner in which the poor are dealt with by the state. Most of their efforts, whether in the form of marches, strikes, protests or demonstrations have been received by government as criminal and violent claims to service delivery.

¹⁰⁶⁷ I focus especially on the work of Anna Selmeczi who has written extensively on the movement. See Selmeczi *A Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* (2014) 230-265. See also Selmeczi "We are the people who do no count" Thinking the distribution of the biopolitics of abandonment" PhD thesis at Central European University, March 2012.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Selmeczi *A Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* (2014) 230.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Selmeczi explores this point with regards to the protests of Abahlali baseMjondolo. She argues that the contemporary spatio-political order of the South African "world class" city is conditional upon constructing many South African lives as superfluous and disposable. See Selmeczi *A Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* (2014) 230. The production and abandonment of surplus people also depends on rendering them as improper political subjects and dominant discursive conceptions further imply and reinforce conceptions of the poor black majority as unable to think and practice their own politics as an illiterate group of people. See Selmeczi *A Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* (2014) 230.

¹⁰⁷⁰ As above.

¹⁰⁷¹ Butler M & Pithouse R *Lessons from eThekweni: Pariahs Hold Their Ground Against a State that is Both Criminal and Democratic* (2007) <http://abahlali.org/node/984> (accessed on 28/12/2014).

Abahlali contends that the black poor majority are seen as less than equal political and economic subjects.¹⁰⁷² The movement has in many ways attempted to overturn the implicit assumptions of their demonstrations as criminal acts:

They say we committed public violence but against which public? If we are not the public then who is the public and who are we?¹⁰⁷³

By asking who is included in the count of the public, this statement strikingly disputes the criminality often associated with the movement's actions. On this logic, the movement and its members must certainly be perceived in excess to the public:

The fact that our minor and non-criminal offences are treated as criminality- as public violence- shows that in reality we are not included in the definition of the public [...] Therefore we have to rebel just to count as public.¹⁰⁷⁴

Here the movement overturns the logic that sees them as uncounted. These demonstrations can be read as political statements that “exist because those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings, make themselves of some account.”¹⁰⁷⁵ Tanke has argued that demonstrations are necessary in Rancière's conception of politics, “demonstration create possibilities for the part of those who have no part to begin to take part”.¹⁰⁷⁶ Demonstrations can therefore impose a sensible obligation upon others to recognise the rationality of the arguments of the demonstrators.¹⁰⁷⁷ Whether through polemics, strikes, speech scenes, poetic

¹⁰⁷² Selmeczi A *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* (2014) 235-236.

¹⁰⁷³ Zikode S “The Third Force” in *Yonk' Indawo Umzabalazo Uyasimuvela: New York From Durban: Durban Centre for Civil Society Research Reports* (2013) as referenced in Selmeczi A *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* (2014) 235.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Poni M “Public Violence” (2009) available at <http://abahlali.org/node/5769> (accessed on 23/12/2014). As Selmeczi explains Abahlali has claimed on numerous occasions that blockading roads is not violence: “violence is harm to human beings.” See Selmeczi A *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* (2014) 237. The members of the movement often make the point that protests usually only turn violent after the police intervenes: “Usually harm is only experienced when the police come. Before police come, no harm happens, whether we sing and burn tires as part of our expression [...] So, when we burn tires, we sing our songs, the only thing we're causing is traffic, which traffic always happens by the way. And then, when police come, that's where harm take place, and usually we are the only victims”. See Selmeczi A *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* (2014) 237.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Bosteels B “Rancière's Leftism, or, Politics and its Discontents” in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 165.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Tanke J (2011) 60.

¹⁰⁷⁷ As above.

activities or the definition of new capacities, equality must be made visible or it must manifest in the declaration of a wrong so as to break open an interpretation of sense thought to be incontestable.¹⁰⁷⁸

Dominant discourse has also often seen the demonstrations of the movement as “reactionary”, “opportunistic”, “anarchist” and “populist”.¹⁰⁷⁹ They have been condemned for vandalising “already existing infrastructure in our community”.¹⁰⁸⁰ This type of logic with regard to dissent- that includes road blockades, trespassing and civil disobedience- is becoming more and more prominent within the new South African constitutional order. It is indicative of a reasoning that puts forth that post-apartheid freedom and equality should be achieved through patient organisation, education and sustained struggle. The implicit consensus is that in our constitutional dispensation, such acts are criminal and there is a refusal to acknowledge certain types of dissent as political struggle. The movement’s speech is in some cases not recognised as fully authorised speech:

We have discovered that our municipality does not listen to us when we speak to them in Zulu. We tried English. Now, we realise that they won’t understand Xhosa or Sotho either. The only language that they understand is when we put thousands of people on the street.¹⁰⁸¹

Rancière:

[I]f there is someone you do not wish to recognise as a political being, you begin by not seeing them as the bearers of politicalness, by not understanding what they say, by not hearing that it is an utterance coming out of their mouths.¹⁰⁸²

Abahlali has also been made out to be “thoughtless” in their actions.¹⁰⁸³ They maintain however that although they have chosen a different form of struggle (than what may be considered as acceptable legal and political routes), it doesn’t

¹⁰⁷⁸ Tanke J (2011) 61.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Selmeczi A *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* (2014) 238.

¹⁰⁸⁰ As above.

¹⁰⁸¹ Zikode S “Third Force” (2005) as referenced in Selmeczi A *Interface: A Journal For and About Social Movements* (2014) 239.

¹⁰⁸² Rancière J (2001) 32.

¹⁰⁸³ Selmeczi A *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* (2014) 239.

mean that “we did not come to this campaign after careful thinking”.¹⁰⁸⁴ Further, the movement has not only sought to overturn the sensible distribution of their dissent as thoughtless, but has also resisted dominant allocations of the poor as ignorant and in need of education:

We hear that the political analysts are saying that the poor must be educated about xenophobia. Always the solution is to “educate the poor”. When we get cholera we must be educated about washing our hands when in fact we need clear water. When we get burnt we must be educated about fire when in fact we need electricity. This is just a way of blaming the poor for our suffering. We want land and housing in the cities, we want to go to university, we want water and electricity- we don’t want to be educated to be good at surviving poverty on our own.¹⁰⁸⁵

After a fire broke out in a settlement, the same type of imposed education was postulated by the state:

After the fire, people were basically telling us to teach people how to use a paraffin stove properly- how to use a paraffin stove is not something I need to teach to the people who have used them all their lives! Why is this the thing they think must be taught when we have said clearly the problem is that we are excluded from getting electricity.¹⁰⁸⁶

Many protests and forms of dissent have been viewed by the dominant political discourse through the lens of the pace of government’s service delivery. Dissent is viewed within the framework of the immediacy experienced by the poor that cannot grasp the complexities of government processes and that lack understanding of the patience and work involved in long-lasting and proper development:

Many journalists have been phoning us and asking if our “service delivery protest” will be going ahead tomorrow. We appreciate the interest of the media but we really want to stress that this will not be a “service delivery protest”. We have never organised “a service delivery protest”. [...] The language in which people’s struggles are turned into “service delivery protest” is a language that has been imposed on our struggles from the outside- it is not our language. Of course we are struggling for land and housing, water and electricity. But we do not accept the limited way in which these “services” are “delivered”. Often an important part of our struggles is to reject the way that services are delivered [...] We are struggling for the full recognition and realisation of our humanity in a

¹⁰⁸⁴ As above.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Abahlali baseMjondolo “Statement of the Xenophobic Attacks in Johannesburg” (2008) available at <http://abahlali.org/node/3582> (accessed on 13/11/2014).

¹⁰⁸⁶ Abahlali baseMjondolo and Rural Network *Living Learning* (2009) as referenced in Selmeczi A *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* (2014) 252.

society that denies our humanity at every turn [...] To call our struggles “service delivery protests” is a way of making them safe for our oppressors [...].¹⁰⁸⁷

And

We are concerned that your chief of staff has said that the meeting would only deal with “service delivery issues” and would not deal with “unrelated issues”. Since when was democracy about service delivery? Since when was human dignity about service delivery? We have a democratic right to take this view and to argue for it when we engage the state. In fact we reject the whole paradigm of “service delivery” [...] Your chief of staff wants to confine us to discussions of peripheral importance just as we are already confined on peripheral land on the outskirts of the city.¹⁰⁸⁸

Abahlali refuses the description of their struggles within frameworks that can neutralise their claims or contain their politics. The movement lays the contingency of the current South African spatio-temporal order bare: “We know that we are not supposed to be living the way we do”¹⁰⁸⁹ and attempt to disrupt any form of intellectual authority: “We always say that the fact that we are poor in life does not make us poor in mind.”¹⁰⁹⁰ Although the movement has continually stated that they are “ordinary men and women [that] insist on their right to speak and be heard on matters that concern their daily lives”, the ruling party has insisted that the movement is ruled by a “third force” of leftist intellectuals.¹⁰⁹¹ As Selmeczi confirms, this logic postulates a fundamental doubt of the shack-dwellers’ capacity to theorise and conduct their own struggle.¹⁰⁹²

The movement has established the “University of Abahlali baseMjondolo” by declaring that the shantytowns are places of “living learning”.¹⁰⁹³ The movement has also refused knowledge imparted by the “politician-expert” and “charity-

¹⁰⁸⁷ Abahlali baseMjondolo “Sutcliff’s Dirty Tricks Won’t Keep Us From Marching In Our City Tomorrow” (2010) available at <http://abahlali.org/node/6403> (accessed on 27/12/2014).

¹⁰⁸⁸ Poni M quoted in *Dear Mandela* A film by Dara Kell and Christopher Nizza (2011) as referenced by Selmeczi A *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* (2014) 248.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Selmeczi A *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* (2014) 248.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Hlongwa M “The No Land, No House, No Vote Campaign Still On For 2009” (2007) available at <http://abahlali.org/node/510> (accessed on 12/12/2014).

¹⁰⁹¹ Selmeczi A *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* (2014) 249.

¹⁰⁹² As above.

¹⁰⁹³ Selmeczi A *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* (2014) 255.

expert” that aim to “enlighten the dark pockets of the ignorant”.¹⁰⁹⁴ Abahlali notes:

We are supposed to suffer silently so that some rich people can get rich from our work and others can get rich having conferences about having more conferences about suffering [...] We must even be invisible when people are getting paid to talk about us in government or in NGO’s. Everything is done under our name.¹⁰⁹⁵

Here Abahlali can be said to indicate something of Rancière’s contention that some knowledge emerge as the surplus value of the poor’s labour: “It is produced by them, but claimed by the owners of the means of production”.¹⁰⁹⁶

Although at times government has intentionally sought to subvert the workings and actions of the movement by way of arbitrary evictions and arrests (with charges usually dropped before cases reach court) and intimidation by ruling party members, the movement has managed to sustain protests and broader public engagement. Their membership has grown to tens of thousands and they have attracted the attention of activists across different levels of civil society. The movement has also helped numerous members of their community and has demanded response from various governmental institutions. Against prevailing discourses and dominant configurations of society that ensures that only certain classes of people are authorised to think and speak, Abahlali have declared that they do think and speak. To say that “[e]veryone speaks, everyone thinks” is more subversive than it sounds.¹⁰⁹⁷ As Hallward elucidates, thinking “evades regulation and contests classification”.¹⁰⁹⁸ To think is therefore, according to Hallward, itself to subvert any rigid distribution of places and roles.¹⁰⁹⁹

¹⁰⁹⁴ Selmeczi A *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements* (2014) 252.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Hlongwa M “The No Land, No House, No Vote Campaign Still On For 2009” (2007) available at <http://abahlali.org/node/510> (accessed on 12/12/2014).

¹⁰⁹⁶ Pelletier C (2009) 6.

¹⁰⁹⁷ As above. Hallward P “Jacques Rancière and the Subversion of Mastery” *Paragraph: A Journal of Modern Critical Theory* (2005) 26.

¹⁰⁹⁸ As above.

¹⁰⁹⁹ As above.

Before concluding, I return to the figure of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri that Spivak invokes in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In the section below I offer a short and different reading of Bhubaneswari.

5.5 Bhubaneswari Bhaduri

It has been mentioned that the tragic figure of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri haunts Spivak’s famous essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”¹¹⁰⁰ Morris explains that Bhubaneswari, as a continually misread woman with an impossible story, has in many ways accompanied and also possessed Spivak in her own effort to be accountable to and for the history of the subaltern.¹¹⁰¹ In chapter four it was explained that Bhubaneswari Bhaduri was a young middle-class Indian woman who took her own life in her father’s apartment in Calcutta in 1926.¹¹⁰² After her suicide it was discovered that she was a member of one of the many groups involved in the armed struggle for Indian independence. She had been entrusted with a political assassination, which she was unable to do. She subsequently committed suicide in order to avoid capture by the British colonial authorities and to, speculatively, safeguard the members of her group. Spivak reads Bhubaneswari’s suicide as an attempt to cover up her involvement in the anti-colonial insurgency movement by disguising her suicide as a modern example of *sati*.¹¹⁰³ However, Spivak contends that her voice and agency as a real historical woman freedom fighter disappeared from the official, male-centred historical records. Technically, her suicide did not conform to the codes of *sati* because she was not a widow and the suicide did not take place in the sacred site of the husband’s funeral pyre.¹¹⁰⁴ However, on Spivak’s account, as Morris explains, Bhubaneswari at least foreclosed any possibility that her suicide might be

¹¹⁰⁰ Morris R (ed.) (2010) 16.

¹¹⁰¹ It should be mentioned here that Spivak later wrote that Bhubaneswari wrote a letter to her grandmother. Spivak’s mother told her the story of Bhubaneswari and that is how she came to research her as historical figure. See Morris R (ed.) (2010) 228.

¹¹⁰² See section 4.2.

¹¹⁰³ As above.

¹¹⁰⁴ It should be mentioned here that there is of course no way in which Bhubaneswari’s intentions can really be proved. Spivak offers a reading of Bhubaneswari’s story as an attempt to rewrite “the social text of sati-suicide in an interventionist way”. See Spivak GC (1988) 307.

interpreted as an illegitimate pregnancy as she was menstruating at the time of her suicide.¹¹⁰⁵ For Spivak, there is no question that Bhubaneswari was a politically committed member of the national independence struggle. However, Bhubaneswari's attempt to rewrite the text of sati-suicide is a "tragic failure" because the "subaltern as female cannot be heard or read" in the male-centred terms of the national independence struggle.¹¹⁰⁶ Her voice was "effaced by the ideological structures of imperial masculinity and the state".¹¹⁰⁷ Spivak explains that supplementary narratives and retellings erased Bhubaneswari's story.¹¹⁰⁸ According to Spivak, her exceptional act of women's resistance was later re-coded as a case of an illicit love affair and a source of shame for the subsequent generations of her family.¹¹⁰⁹ Spivak was disturbed by the fact that everyone, including Bhubaneswari's own family, misunderstood her suicide and no one seemed interested in Spivak's return to and reinterpretation of the event.¹¹¹⁰ "Unnerved by this failure of communication", Spivak concluded that "the subaltern cannot speak!"¹¹¹¹

Bhubaneswari's narrative is discussed at the end of the essay and Spivak offers Bhubaneswari as a text to be read.¹¹¹² As mentioned, since her initial essay Spivak has reminded herself that speaking always occurs within the nexus of actions that include listening, responding, interpreting, qualifying and so on. To happen, events must be perceived and acknowledged as such. Although on Spivak's reading Bhubaneswari's suicide was a tragic failure, she certainly redistributes some of the sensible distributions at work in her context. She was a female member of an anti-colonialist struggle. She took her own life against religious codes. And she committed suicide while menstruating so as to rule out subsequent narratives of illicit pregnancy. With these actions, Bhubaneswari

¹¹⁰⁵ Morris R (ed.) (2010) 6.

¹¹⁰⁶ Morton S (2003) 65-66.

¹¹⁰⁷ Morris R (2010) (ed.) 7.

¹¹⁰⁸ See section 4.2 above.

¹¹⁰⁹ Morton S (2003) 66.

¹¹¹⁰ Leitch V, Cain W et al (eds.) (2010) 2195.

¹¹¹¹ Spivak GC in Nelson C & Grossberg L (1988) 307.

¹¹¹² See footnote 992 above.

refuses to be interpreted in a certain way. Her body carried the signs that would make certain masculinist and imperialist interpretations impossible. Commentators have noted how Spivak's retelling of the story of Bhubaneswari on numerous occasions has transformed the private family secret of her suicide that nobody in her family wants to talk about into the "public political archive of post-colonial studies".¹¹¹³ This is especially accurate if one considers the impact of Spivak's essay. When considered along the lines of Rancière's politics, a different lesson can be gleaned from Bhubaneswari. When it comes to the retelling of Bhubaneswari, Spivak records in the discourse of her essay, a voice that is phenomenally impossible as a historical speech-act.¹¹¹⁴ According to Spivak, Bhubaneswari has no place from which to speak. And it is from within this juncture that a different political future might be opened up: The alternative telling lies, not in *making* Bhubaneswari speak, but rather within the very impossibility of her having a voice. For in recording Bhubaneswari, Spivak does "more than give [her] a historical identity", she also demonstrates along the lines of a Rancièrian framework, "how a politics can be predicated on an impossible phenomenality of voice".¹¹¹⁵ Spivak records a speech event that is impossible and it is from within this recording that the politics of voice is revealed.

5.6 Conclusion

¹¹¹³ See Shetty S & Bellamy E "Postcolonialism's archive fever" *Diacritics* (2000) 25-48.

¹¹¹⁴ See Parker A in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 249. Parker discusses Rancière's discussion of Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. See Rancière J *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge* (1994) 29-30. Auerbach discusses the New Testament and a specific instance where Tacitus records a speech of Percennius in his writing. Percennius cannot speak for he is of the poor, he is a soldier. He therefore has no place from which to speak, but Tacitus "lends him his tongue". For Rancière, it is exactly the fact that Tacitus records in his discourse the speech event that is impossible that can point to a political future or politics: "By invalidating the voice of Percennius, substituting his own speech for the soldier's, Tacitus does more than give him a historical identity. He also creates a model of subversive eloquence for the orators and simple soldiers of the future" See Rancière J (1994) 29-30. I therefore use this line of thinking in Rancière's discussion of Auerbach and Parker's eloquent relaying of Edward Said's and Rancière's engagements with Auerbach in my contemplation on Spivak's essay with regards to this last point. Parker A in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 249-257.

¹¹¹⁵ Parker A in Rockhill G & Watts P (eds.) (2009) 257.

The figures and statements discussed above represent a way of reacting against the background sketched in the first chapter, specifically the complexities and difficulties of voicing as it pertains to many South African women. Along the lines of employing a method of equality, I attempted to contemplate moments of the reconfiguration of the sensible. These figures and related statements encompass a different way of mapping the trajectories of the visible and sayable. A method of equality entails reading and producing words against guarantees and modes of legitimation. It entails highlighting verifications of equality and valorising redistributions of the sensible order so as to give rise to voicing and ways of voicing thought not to exist.

De Gouges mobilises the contradictions of the contingent police order that surrounds her by connecting the unconnected. She therefore invents an argument by relating facts previously unrelated. She handles the (im)possible double meanings of the public and private, the universal and particular and inclusion and exclusion in a way that mixes descriptions and definitions and she presupposes equality on these grounds.

Lucy divides the distribution of places and roles and tasks anew by refusing to follow or act in a way that affirm police order designations. Her redistributions not only allow her to tread her own path, but also open up the possibility of another time and place within the located time and place. She lives an impossible transformation by contesting the lines of post-apartheid sensibility and as an alternative figure of division, she holds open the possibility of voice.

The statements of Abahlali baseMjondolo represent a refusal to simply accept the distributions of the dominant political discourse that sees the movement as ignorant and unable to understand the complex mechanisms of governance. They rather insist that their voices count and that their struggle is political – refusing intellectual and consensual authority that defines what people should and should not do and who should think and not think. Within their demonstration and

sustained struggle they incite and represent to others that there is nothing natural about their position within the societal order.

Bhubaneswari overturns certain readings that would see her through the lens of masculinist assumptions. A retelling of her story demonstrates how a politics can be thought through instances of impossible voicing. The recording of non-speech acts invalidates those frameworks that would see them as noise and not political voice. These figures and statements all in some way traced and mapped redistributions that can possibly disclose and reveal the way in which voice is freed when it refuses to be reduced to the space-times and locales of sensible configuration.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion: Retracing the way Towards the Possibility of Voice

It is mentioned in the first chapter that this thesis involves making sense of the notion of political voice. More specifically, it involves a reflection on voice through the lens of the politics of Jacques Rancière, against the background of the difficulties surrounding voicing as it pertains to many South African women. It is also mentioned that the thesis does not involve formulating concrete steps in an effort to go forward. Rather, my exploration of Rancière's work on politics, against the specific background sketched in chapter one, comprises of a journey that ultimately points me to new insights and ways of understanding the notion of political voice as well as the way in which political voice relates to my discussion of women and the specific disconnect that comes into play when considering some of the most pressing issues that many South Africa women face.

As explained in the second chapter, Rancière does not conceive of politics along social conditions or identity categories. Rather, what matters is equality. As Clarke confirms with regards to the social category of "women" and Rancière's thinking: "[W]hile [...] disagreements may invoke the name of a particular social category ('women'), it is an error in Rancière's view to understand this name as a reference to a prior community or social body".¹¹¹⁶ Indeed, Rancière's thinking on politics points to localised, contextual and individual thinking and theorising and my exploration here opens up the question of how we are to trace new topographies of the visible and sayable and of how we are to think about contexts of inequality as it relates to many women. Such thinking does not require an expression of a social category or a unified self. Rather, it requires expressions in relation to equality, in relation to new categories and identifications and in relation to the questioning and interrogating of gaps between universal categories and lived realities. Rancière's politics therefore points to the possibility of new

¹¹¹⁶ Clarke C "Ranciere, Politics and the Social Question" in Davis O (ed.) (2013) 15.

configurations of voice and of voicing as a politicising gesture. In order to conclude in the section below, I highlight some of the most significant lines of thinking opened up by my reflection on voice.

In exploring Rancière's politics by way of the concepts of "the police order", "politics/equality", "the political subject", "the miscount and the wrong" and "the distribution of the sensible", it becomes clear that within a Rancièrian framework, politics is the very struggle over or for voice. Politics is the process that breaks apart the various obstacles that confront exercises of political voicing. Moments of political voicing runs counter to the police order and the various categories and configurations of the distribution of the sensible by confronting it with a different configuration. Politics radically disputes the frameworks that determine who and what can be heard and seen in what contexts. The possession of political voice is conditioned upon the possibility of appearance in realms of intelligibility, perceptibility and visibility. Voicing becomes the moment wherein the properties of space, the possibilities of time and the formation of identities and locales are overturned. Political voicing consists of inventing worlds, arguments and supplementary names and identities. When analysing Rancière's formulation of politics against the background of the disconnect and difficulties of voice as it pertains to the contexts of many South African women, the notion of consensus highlights the fact that legal and institutional mechanisms of government and the broader protocols of the community cannot give rise to political voicing properly. These mechanisms, rather than giving rise to politics, establish a discourse of pragmatic management. Further, the policy and legal mechanisms of government as well as the shared norms of activism give rise to a specific logic or orientation towards the sensible world. As mentioned, women's broader issues and gender challenges are within the public realm, but they themselves, as individuals, bodies and beings, are somehow beyond the realm of relevance, living in abject poverty and in constant fear of sexual violence. Many women cannot therefore politically appear or be visible to the extent of their concrete contexts being transformed. The challenges facing South African women, when viewed through the lens of the police order becomes issues that

has been counted, taken into account and named. As such, they are neutralised and naturalised- not open to dispute and contestation, litigation and controversy. The first research question stated in chapter one of the thesis is: What directions for thought and useful lines of thinking are opened up by an exploration of the work of Rancière? I argue in chapter two that the distribution of the sensible becomes valuable as mechanism and concept, as idea and tool. The topography of the visible and sayable provides a ground from where to think through and intervene in the structures that set up the well-ordered partitions of voice and silence. More importantly, Rancière's work on politics allows us to ask to what extent certain mechanisms and societal consensus becomes part of the inner logic of the police order and as such contributes to silencing. Policy and juridical frameworks as well as the shared norms of society create forms of inclusion and exclusion. These frameworks produce spaces of silence. It selectively frames and interprets, lending an air of inevitability and postulating the given or "the way things are".

In chapter three, I explain the fact that Rancière's formulations on politics were built on his encounters with the figures of Joseph Jacotot and Gabriel Gauny. Radical intellectual equality resulted in the political presupposition of equality. Equality, declared from the outset, is a destabilising force that discloses political opportunities of emancipation against institutional power and postulates poetry, invention, thought and creation. Equality is used to make space for politics. Gauny and the other worker-poets displaced distinctions and thereby created possibilities for voicing. These figures displaced predestined spaces, places, times, identities and in this regard voicing consists of a radical redistribution of spatio-temporal locales. The rejection of identities stamped on bodies by dominant discourses reveals a space where voice can be radically reconfigured. The discussions in chapter three give rise to the question of how we are to approach the notion of political voice against the background of the difficulties, complexities and precariousness of voicing when it comes to many South African women. Within a Rancièrian understanding, characters, concepts and ways of writing are framed in such a way so as to refute various lines of thinking. Writing

becomes an aesthetic-political expanding of perception that can divide the capacities of voice and silence anew. Within Rancière's conception of politics our thinking on voice and our writing about voice highlights the fragility of voice. It was mentioned that voice cannot emerge from a proper body, in its proper location tied to specific forms of speech. It cannot be traced along the lines of established categories. Our approaches are in themselves political practices and therefore require dissensual methods that invent new forms of sensible structures from where to engage.

In chapter four I discuss Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" An analysis of Spivak's essay highlights the fact that women in the global South are confronted by a particular set of difficulties when it comes to political voicing. The discourses of masculinity, patriarchy and imperialism serves to, in Spivak's analysis, silence the voices of women. Against the background of the voices of South African women Spivak also highlights in what way mechanisms of human rights and gender equality serve to maintain the *status quo* rather than contributing to the creation of spaces where voices can be revealed. Spivak warns against the dangers of representation and underlines that "speaking" always already belongs to an existing structure of domination. When reading Spivak's assertions through the lens of Rancière's politics, it would seem as if, from this perspective, the subaltern can speak through radical forms of equality. Rancière's politics emphasises how voicing is about disidentification and the delegitimation of speaking positions. Although voicing functions within the police order that we must live in, we can upset the order of the police's discourse and mobilise obligations to hear. Equality can give rise to paradoxical confusing identities that work in-between dominant political spheres, names and spaces. The subaltern is confronted by dominant established frameworks and discourses that function in certain circumstances to efface voice, but voicing can occur by way of the disembodiment of the subaltern from the discourses that produce her. Rancière's politics points to the question of how we close off opportunities for equality in our theorising and shifts the point of focus to the possibility of voices declaring equality.

In chapter five I attempt to trace redistributions of the sensible as a way of further reflecting on the notion of voice. Reacting against the difficulties surrounding the political voicing and visibility of many South African women sketched out in the first chapter, I explore certain figures that map different trajectories of the visible and sayable. Highlighting verifications of equality and valorising redistributions of the sensible, these figures give rise to voicing thought not to exist. De Gouges demonstrates the invention that is characteristic to Rancière's political subject. Working in-between and handling double meanings, she presented a political case for women to be counted as having the right to participate in politics. Inventing an argument and the ground from which this argument counts, De Gouges divides the parameters of inclusion and exclusion anew. Lucy similarly divides anew by acting and speaking in a way that point to another time and place and another way of living. Lucy's voice cannot simply be located. She resists easy readings and as such becomes an alternative figure of division. The political statements of Abahlali baseMjondolo represent a declaration of equality that lays the contingency of inequality bare. Against dominant configurations that would see them unable to understand the mechanism of government and governance, Abahlali sustains struggle and engagement, stating that they also think and that they cannot easily be confined to the peripheries of the city. The discussion of Bhubaneswari revealed the politics of voice. A different reading doesn't attempt to make Bhubaneswari speak, but rather demonstrates that politics work between the lines of what can be seen and interpreted as voice and what cannot. An alternative telling therefore reveals an impossible voicing that maps a different relation between voice and silence.

Continuously working against the grain of established frameworks of visibility, intelligibly and perceptibility, Rancière's thinking opens up a different framework from where to consider what it means to speak. He invites us to contemplate, under the presupposition of equality, new ways of acting, speaking and doing in order to displace current norms of voice. Mapping times, places, spaces,

capacities and sensible distributions, his politics implicitly raises the question of how we are to continue to resist the established formations of voice.

It was mentioned in chapter one that Rancière's work on politics is but one way in which to imagine the notion of political voice. After exploring Rancière's formulations, this description becomes even more accurate. In the context of Rancière's conception of politics, implicit in the notion voice, is imagination. Rancière points us to a radical, dissensual, egalitarian call to contest the very definitions of what it means to have a voice. Politics is the process of inventing a voice. We always have invention at our disposal; invention against the way it is, against inevitability and naturalisation, against the mechanisms of silence and against the domain of the impossible.

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