

**Between Mastery and Subjectivization; *Jacques Rancière and
a Politics of Art without Foundation***

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I declare that the work presented in the thesis is my own:

Abstract

The central theme of this thesis is the connection between art and politics focussing in particular on its recent post-foundational formulation by Jacques Rancière. While Rancière does provide a convincing articulation as to what a political or critical art practice might look like or hope to achieve, I contest his position whenever the constraints of the art-politics interconnection is unjustifiable.

Chapter One.(a) provides an overview of Rancière's philosophical system, which prepares the ground for an analysis of Duncan Campbell's artists' film *Falls Burns Malone Fiddles* (2003). Chapter One.(b) reads this work as an exemplary instance of that 'dissensual' spectatorial experience that Rancière associates with aesthetic regime art. In Chapter Two I address the 'cultural sociology' of Pierre Bourdieu accusing him of a type of (foundational) metaphysical thinking, which leads inexorably to a determinist understanding of spectatorial subjectivity, as well as securing for himself a position of mastery. Similar accusations are made in relation to the work of Andrea Fraser as represented by her performance *Official Welcome* (2001).

In Chapter Three I attempt to expose a limitation in Rancière's assessment of art's criticality. In trying to protect art from the dangers of performing an authoritarian role within society, he erects unnecessary barriers to thinking the artist as politically committed. I attempt to hurdle those obstacles, so as to stretch his system to accommodate a figure of the artist as *directly* performing political subjectivization. This alteration both significantly changes his aesthetic philosophy, while retaining its constitutive logic. This chapter is therefore a polemical intervention into Rancière's influential discourse, a questioning of the validity of his ethico-theoretical decision to exclude a specific type of commitment from art. From this customised position I re-describe the political functioning of Suzanne Lacy's canonical feminist artwork *In Mourning and in Rage* (1977).

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Introduction

The central theme of this thesis is the connection between art and politics focussing in particular on its recent formulation by Jacques Rancière. I take Rancière to propose a “post-foundational political thought” (Marchart 2007) in which art takes a privileged role. Contemporary art is situated under a historical regime of identification, which Rancière terms “aesthetic” (2004c, pp.22-29). One way of articulating the politicality of aesthetic art is to say that it enables an emancipatory spectatorial experience; art can cause the social order to waver, to appear less concrete than before (Rancière 2004c, pp.63-66). However, for Rancière, this action on ‘the social’ through envisioning it differently ‘falls-short’ of any particular populist political action or, in other words, cannot directly partake in ‘subjectivization’. This term names a ‘paradoxical’ collective subject (Rancière 1999, pp.35-42) which emerges in dissensus with the social status quo - the police order (Rancière 1999, pp.21-42) - around a specific demand for equality (‘we want higher wages, or rights denied us but afforded others’, etc) and thereby begins a political sequence. It is the task of Chapter One.(a)¹ to explicate Rancière’s theory of politics defining and contextualizing his concepts of subjectivization and the police order. I pay particular attention to his quasi-transcendental notion of equality, which is compared to similar ‘deconstructive’ concepts within the philosophy of Jacques Derrida (1997, p.141-164, 269-316).

Art, then, has its own politics which is not that of subjectivization. Rancière states this explicitly in a conversation with Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey, claiming that the politics of collective action (subjectivization) can be “truly distinguished” from that of art-politics (Rancière 2007a, p.264). Also Rancière most often frames the difference between these two ‘politics’ in this way: for an artwork to become directly involved in collective political struggle it will attempt to hail a spectator, to convince them to join a cause. And this is problematic within the context of the aesthetic experience because its disorderly nature disrupts the transmission of any (singular) communication: “[the] core problem is that there is no criterion for establishing an appropriate correlation between the politics of

¹ In recognition of the impossibility of entirely separating Rancière’s understanding of politics from his understanding of art and the aesthetic, I have split my first chapter into two, parts (a) and (b). Part One.(a) brackets his notion of the emancipatory potential of art and the aesthetic to concentrate on his formulation of the police order and its disruption by ‘political equality’. Section One.(b) focuses on Rancière’s theorisation of the interconnection of art and politics.

aesthetics and the aesthetics of politics [subjectivization]" (Rancière 2004c, p.62). Art can therefore not guarantee the effect it will have on any potential collective political subject. See also Rancière's *Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art* (2008a) for another clear expression of this argument. This partition between art-politics and the politics of subjectivization is the subject of Chapter Three.

However this 'partitioning' does not mean that we should underestimate Rancière's conception of the politics of aesthetics, which is certainly a form of *political action* (2007b). Presenting (or interpreting) 'reality' as disorderly, rather than 'naturally ordered' is part of the process of changing that reality, a first step. However the politics of subjectivization is different, involving as it does a specific hailing of the police order, an attempt to oblige the beneficiaries of hierarchy to 'apprehend' a particular social inequality (Rancière 1995, p.86). I therefore call this latter politics, in comparison with the former, a *more* targeted, direct or active approach².

According to Rancière it is this attempt to 'hail' that problematizes the aesthetic status of some art. Aesthetic art's political worth is tied to the way it renders *all* police orders suspect; to fight for a specific cause, to make direct political claims on behalf of oneself, or for others is to side with a project to *build another order* and as such instrumentalizes art. In these instances artwork acts dogmatically, or ethically, which amounts to the same thing, and enforces the stultifying logic of 'mastery' (Rancière 1991; 2004c, pp.49-50). I produce a detailed analysis of mastery in Chapter Two. This position of dogmatism is antithetic to the definition of aesthetic regime art, so we could say that the practice of a master becomes something other than art. Rather, what is desired is a work that opens itself to a political reading without dictating what that reading ought to be.

It is within these arguments that I have attempted to negotiate some distance from Rancière. This project is, ultimately, an attempt to think - contra Rancière - certain types of practice as directly political, that is, a *contribution* to a particular subjectivization; the artwork becomes part of a collective demonstration tied-up with a semantic demand,

² However 'collective political action as art' is not aggressive to the 'politics of aesthetics', and one is not necessarily better than the other; they both would seem to have strengths and weaknesses, which I discuss in Chapter Three.

which has equality as its final quasi-referent. And this project proceeds by clarifying the difference between Rancière's concepts of mastery and subjectivization as they are deployed in relation to art and the aesthetic.

But let me make two preliminary points concerning the precise nature of my intervention. First, I follow Rancière when he insists that art offers an enshrined equality which can lead to emancipatory interpretation. In Chapter One.(b) I describe Duncan Campbell's 16mm film *Falls Burns Malone Fiddles* (2003) as an exemplary instance of this work. The film is then positioned within the broader context of the aesthetic regime, its political efficacy described in terms of a mobilization of equality. Politics and aesthetics are shown to be profoundly connected by their mutual relation to this figure. This connection is explored through a summary of Rancière's reading (2002; 2003b, pp. 197-202) of Emanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790: 1972).

Secondly, I also follow Rancière when he asserts that to 'fight for a particular cause', to make direct political claims on behalf of oneself or others is problematic, *if done so* in the modality of 'message' (Rancière 2007a, p.258). To present metaphysical, secure messages within art leads to a position of mastery for artist/theorist and the concomitant stultification of possible dissensual readings through art. In Chapter Two I shall address this problem which concerns much work that views itself as critical or political. The spine of this chapter relates to Pierre Bourdieu, as well as his influence on Andrea Fraser. I read Bourdieu as one of the most formidable purveyors of 'messages' in the realm of art and the aesthetic. Drawing on theoretical resources provided by Rancière, Derrida and Judith Butler amongst others, I challenge his sustained attack on the Kantian aesthetic attitude.

Bourdieu's critique has to be dealt with because it is suspicious of 'the aesthetic' to the extent of debunking any 'promise' that it might hold (Bourdieu 2004). Bourdieu's account is therefore directly antagonistic to Rancière's. The sociologist focuses particularly on the falsity of the universal claim for the aesthetic. This airy philosophical invention is brought back down to earth by showing it to be statistically incorrect. The 'promise of equality' is turned on its head, shown not only to be an unsupportable claim, but a motivated lie which keeps the dominated in their lowly place (Bourdieu 2004). I conclude that the obsession with this secret-message-of-the-aesthetic is problematically foundational, installing a

relation of 'mastery' and serving to close-down the possibility of art as the site of a continuing resistance to power.

However, suspicious as I am of messages, I find Rancière's tacit denigration of commitment within art to be problematic (2004c, pp.60-65). My intervention, then, opposes the way his writing suggests that the expression of commitment, or an assertion about how the world might be 'improved', always halts Kantian 'free play'. I do not intend to justify all 'messages of commitment' within the aesthetic, rather I am advocating a paradoxical kind of message, what I call a 'political demand'. The activity of the master, who utilizes messages, and that of the subjectivizing subject, who deploys demands, is definitely not coextensive and yet Rancière's writing on art tends to blur them together.

Context

The various 'problems' this thesis addresses can be seen to emerge from, without being reducible to, a particular British art scene of the late 1990's and early 2000's. This milieu provides a certain pre-history to the current project. I refer specifically to that loose affiliation of individuals who might be termed 'the alternative YBA' (Beech 2009, p.9). The collective *BANK*, composed of an evolving core membership of artists could be said to occupy the centre of this constellation. They were responsible for a series of group shows, *Wish You Were Here* (1994), *Cocaine Orgasm* (1995) and *Zombie Golf* (1995) to name but a few, which held a certain mythic status for many British art-students of the time (1995-2001). These shows managed to filter into a collective consciousness, offering a template for what an exciting practice might look like. Worth mentioning too are the journals *Everything Magazine*, edited by Steve Rushton and John Timberlake, as well as the long established *Art Monthly*. These publications gave a voice to those artists and theorists contributing to this small 'scene'. Several *Art Monthly* articles – along with other contributions - came to form the basis of a book, *The Philistine Controversy* (Beech and Roberts 2002), an ambitious attempt to theorize a politics for 'alternative YBA' art. According to its authors this work had a certain critical traction, a conclusion I endorsed and upon which I attempted to construct my practice. However, this enthusiasm was - of course - not shared by everyone, Julian Stallabrass in *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s* accused Beech and Robert's of being "the Clement Greenbergs of *Fuck, Suck, Wank, Spank*" (1999, p.118).

Also during this time – beginning around 2001 – I started reading and becoming invested in post-foundational political thought, being particularly interested in the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (Laclau 2005; Mouffe 2000; Laclau & Mouffe 2001). At this point a contradiction within my intellectual allegiances began to emerge. I found the residual influence of Pierre Bourdieu within philistine theory – represented in the book by the centrality of the concept of ‘distinction’, and the author’s proposal of strategies of counter-distinction – contravened my growing commitment to a post-foundational understanding of politics. At the time, and more so now, Bourdieu’s description of the encompassing nature of habitus and the implacable reproduction of the social status-quo, which inform his understanding of art, jarred with theories devoted to the political transformation of subjectivity and the thinking of social change.

Furthermore the increasing visibility within the British art press of the Nicolas Bourriaud endorsed *Relational Aesthetics* (Bourriaud 2002) challenged my ‘philistine’ outlook. He theorized art’s politicality as its ability to establish ‘convivial’ non-alienated social encounters. Although I did not subscribe to this perspective his ideas contributed to a shift in the debate concerning ‘critical practice’ away from issues of the ‘antagonism’ between high and low culture, a central stay of philistinism, and thereby fostered a growing belief that these previous touchstones might not represent the ‘truth’ of political art. (The British reception of *Relational Aesthetics* was very much a delayed affair, certainly this work played no, or at least very little part in studio discussions or critical seminars during my time at art school (1995-2001)). The thesis then can be seen as an attempt to figure a post-foundational politics of art partly as a reaction to certain inconsistencies or limitations within my previous theoretical affiliations. In selecting philosophical tools my focus shifted from Laclau and Mouffe to Jacques Rancière. I quickly realised that his politico-aesthetic philosophy directly covered the intellectual territory that I wanted to understand and assimilate; from this point on my project preceded as a close engagement with and reaction to Rancière’s thought and is therefore not a general history or overview of art, politics and their interconnection.

However, the central ‘theoretical move’ made by this thesis, that is, the attempt to unsettle the partition Rancière draws between art-politics and the politics of subjectivization has not been conducted within a vacuum. My intervention has a broader significance relating to an argument within contemporary art discourse between those who advocate the position of emancipatory interpretation, often but not exclusively referencing Rancière,

and those who advocate a different model for art's politics; let us call it the strategy of 'say-what-you-believe'. This latter approach is hostile to the Rancièrian model, or what Rachael Garfield has termed radical ambiguity (2007), favouring instead the adoption of a 'clear' political position as well as a lucid expression of that stance.

In establishing 'the demand' as a possible modality of aesthetic practice I introduce another co-ordinate into this debate. This new position offers - what I take to be - a more 'direct' politics than that available under the model of radical ambiguity, and also enables a distance from the second model, a place to judge specific political stances. Not all art which 'takes a stand' and 'says what it means' is necessarily emancipating, in fact this tendency often seems bound-up with the authoritarian logic of 'message'.

I now want to sketch-out this contemporary terrain: let us begin with that cultural barometer *documenta*. The most recent exhibition seems to have been influenced by Rancièrian thought. (In fact he contributes a piece to the *Documenta Magazine No-1-3, Reader* (Rancière 2007d)). Without analysing the bricks and mortar of the show, Rancière's impact registers in the tone and vocabulary of Roger Buerger's catalogue essay which explains his curatorial strategy. *Documenta 12* is organized so as to enable a very special type of education. The show, following in the footsteps of the first *documenta*, sought to treat its spectators to an "aesthetic lesson" (Buerger 2007, p. 30). This phrase would appear to reference Friedrich Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters* (1794: 1967). Schiller's concept of *Spieltrieb* (play-drive) has been important to Rancière's political reading of aesthetic irresolution, or what Buerger calls "radical contingency" (Buerger 2007, p.30). These ideas translate, in *documenta 12*, into the advocacy of a non-directed form of spectating, and accounts for the curator's rejection of an explicit theme for his show thus enabling each visitor to experience 'as they will'.

Within the context of *documenta*, the public constituted itself on the groundless basis of aesthetic experience - the experience of objects whose identity cannot be identified. Here there was nothing to understand, in the true sense, no preconceptions, which is precisely why it was possible and essential to talk about everything, to communicate about everything. (Buerger 2007, p.31).

From a global to a local exhibition; *After Shock: Conflict, violence and resolution in contemporary art* (2007) is a particularly clear example of the politically inflected notion of ambiguousness. Yasmin Canvin explains the rationale behind her selection of practitioners:

The artists in *After Shock* have developed their own strategies to depict violence and suffering without shocking: they show us alternative histories, create dialogues between real and imagined narratives, re-contextualise images, use subtle, seductive or fragmented images and sometimes even employ humour. While the artists focus on the moments before and after violence has occurred, or on the effects of conflict, they do not take sides. (2007, p.7)

In both these shows then the curators attempt to create an 'open situation', the presentation of signifying material ("fragmented images") which refuses to "take sides". And, at least in the former case, this is seen as enabling a form of 'democratic spectating'.

My next example takes the form of an argument played across the letters pages of *Art Monthly*. The disagreement involved JJ Charlesworth, his political position expressed in the curatorial project *Fusion Now! More Light, More Power, More People* held at Rokeby gallery, London in March 2008. His 'opponent' was Dean Kenning with a different take on environmental politics, described in *Eco Art: Art Energy in an Age of Ecology* (Kenning 2008). The exchange was impassioned, each intent on separating their version of politics from the other. Charlesworth accused Kenning of pushing an environmentalist dogma unaware of its own hegemonic status as an "unquestionable orthodoxy" (Charlesworth and Kenning 2008, p.14). Kenning responded that Charlesworth had simply created a straw man environmentalist "a convenient fetish" bearing no relation to actual green-discourse, which continues to upset "mainstream consumerist and universalizing rhetoric" (Charlesworth and Kenning 2008, p.15).

However despite the ostensible distance between their positions there is a striking continuity to their understanding of politics as pertaining to art, in other words, they seem to agree on how art might be political. This is highlighted in the way they both find fault with the other's problematic 'instrumentalisation' of art. According to Kenning Charlesworth "begins from the position of a 'good' cause (...anti-environmental 'humanism') and then proceeds to measure the value of art according to this universal yardstick". This method produces "drab illustrative artwork and self-aggrandising declarations of support" (Charlesworth and Kenning 2008, p.15). For Charlesworth it is Kenning who, in spite of himself, is guilty of such an approach.

Far from championing art's special dislocation from politics, Kenning only manages to reveal that he is a political partisan... that he is an environmentalist, and I am not. (Charlesworth and Kenning 2008, p.15).

Again, Charlesworth and Kenning both 'want' an artwork that achieves its political effect by *not* being dogmatic, or proscriptive, an efficacy based on open-endedness: "Art's inherent energies are dissipated as soon as it is called upon to support a cause. God forbid that there should be an 'eco-art'" (Kenning 2008, p.1). And for Charlesworth: "The irony is that *Fusion Now!* was *not* politically prescriptive, asking the art only to imagine "a world based on more energy, not less"" (Charlesworth and Kenning 2008, p.15).

Another case would be that thriving genre of art photography which eschews the representation of direct conflict to concentrate on the quiet-but-telling detail. Some names associated with this tendency are Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin who work collaboratively, Paul Seawright and perhaps most famously Simon Norfolk, who recently produced a series of large-scale prints of Afghan landscapes, replete with the scars of serial occupations and bombing raids. These artists were all included in *The Sublime Image of Destruction*, an exhibition that formed part of the Brighton Photography Biennial (2008). Another name we could add to the list is Sophie Ristelhueber. Rancière, writing in *Artforum*, describes her work.

Sophie Ristelhueber photographs barricades on Palestinian roads. But she doesn't photograph the great concrete wall that petrifies the gaze. She photographs from a distance, from above, the little handmade barricades made of piled stone, which look like rock slides in the middle of a tranquil landscape. That is one way of keeping one's distance from the shop-worn affect of indignation and instead exploring the political resource of a more discreet affect – curiosity. (2007a, pp.259-261).

Here, a political subject matter, the contentious Israeli occupation, is addressed obliquely. The road blocks do not immediately exhibit their purpose, looking natural rather than man made. They are not accompanied by a slogan or statement condemning or praising either side. They attempt a neutral presentation of an overlooked piece of physical evidence, which through its indeterminacy offers a thought provoking entry point into this conflict. What exactly do we see and why is it relevant?

Two final examples, Paul Chan has written about his art-politics as involving a 'productive tension' between compositional elements: "a ripped piece of black pastel paper...the metallic blue light of a video projector" all remain "equidistant from becoming form or content"(2007, pp.261). Ambiguous! Similar sentiments are echoed, perhaps more explicitly by Liam Gillick, again describing his own practice.

Consider, for example, a body of work taking as its starting point the idea of a group of laid-off car workers returning to their abandoned factory, and who subsequently seek to create a resolved ecopolitical equation of totalizing relationships. Don't attempt to illustrate any of this directly but heap 440 pounds of red glitter on the floor. Red snow? Dispersed form? Rancière's ideas might be understood as a structural justification in this case. (2007, pp.265)

In these instances art-politics is associated with indirect illusion, rather than upfront statement. Chan and Gillick produce art which 'suggests' political meaning, whilst at the same time blocking resolved meaning. Gillick does not support a particular group of laid off car workers, rather his work establishes - the now familiar - open situation. In this example political content is enveloped in a fictional scenario, itself expressed through extremely oblique metaphors (that red glitter)³.

The politicality of 'radical ambiguity' - with which many contemporary artists, writers and curators seek to align themselves - is premised on encouraging a *continuing 're-thinking'* of socio-political 'scenes' (environmentalism, war, the Palestine 'issue', striking factory workers, etc). Unambiguous, determined images and their attendant discourses, on the other hand, petrify thought – stop it in its tracks.

However this petrification or 'halting' is re-cast positively under the 'say-what-you-believe' model, representing a decisive moment of commitment, or action. Free art collective make the point: "3.-No more ambiguity! No more irony! No more pussy-footing-around! Artists, it is time to say something and stand by what you say!" (Free Art Collective 2008, p.7).

This attitude is also demonstrated by Julian Stallabrass when he writes about Alan Sekula's slide installation *Waiting for Tear Gas (white Globe to Black)* (2000), which consists of several dozen photographs of anti-capitalist protestors involved in the famous Seattle demonstrations against the WTO in 1999. Stallabrass says of the installation:

This work cuts against art-world conventions in being an overt piece of political propaganda, and in having a specific use that comments

³ I could go on because this 'ambiguity' is now a hegemonic strategy in contemporary art. For instance I could analyse art symptomatic of the so called 'documentary turn' much of which is almost defined by its refusal to 'take sides'. Those exhibitions associated with this tendency, paradigmatically the Mark Nash curated *Experiments with Truth* at the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia in 2004-5, have championed the practice of artists who subvert the codes of 'conventional documentary'. This code-busting contemporary work is "increasingly minimalist, refusing to tell you what to think about what you are seeing" (Nash 2008, no page numbers).

critically on art's apparent uselessness. While the fostering of ambiguity and the deferral of meaning is standard in works of art, and is constantly insisted upon in their interpretation, there is no doubt here about the meaning of the work or about Sekula's attitude to his subjects. The work is designed to serve the movement. (Stallabross 2003-4, p.3)

Following Rancière I view much of what passes for this latter, more directly committed model as the problematic reduction of art to univocality, or 'message'. The problem for me is one of the politics being expressed (political outlook) rather than (so much) an issue of the artistic means by which this politics is articulated. Of course I do not mean to down-play the importance of 'formal' factors in the production of meaning, but my point is that we must also be attentive to 'content': what is being said and by whom? A 'message' may lurk under an ostensibly ambiguous 'formal' appearance. For example, as analysed in Chapter Two, the 'uncertainty' which inhabits Andrea Fraser's performances, those moments when it is not at all clear whether she speaks as 'herself' or in character is – in the last instance - recuperated as foundational political content. Also, as will become clear in Chapter Three forthright messages of commitment can be highly ambiguous.

The problem then with 'messages', indeed what defines them as such, is that they are conceived metaphysically, that is foundationally. (For a full account of what constitutes a 'foundational message' see chapters two and three). Both Free Art Collective and Julian Stallabross do seem to hold foundational commitments in politics and art. This is more straightforward in Stallabross's case because his writing on art exhibits a strong form of economic determinism. Capitalism plays an un-nuanced foundational position in his pronouncements on art, and everything else. This issue is slightly more complex with Free as their politics arises from diverse sources, including post-foundational references, thinkers such as Étienne Balibar. However this complex-mix often falls back onto a crudely Marxist and Bourdieuan appreciation of art and the aesthetic. These two slogans from their *Three Functions* banner series provide cases in point: "*The economic function of public art is to increase the value of private property*" (Free 2004) and "*The aesthetic function of public art is to codify social distinctions as natural ones*" (Free 2005).

However, I would not want to damn all work made by Free. The type of fine distinction I am attempting to draw between political messages and political demands requires a detailed and case by case analysis as undertaken in chapters two and three. This occurs in relation to the work of Andrea Fraser and Suzanne Lacy respectively. And just because Stallabross relies on a mode of authoritarian pronouncement does not necessarily mean

that *Waiting for Tear Gas (White Globe to Black)* is an equally founded expression. In fact the way that Sekula appears to be acting as part of a larger collective movement, or in solidarity with such a movement might suggest otherwise.

'Messages' in art then are a problem. This is *not* to say that I do not sympathize with those who advocate for partisanship within artwork. The strategy of radical ambiguity can feel like a restriction of the agency of artists. Rancière, when discussing the relationship between art-politics and the politics of subjectivization emphasizes the role of the spectator. It is she who, ultimately, 'realises' the latent politics of an artwork. (For a more detailed discussion of this issue see Chapter (b)) Aesthetic regime practices disorder sensible relations – revealing that the status quo might be other – but they cannot 'decide' how this knowledge might result in collective action: "It is up to the various forms of politics to appropriate, for their own proper use, the modes of presentation or the means of establishing explanatory sequences produced by artistic practices rather than the other way round" (Rancière 2004c, p.65).

Although artists can 'disorder' in more or less politically effective ways this 'resistance' when compared with the action of a subjectivizing group can seem 'somewhat' passive. Gillick makes this point when he says: "The weak spot here might be regarding the acceptance of contemporary art as a valid activity *per se*. Rancière leaves space for us to make judgements as to the efficacy of certain practices yet neglects (without ignoring) the questions of urgency, time, and of direct action" (Gillick 2007, p.340).

However what is the alternative? Are practitioners forced to choose between a politics of ambiguity or an authoritarian position of commitment? As already suggested there is another option. In Chapter Three I make room within Rancière's system for certain activist art practices as critique; my example is Suzanne Lacy's extended work *Three Weeks in May*, specifically the public performance *In Mourning and In Rage* (1977). In this context a political message transforms into a political demand because the ones who communicate are themselves indeterminate. As (previously lowly) now 'paradoxical' subjects they collectively express dissatisfaction with the current police order via a semantic demand for equality which removes them from their prior police positioning.

Their 'paradoxical status' insures that their demands are not fully founded 'messages', but ones *in formation, or in between*. Therefore a demand within subjectivization cannot be rejected from the aesthetic experience; the force associated with Rancière's theory of

collective political action whereby the police order is confronted with the evidence of its non-totality *can be* utilized as aesthetic practice. Free-play is *not* closed down via the demand made by the subjectivizing artist, as it *is* under Beech's and Stallabrass's calls for positive order and commitment.

Chapter 1.(a)

Jacques Rancière's Politics of Equality

Introduction

This chapter is a detailed exposition of Rancière's theory of politics-as-collective-action, which I have bracketed from a description of his theory of art-politics (narrowly defined). This is done for the sake of clarity, allowing me to introduce his key terms and arguments before moving onto their relevance for contemporary art; this task is reserved for Chapter One.(b). I begin with Rancière's conceptualization of power, what he calls 'the police order'⁴. I draw attention to the way this order substantiates its 'activity' by gesturing to an (apparently) pre-existing and necessary 'reality', or foundational principle (Rancière 2000, pp.123-124). Rancière constructs an alternative model in which the casual chain that leads from foundation to state (and other) instances of power is presented as spurious. This 'presentation' through collective action provides a virtual definition of Rancière's understanding of politics (Rancière 1999, p.30).

Secondly, I elucidate his notion of equality, which is shown to be a quasi-transcendental 'medium' acting as the condition of possibility for the police order (Rancière 2006b, p.48), but also – and at the same time – serving to thwart the full realization of any instance of this hierarchic social arrangement (Rancière 1999, p30). At this point I read Rancière alongside Jacques Derrida, drawing comparisons between 'equality' and certain Derridean concepts-under-erasure, such as "the supplement"(Derrida 1997, p. 141-164, 269-316).

I also describe how politics operates byway of a form of collective dis-identification, which Rancière calls subjectivization (1999, pp.35-42). This activity performs equality and in-so-doing highlights the invalidity of police hierarchy. This demonstration represents the dissensual efficacy of Rancièrian politics. Rancière's understanding of equality is then

⁴ I refer to *the police*, or *the police order* to differentiate the integrated nature of this phenomenon from that of 'petty policing'.

favourably contrasted with a 'positive' and 'distributive' version, as manifested in the infamous Stalinist *désastre* (Žižek 2000, p. 230). Finally, I defend against the accusation that Rancière's 'political formula' is too inflexible by establishing the way its quasi-transcendental character affords a contextual sensitivity.

The Police

The police, or the police order, should not be reduced to the "petty police, the truncheon blows of the forces of law and order and the inquisitions of the secret police" (Rancière 1999, p. 28). Rather Rancière follows that work of Michel Foucault, which posited a much broader definition.

The evolution of western societies reveals... that the policeman is one element in a social mechanism linking medicine, welfare and culture. The policeman is destined to play the role of consultant and organiser as much as agent of public law and order. (Rancière 1999, p.28-29).

All police orders are based on an '*arche*' (foundational principle) which guarantees, or provides legitimation for a specific 'governmental' shaping of 'society'. An *arche* is a hegemonic societal belief in a natural, necessary and objective value or 'situation' upon which a society is based: "[first], an *arche* of community [is] a single principle as to what the community holds in common...; next, a precise measure which allows... the principle of the distribution of functions...; and, last, the idea of a virtue which can sustain the community" (Rancière 1995, p. 75). For example this can be an idea of the 'good city' in which a rational philosopher-aristocracy oversees the social-strata; divine decree might provide another social map, or in our contemporary 'consensual' environment the belief in "a series of large scale economic, financial, demographic, and geostrategic equivalences" (Rancière 2000, p. 123) seem to provide a ground, for social organisation and political decision.

If we think of theories of economic [foundationalism], for example, they first provide a set of principles (the economic 'laws') which are presented as the essence of politics (what politics is 'really' about) and, secondly, they locate this economic 'base' outside of, or beyond, the intersubjective realm of politics, the latter being thus turned into a 'merely super-structural' affair. (Marchart 2007, p.12).

For all western 'liberal' governments the *centrality* of the economy is seen in an affirmative light. Capitalism is viewed as providing 'the best of all possible worlds' and supplying the

parameters, or measure for any questions of 'balance' or 'justice' upon which contemporary society is founded⁵.

An *arche* (seemingly) provides the basis for the police order's primary function, that is, the allotment of subjects to specific roles. Identities are given in conjunction with these roles and guaranteed by an understanding of the necessity of the shape of the whole. Every identity is entitled to a 'share' (or part) of the social; these include material reward, civil or legal rights, or the extent to which a person is able to register support or dissent for 'the system' via voting. The 'rightness' of the link between specific subjects and their police identity is supported through a type of common sense, propagated in multiple ways through culture in its broadest sense.

The principle of this kind of [police] being-together is simple: it gives to each the part that is his due according to the evidence of what he is. Ways of being, ways of doing, and ways of saying – or not saying – precisely reflect each person's due. (Rancière 1999, p.27).

As part of this hegemonic perspective it is recognised that not everyone 'can be a winner', can enjoy the rewards offered under the system (Rancière 2000, p.123). There will be those who enjoy and those who suffer hierarchy. However, within western democracies this acceptance of inequality exists in uneasy tension with a certain principle of equality, which is embedded within society, written into constitutions and/or the first principle of law and/or the taken for granted foundation of civil society (May 2008, pp.106-107). Also, as I will argue, a notion of equality is enshrined within our understanding of art. This enshrinement is useful to political activity because it provides a point of leverage against the domination of the police order (Rancière 1995, p.48). (I expand on this latter point towards the end of the chapter).

There are good reasons to distrust the *arche* paradigm. It is possible to accuse it of a type of symbolic violence that can all too easily take on real consequences. A 'positive' guiding principle when applied to society will perform a type of exclusion, marginalizing those for whom that principle does not represent 'the good life'. In Rancière's system this violence

⁵ There is another way of conceptualizing the metaphysical assertion of foundation: one can assert an *arche* as part of a critical procedure. For example, in classical Marxism, the economy is seen to be determining, but this time, the resulting social relations are viewed as exploitative and must be overcome. This critical position is problematic because it shares the mistaken faith in a transcendental ground. This methodology also serves to exclude, but this time it is other forms of critique or resistance which are marginalized. Those reactions to domination which do not conform to the model of economic exploitation, for example domination based on gender, race etc, are ignored, or recast as organized and explained in terms of capitalist exploitation. This type of foundational thinking leads to the problematic of mastery and shall be fully discussed in Chapter Two.

can be understood as the production of hierarchy through the police allotment of subjects to roles.

The distribution of the sensible is partitioned, across multiple fronts, into those symbolically sanctioned to 'govern' their lives, to have a hand in the formation of their own existence, and those not positioned to do so⁶. The latter are considered not 'equal to the task' and are thus voiceless, or invisible in this respect: "[the police] is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity [or identity] is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise" (Rancière 1999, p.29). In terms of our western representational democracies we might say that the majority of the population are cast in the passive role subject to the decisions made by a political elite. However within that broad sweep there are many micro divisions, hierarchy suffuses society in multiple ways: bosses often treat workers as if they are less equal, men might also behave in this way in relation to women, as might the ethnic majority with regard minorities. Also, one might be positioned on different sides of the divide in different facets of one's life, for instance, subject to heavy handed management in the workplace as well as propagator of misogynist private relationships.

As we have seen an *arche* is presented *within* any police order as the foundation upon which governmental and other decisions rest, preceding and justifying. Rancière's point is that this is an illusion, and that *arche*, society and individual, are all *performed* by police action in the creation of a shared "distribution of the sensible" (2004c, p.12).

The police is, essentially, the law, generally implicit, that defines a party's share or lack of it. But to define this, you first must define the configuration of the perceptible in which one [party] or the other [share] is inscribed. (1999, p.29).

In *Dis-agreement* (1999) Rancière gives several examples of the ways that police 'perform' the social. The 'classic case' relates to particular period of Roman history and concerns a ruling class, 'patricians', and their plebeians. The patricians produced their social objectivity by performing the 'non-comprehension' of the plebs. To the patricians plebeian speech was simply 'noise' – 'not saying' – equivalent to the lowing of cattle rather than fully human speech. The plebs are positioned as purely physical beings, fit only to be ordered and

⁶ Rancière's understanding of self-determination, that ability to have a say in the 'government' of one's own life, is very different from a liberal understanding. For him self-determination is coextensive with emancipation from domination, whereas in the liberal model self-determination is enabled by maintaining a 'reasonable' distance from state power. "By adopting the view that freedom is closely linked with freedom from oppression, advocates of the emancipatory tradition set themselves apart from liberals, who tend to see freedom as absence from interference" (Hewlett 2007, p.1).

instructed, unable to partake in power. The patricians natural right to govern, and to privilege is also produced in that 'non-comprehension'.

Between the language of those who have a name and the lowering of nameless beings, no situation of linguistic exchange can possibly be set up, no rules or code of discussion. This verdict does not simply reflect the obstinacy of the dominant of their ideological blindness; it strictly expresses the sensory order that organises their domination, which is that domination itself. (1999, p.24).

The sensory order then is retroactively posited by the action of power, rather than the starting point which necessitates the action of power; Individuals become individuals *through* their assignment. The whole architecture of 'the social' is, in fact, constructed through these acts of performative 'positioning'. This is one core post-foundational insight, shared by a number of political theorists, who postulate that there can *never* be a preceding and stable *arche*, upon which a society can be constructed. Following Marchart we could name Jean-Luc Nancy (2006), Claude Lefort, Alain Badiou (2002) and Ernesto Laclau (2001; 2005). These thinkers subscribe to: "the impossibility of a *final* ground...[implying]... an increased awareness of, on the one hand, contingency and, on the other, the political as the moment of partial and always, in the last instance, unsuccessful [performative] grounding" (Marchart 2007, p.2).

There is another important point in relation to police distributions; its effect is 'felt', or 'sensed', as much as known. To be the victim of hierarchy is to live in a world which one intuitively apprehends as brute and unaccommodating. The sensory character of police orders is one reason why Rancière uses the word 'aesthetic' in describing its effects. It is this understanding of 'the police' as producing a social order through the *composition* of bodies, beliefs, and sensory perceptions which leads us to the first connection Rancière posits for art and politics; they are both aesthetic because they organise experience and thought through an arrangement of matter, perception, sense, etc.

Rancière, criticising those who think that the rise of modern politics, especially Nazism, introduced aesthetics into politics, [i.e. Walter Benjamin and his acolytes] responds that, "there has never been any aestheticization of politics in the modern age because politics is aesthetic in principle". (May 2008, p.111, citing Rancière 1999, p.58).

So here Rancière uses the word aesthetic in a very broad fashion, meaning something like: pertaining to relationships or compositions which provoke experiential and conceptual effects in subjects. However he also uses the word aesthetic in a different way to name a

much more profound connection between these two terms. Art and politics both mobilise a notion of equality which is disruptive to the hierarchy of police. In Chapter One.(b) I will explain how equality operates within and through art, but first I need to unfold – at some length – the importance of this notion for Rancière’s system more generally.

Equality

Equality has already been haunting our discussion of the police. This is because any police order is actually premised upon equality, acting as its condition of possibility. We shall explore this rather counter intuitive statement in a moment when we compare Rancièrian equality with certain pseudo-ontological figures within Jacques Derrida’s ‘deconstructive’ philosophy. However, first I want to approach this issue using a less overtly philosophical vocabulary.

Rancière’s system is premised upon a ‘fundamental’ equality of all with all. One way he evidences this supposition is through his thesis of the equality of intelligences; all people – in some respect - are equally intelligent. This assertion receives its most significant elaboration in *The Ignorant School Master* (1991), which describes the pedagogic theory of Joseph Jacotot, a French revolutionary forced to flee his country after the restoration of the monarchy. He finds himself in Flanders and despite not speaking Flemish secures a position as a school teacher. In this unusual ‘learning environment’ he finds his only teaching aid to be a dual language edition of *Telemachus* containing French and Flemish translations. The book is his only means of communicating with the students as they lack a shared language. In the course of the year he sets them an essay on *Telemachus* to be written in French. To his surprise the scripts are excellent, and he draws this conclusion: people are equally intelligent, the differences between them lies not in their intelligence but in their attention. Or as Rancière writes: ‘what stultifies the common people is not a lack of instruction, but the belief in the inferiority of their intelligence’ (1991, p.39).

The task of the teacher is to promote the realisation within students that they possess intelligence the equal of anyone else’s, to give them the confidence to go on intellectual adventures of their own. The standard teacher/student relationship is actually aggressive (stultifying) to such a realisation, because it is premised upon the *difference* between student and teacher (Rancière 1991, p.7). The student is forever trying to ‘catch up’ with the ‘superior knowledge’ of the teacher. The ignorance of Jacotot in relation to Flemish, his obvious lack of superiority (in this respect) emboldened the students, making them

confident in their own ability, and produced amazing results, papers written on classical mythology in an alien tongue.

Let us be clear, the equality of intelligence that Rancière is striving to uncover does not concern amounts of knowledge. He is not saying that we all have the same 'stores-of-mental-information'. He is not even saying – fundamentally - that everyone is *potentially* equally able to perform certain 'gold standard' feats of intelligence, to become brain surgeons or astrophysicists, if only we believed in ourselves. (But it is clear from the narrative of Jacotot, that he thinks we would be more capable of achieving surprisingly 'high level' intellectual results if we managed to re-order stultifying practices...). No, fundamentally Rancière is pushing an account of equal intelligence, in which we all share a minimal ability to make sense of our world, to negotiate reflectively problems in our life. And this intelligence makes us all capable of contributing to improvements in this life. In directly political terms Rancière's notion of equal intelligence ask that we presuppose that all people are equally able to recognise if they are dominated, i.e. treated unequally, and then able to challenge this treatment.

Therefore, people possess a certain shared intelligence which makes them 'equal'. However, to return to one sentence at the beginning of this section, how can this equal capacity be seen as the 'basis' for police orders, which as we have seen are hierarchical and exclusionary? Rancière clearly states the reasoning for this outlook in the quotation below.

Those who think they are clever and realist can always say that equality is only the fanciful dream of fools and tender souls. But unfortunately for them it is a reality that is constantly and everywhere attested to. 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. Inegalitarian society can only function thanks to a multitude of egalitarian relations. (2006b, p.48).

Therefore the practice of hierarchy *depends* on an inferior being able to understand the command of his superior. For the police to function it must be preceded by a type of minimal equality. However Rancière is also clear that the basic similarity of people can also potentially undermine those police orders. In the next quotation Rancière, as he often (but not exclusively) does, couches equality in terms of language use; speaking beings are equal beings.

Political activity is always a mode of expression that undoes the perceptible divisions of the police order by a basically heterogeneous

assumption...the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being. (1999, p.30)

Therefore the police is both premised upon *and undone by* equality. The formulation seems incoherent or contradictory, how can one thing be both the basis for, and aggressive to the constitution of another? Contradictory it may sound, but also familiar, as this logic saturates the oeuvre of Jacques Derrida.

We have seen that in Derrida what makes possible immediately makes impossible the purity of the phenomena made possible. What allows a letter to be sent and received, a postal network, simultaneously makes the non-arrival of this letter possible too. What makes a performative possibility (iterability) means that a performative can always be "unhappy". What allows language to be transmitted in a tradition opens meaning to a dissemination which always threatens any transmission of a thought. (Bennington 1999, p.276).

As we have said, for an inferior to understand the order of his superior he must share a minimal intelligence, that is, equality with his superior. However the relation of superior to inferior supposes a lack of equality. The terms superior and inferior would be irrelevant if equality was admitted. Therefore the condition of possibility for hierarchy seems to be the condition of impossibility for the validity of hierarchy. The incoherence of the desire of a person to be the superior of another is revealed by the fact that this other must be minimally equal for the desire to successfully express itself as command.

Deconstruction

I now want to briefly map the, perhaps rather well trodden, theoretical territory of 'deconstruction'. I do so to aid my explanation of Rancière's conception of political action.

According to the terminology used by Derrida and many of his commentators, perhaps most notably Rodolphe Gasché, we can say that equality - in Rancière's usage - is an 'infrastructure' (Gasché 1997, p.7) or a 'quasi-transcendental': "And what if what cannot be assimilated, the absolute indigestible, played a fundamental role in the system, an abyssal role, rather, playing... a quasi-transcendental role" (Derrida 1990, p.171-82a/151-62a).

Equality, like 'absence, dissemination, detour, difference, writing' is quasi-transcendental because it in some way resembles a transcendental term, acting as a 'prime mover', a condition for the appearance of 'being', but it is not transcendental because it cannot achieve a 'positive' existence. Equality is infrastructural because, like Duchamp's notion of

the infra-thin, it is an in-between 'notion', a non-total difference; It is the interval which thwarts the desire for the full determination of beings.

We can see that a description of equality as weirdly *for and against* police orders does manage to describe the operation of hierarchy. This 'for and against' formulation in a sense 'works', but is it not still a rather paradoxical and contradictory logic to use? What is the justification for apparently tying oneself up in these logical knots? The point is that it may be a contradictory formulation according to common sense, or to 'classical' standards of philosophical logic, however the assertion of 'deconstructive' philosophy is that this formulation is premised on the *necessary* role of infrastructure and is the most philosophically astute way of explaining the operation of orders of all kinds, from conceptual frameworks (western metaphysics) to societal organisation (the police).

The real dangers for thought and 'in fact' come from the absolutely habitual denial of this infrastructural relation. Contradiction actually exists on the side of metaphysics or the police, because in failing to recognise their own constitutive logic they have no choice but to engage in all sorts of inconsistencies or aporias. It is the 'classical' idea of concepts which becomes contradictory in its desire to avoid quasi-transcendental or infrastructural logic. In terms of 'the police order' these inconsistencies have direct political ramifications, which I will explore anon.

In recognition of the encompassing nature of the metaphysical tradition we should probably start, at *this* very moment, with presence. According to Derrida, following Heidegger, the western philosophical tradition (western metaphysics, onto-theology) is structured around the principle of presence (Derrida 1997, p.23). Whichever way this value is figured the metaphysical mode attempts to uncover some supreme principle, which can be shown to be tied-up with this presence, no matter what its particular content might be. Presence has been conceived within this tradition in a huge variety of ways. The desired presence may be – perhaps is most often – presented as *currently absent*⁷. One might say that the term 'presence' operates as a privileged synonym within

⁷ I am referring here to the philosophical principle of *telos*. As an example let us draw on Plato's 'perfectly amalgamated' city (Plato 2007). Why is this 'good city' tied up with a value of presentness? The good city – projected as *telos* – cannot be improved upon. Although its realisation is 'around the corner', once attained, the city state will not progress as perfection will have been reached. In a sense the state would have no future, would exist in permanent present-tense perfection. The citizens within this ideal are necessarily present to themselves. Their identities and social roles are manifestations of the 'same', insulated against the possibility of differential hybridity or future change. They perform one function and one alone, and this is what generates the perfectly ordered social. This is why, as Rancière has shown in *The Philosopher and his Poor* (2003) the

philosophical discourse for other terms which also express the impossible desire of metaphysics, for example homogeneity, self-sufficiency, autonomy, etc⁸.

Why is this process of, let's say, conceptual 'figuring' or 'defining' problematic? Simply and rather schematically put, this desired 'cutting off' runs counter to the actual functioning of concepts. Philosophical concepts would be homogeneous and self-sufficient if they had a nucleus of meaning, of which they were exclusively in possession. They would then simply be conceptual atoms. However concepts exist in an economy of sorts, a system of differences, whereby they give and receive meaning from other concepts, most 'fundamentally' by the relation to a term positioned as binary opposite. For Derrida, these pairings, even if apparently without order of preference, are always hierarchical, the result of an "ethico-theoretical decision" (Bennington 2000, p.8) that positions one term as first, that is present or logically prior, ontologically more valuable than the secondary, ontologically 'mundane' term. This implicit or explicit denigration should be seen as part of the attempt to *realise* one term as contra its pair.

It is relatively easy to see how the metaphysical notion of the isolation of concepts is rocked by the proposal that concepts take their meaning from a "backdrop of others" (Gasché, 1997, p.129). However simply noting that concepts are relational does not challenge metaphysical logic, which – as we have seen – recognises this relationality so long as it be thought of in terms of total opposition. Metaphysics admits that 'soul' needs 'body' so long as soul is thought as the opposite of body. Derrida's philosophy reaches beyond this binary relation by introducing a necessary third 'term', that is, the infrastructural medium *in which* positive meanings emerge, and which produces (contra metaphysics) *non-opposite* difference: "There is no ethics without the presence of the other but also and consequently, without absence, dissemination, detour, difference, writing" (Derrida 1997, p.139-140).

polytechnic artisan, or sophist are such dangerous phenomenon for Plato because in performing multiple roles, they contravene the punctual singularity of identity that his perfect city requires (Rancière 2003b p.16).

⁸ This similarity is revealed if one tries to define presence. For something to be present means that it is not spatially or temporally elsewhere. (The fact that any *telos* is not 'presently' realised does not problematize the fact that its value is conceived as an ideal presentness to come). The concept (of presence as well as all other concepts) is premised upon cutting itself off in an idealised moment of here and now. It is in this moment of *realising* itself as a figure against a ground that presence names a homogeneity, self-sufficiency, autonomy, etc.

As we have already said in relation to binary pairs, the first part of the quotation refers to the concept of 'self' and 'other' within the ethical relation; no one without another, no self without the presence of the 'other'. But these binary pairs are *not* mutually exclusive opposites, and this is why Derrida appends a list of quasi-transcendental terms (absence, dissemination, detour, difference and writing) to the 'face-off' between self and other within the ethical relation. 'Self' is made different to its supposed binary by an originary interval, which *enables* it to possess positive content, but also *connects* it to that supposed binary, disqualifying the stability of absolute opposition. The infrastructure enables a thought of difference that is not reducible to opposition. This difference, or infrastructure explains why thinking concepts as positive terms, which then inflect (face off against) each other, is inadequate. The difference is primary and *makes* the concepts what they are, any concept must be therefore thought as originally split via this difference to its other.

There are things like reflecting pools, and images, an infinite reference from one to the other, but no longer a source, a spring. There is no longer a simple origin. For what is reflected is split *in itself* and not only as an addition to itself of its image. (Derrida 1997, p.36).

Thereby no concept, including that of 'self' within the ethical relation can be rigorously thought without including the trace of its difference – the differing interval – from its other within itself. The contradiction or paradox of the 'autonomous' self determining concept is at its most stark in this formulation. The desire to individuate, or make a concept present as opposite, runs absolutely counter to the *inherently* relational, or split and non-opposite condition of concepts.

This splitting or non-opposite relating is described or accounted for (Gasché 1997, p.142-151) by infrastructures, which are *necessary* for the production of 'concepts' and everywhere expelled in order to make them work 'properly'.

Yet that is as much to say that the concept – of ethics, for example, but all other concepts as well – includes within itself the trace of that to which it strives (teleologically) to oppose itself in simple and pure exteriority. As a result of this law constitutive of concepts, all concepts are in a sense paradoxical. (Gasché, 1997, p. 129)

Therefore, looked at in this way – from the perspective of 'deconstructive' philosophy – the quasi-transcendental explanation with its head scratching collapse of possibility and impossibility, is better able to explain concepts, or coherence, or meaning, or the bringing about of being, than the conventional model, with its respect for the 'integrity' of concepts or coherence, or meaning, or the bringing about of being. This 'respect' is its downfall, the

site of contradictions, paradoxes and sublimations. This 'respect' means that metaphysics will constantly deny that which makes it possible in order to attempt (the ultimately impossible task) of securing its purity. The inability to square its desire with the reality of its functioning is the site of contradiction, or paradox within metaphysics. Deconstructive philosophy avoids these contradictions by coming to terms with, formulating a theory which accounts for this reality of its functioning.

Deconstruction as critique

The demonstration of the paradox at the heart of metaphysics is associated with a type of critical procedure which shows the fallibility of metaphysical formulations. Deconstruction *works on* texts, reads them for slippages and asymmetries within their arguments. These are then taken as indicative of the constitutive contradiction of metaphysics. Or rather, the inconsistencies discovered in canonical texts led Derrida, (following Heidegger, following...) to an awareness of the necessity of a (sublimated) infrastructure, and this process of sublimation is then registered and elaborated in every new reading.

Famously in *...That Dangerous Supplement...* (1997, p.141-164) Derrida reads Jean-Jacques Rousseau and focuses on the contortions of language and argument within his writing. Primarily, Derrida is interested in the problems Rousseau faces in his attempts to maintain a distinction between the concepts of speech and writing.

That this binary cannot be maintained within Rousseau's argument – despite his desire – gestures towards a complicity between these terms and as we have seen this can be coherently accounted for by way of infrastructure. The oppositionality of the two terms is questioned; they are in fact shown to be connected by a certain non-opposite difference, which confers on them a minimal similarity. And it is the awareness of a certain complicity or likeness that completely undoes the attempt to dichotomise and hierarchize. As is consistent within Derrida's thought, each new 'discovery' of the necessary presence of infrastructure (to account for the contradictions within a text) is named differently. The denigrated positive term 'supplement' is pressurised by Derrida into gesturing towards that non-opposite infrastructural interval which ruins Rousseau's attempt to isolate and thus protect speech⁹.

⁹ Rousseau not only tries to keep them apart but the main thrust of his argument endeavours to prioritise speech over writing and to protect speech from writing's corrupting influence. What is at stake for Rousseau is an attempt to defend a concept of a 'natural' or 'self present' identity. Speech through its apparent immediacy

This undermining or 'shaking' of metaphysics, which proceeds through detailed readings and warns against "metaphysical purifications, essentialisations, totalisations and transcendentalisations" (Bennington 2000, p.14) of all sorts might be said to be the critical imperative of deconstruction. Rancière's understanding of the deconstructive principle of politics aims at outlining a more direct dissensual procedure. I will now outline this political 'action' and chart its various structural similarities to deconstruction as critical procedure.

Politics

As we have seen a subject's place within the police order is based on her 'allotment' by various agencies, this produces a 'commonsense' understanding of who that person might be and consequently how they deserve to be treated. They are placed in a binary 'framework' either as equals or unequals. Equality is also that interval which affords these relations of hierarchy and at the same time prevents their total realization. The police is therefore always vulnerable to evidence of the instability of its binary 'partitions'. Politics works against the police 'ordering' of society by producing a community, or group that does not 'fit into' the organisational schema, thus disrupting its neat arrangement.

Subjectivization

From now on I will use the term subjectivization or subjectivizing group to describe this community, which is really a becoming or between community, a collective in-formation: "What is a process of subjectivization? It is the formation of a one that is not a self but is the relation of a self to another" (Rancière 1992, p.66).

The subjectivizing group is not definable in terms of ethnic properties; it is not identifiable with a sociologically determinable part of the population: "parties do not exist prior to the conflict they name" (Rancière 1999, p. 27). For instance the Woman's Movement of the sixties and seventies might provide an example. Now, of course these feminists had

and lack of mediation seems to guarantee self presence. However Derrida homes in on Rousseau's continual uses of the word 'supplement', highlighting a certain definitional slipperiness to this term that undermines the co-ordinates of Rousseau's argument. To supplement something can mean both to add an 'extra' to an existing 'whole' or an addition to an absence within a 'non-whole'; "...it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence...its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness" (Derrida 1997, p. 144-145) The very language Rousseau employs works against his arguments' explicit aim. To describe writing as supplemental to speech is to both describe it as exterior but also to inadvertently claim a kind of necessary relationship, speech needs writing. Throughout the chapter Derrida charts the convolutions and even reversals that Rousseau's arguments undergo.

women's bodies, belonged to a biological description of womanhood, but Rancière has claimed that the types of subjectivity they mobilised – when demonstrating equality - broke with the previous societal understanding of women: who they were, what they wanted, and of what they were capable. In this way they formed an extra community – existing between positive identities - that had never before been reckoned with: a new non-identity without a role in the existing order (Rancière 1999, p.36).

This demand for equality must be understood as both motivating for the group in question, but also and at the same time declarative, or public, an attempt to confront elites, those who tacitly benefit from the unequal ordering of society with the contradiction of their position (Rancière 1995, p.48). As already mentioned, this contradiction is perhaps more likely to be revealed in democratic societies where there is *both* the enshrinement of a value of equality - the notion of equal rights is written into constitutions and/or the first principle of law and/or the taken for granted foundation of civil society - *and* a widespread flouting of that enshrined value.

The contradiction exists within commitments or between commitments and actions. A belief in equality is held, whilst at the same time being denied. And this contradiction is made manifest by political 'action'. This contradiction of commitments is a (more explicit) manifestation of one common to all police orders whereby a basic equality must be denied so as to partition 'the sensible' into inferiors and superiors. This making more explicit is the 'gift' of western democracies to political action.

This 'social' reality is a reality of inequality. On the other hand, a legal/political relation exists: the inscription of equality, as it appears in the founding texts, from the Declaration of the Rights of Man... This second relation has the force to engender a different social reality, one founded on equality. (Rancière 1995, p.48).

Another example that Rancière uses in this respect is a French Tailors' strike of the 1800s. In this instance, the legal moves made against workers to criminalise their efforts to 'unionise' are shown to contradict the preamble to the French charter of 1830, which stated that all people are equal before the law. The owners were allowed to act collectively, but not their employees. The workers, through statements and argumentation, began to point out the contradictory position of the public prosecutors (Monsieur Persil and Schwartz) who continued to deny workers had an 'equal status'.

If Monsieur Persil or Monsieur Schwartz is right to say what he does and do what he does, the preamble of the charter should be deleted. It should read: the French people are not equal. If by contrast [the preamble] is upheld, then Monsieur Persil or Monsieur Schwartz must speak or act differently. (Rancière 1995, p.47).

Again the political actors presuppose and demonstrate their own equality demanding it be recognized by the police. The argument made by 'the subordinated' is not straightforwardly recognised, because one consequence of their lowly status is that they are not heard, or not taken seriously. To return to a previous example: "To find out if plebs can speak is to find out if there is anything 'between' the parties. For the patricians, there can be no political stage *because* there are no parties. There are no parties because the plebeians...are not" (Rancière 1999 p.26). Therefore political action as the posing of equality, through speech and activity, is the contestation of this muteness or invisibility. In the case of the French Tailor's statement, they are posing an argument for their equality at the level of form, as well as content. That they are speaking out, addressing their 'betters', engaging them man-to-man as it were, is another way of registering their equality. A contentious equal relation is established where before there was none.

This posing of equality then forces the contradiction of the police order to be confronted by those who benefit from that order. In a manner identifiable with deconstruction subjectivization therefore emphasizes the minimal similarity (equality) of the inferiors and their betters undoing their apparent binary opposition and thus the ethico-hierarchic decision tied to that dichotomy. This minimal similarity (equality) should thus be theorised as infrastructural, that is, as the non-opposite difference of identities within a social objectivity. The collective activity of political subjects, wherein they behave unlike themselves and demand rights in excess of their recognised allowance, gestures to a necessary beyond of the conceptual categories of police and should be recognized as another modality of emphasizing, or accounting for, infrastructure. This 'accounting' only makes sense if expressed as 'we'. It is the assertion of a collectivity which precedes all limited orders. Therefore to point at this via 'activity' means that this activity must be collective. To demand the equality of all with all individually would seem a performative contradiction. (This is one reason why the collective invention of subjectivization is different from the self-creation of the autonomous liberal subject, which it in some ways otherwise resembles).

Finally, whilst this accounting for the quasi-transcendental of equality takes place the police order is shown to be - to both the members of the group and beneficiaries of hierarchy – entirely invalid, without *any* necessary foundation, a fallacy, a sham, a fraud. This is the point where the dissensual efficacy of Rancièrian politics resides, demonstrating the invalidity of any social totality.

Political activity is always a mode of expression that undoes the perceptible divisions of the police order by implementing a basically heterogenous assumption, that of a part of those who have no part, an assumption that, at the end of the day, itself demonstrates the sheer contingency of any order, the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being¹⁰. (Rancière 1999, p.30).

Solidarity

At this juncture, I want to make the point that the beneficiaries of hierarchy are not necessarily precluded from involvement in subjectivization. It is possible to act in solidarity with those who demand equal treatment.

Those who participate in a solidarity movement are not among the part that has no part. They are men who demonstrate for women's rights, straights who demonstrate on behalf of gays, Americans and Europeans which stand with the Palestinians, North Americans who oppose exploitation of South America, people who support the struggle of the Zapatistas and the indigenous populations of Mexico (May 2008 p.55).

The dis-identification that the subject-of-solidarity undergoes is the inverse of the one already described. The former disengages with their given position as superior to assert

¹⁰ This highlighting of police contingency or non-totally can be conceptualized in three ways. First the demonstration of equality shows the police order that there is a group, the contentiously equal constituency, who had previously been unaccounted. Before subjectivization there are simply individuals unproblematically allotted to a lowly role. During subjectivization these individuals emerge as a group in excess of their previous role, thus confronting the police with the inadequacy of their system of social organisation.

Secondly this group justifies their emergence from their lowly position on the basis of the demonstration of equality. The claim made by the victim of hierarchy is "I am your equal because all people are equal", not "I am your equal because we are the superiors of everyone else". This would not be a political claim. Therefore what is highlighted for the police is that, contra the logic of hierarchy, everyone is in fact equivalent-in-equality.

And finally, as we have seen, the political agent in the process of engaging his supposed better as equal dramatizes a peculiar feature of police order, that is, its hierarchies *depend* on the minimal equality of all people. The inferior must understand the order, and understand that she must follow that order, and therefore is minimally equal to the superior.

In my 'second conceptualization' equality is highlighted as the condition of impossibility of hierarchy; if all are equal then hierarchy is an invalid social arrangement. But in the third example hierarchy is also shown to be *premised* on equality; equality is its minimal condition of possibility. Both realisations serve to utterly repudiate hierarchy revealing it to be non-total, unable to accommodate the quasi-transcendental principle of equality.

their equality with those who are judged inferior. In spite of this 'reversal' the familiar political sequence is retained: there is a declassifying effect premised on the performance of equality which is antagonistic to police hierarchy.

When the dissidents of the eastern bloc adopted the term 'hooligans' with which they were stigmatized by the heads of these regimes, when demonstrators in the Paris of 1968 declared, against all police evidence, 'We are all German Jews,' they exposed for all to see the gap between political [subjectivisation]... and any kind of identification"... [Acting in solidarity] is *not* to claim that one is the object of a particular inequality, but rather that one is unwilling to accept the police order of which one is a beneficiary. Therefore one opts to stand alongside those who have no part in the police order in the formation of a political subject that undercuts the very classification of that order. (May 2008, pp.55-56 citing Rancière 1999, p.59).

Political efficacy

The police can bring a political sequence to an end via a (non-dialectical) accommodation of the collective group – meeting their aims – and to a certain extent re-categorising them. This is not necessarily an instantaneous process, but might take years of 'disagreement'. (Alternatively the police can ignore the demand and carry on in contradiction). The result of 'accommodation' is that society is made more equal for that particular group, now possessive of a new role, and afforded a greater share. However this does not wipe out inequality but simply redraws the lines ready for a new unpredictable contestation of power, and – importantly - each mobilization of political action pushes to the surface the constitutive contradiction of police orders, making it available for further utilisation in political action¹¹.

'Equality' then operates on several different but interconnected conceptual levels within Rancière's thought. It is a 'positive' concept given within and by our metaphysical western tradition, capable of being enshrined within western democracies as a principle of law or parliamentary politics. And yet it is capable of being pressurised by Rancière, and under political action, in a way analogous to Derrida's 'use' of the term supplement (writing, trace etc). Under this pressure equality gestures towards the necessary condition for 'being' (police order), and therefore the impossibility of its being total.

¹¹ In Chapter Three I address the issue of (non-dialectical) accommodation of politics by police in more detail.

Clarifications

Distributive equality

I think it is reasonable to, at this point, bring up the spectre of a type of social order which utilizes a notion of equality in a way radically different to Rancière; these police formations re-positivize this 'figure', turning it into an *arche* and, in many infamous cases, widespread authoritarian violence occurs. Below Žižek lays out this argument, to which, increasingly, he does not adhere:

Of course, the... answer (shared even by Badiou) would be that any direct identification of police (the Order of Being) with politics (the Truth-Event) [in my discussion 'equality-as-infrastructure'], any procedure by means of which the Truth posits itself directly as the constitutive structuring principle of the socio-political Order of Being, leads to its opposite, to the 'politics of police', to revolutionary Terror, whose exemplary case is the Stalinist *désastre*. (Žižek 2000, p.230).

In relation to this example I am thinking of those moments within Stalinism where 'dissidents' were killed because, as supposed counter revolutionaries, they were seen as inherently against the communistic principle of equality.

The differences between Rancière's system and any attempt to posit equality as social foundation begin in the fact that in the latter framework equality is *wielded by power* in a *distributive* fashion, which necessitates that it be supplemented by a further term, or positive feature. Through this addition equality comes to stand for a common-sense idea of the category 'people', or 'citizen' etc, against which it is possible to position those 'dangerous others' who cannot be assimilated into the distributive project. For instance all communist comrades are equal against dissidents. In the register of 'intelligence' these dissidents might be labelled 'other' because they possess a degenerate intelligence, which is outside and thus subverts the healthy mythical mean intelligence of an average citizen. These 'others' are then subject to the full aggressive force of power. In this scenario, whereby power allots equality, equality *must* be supplemented by a positive feature, 'a something' so that it can be distributed. Rancière's version cannot operate in this way because to allot equality immediately splits the social into those who distribute and those who receive. This is why equality must be 'pre-supposed', as the beginning of any political sequence, because if it comes at the end via a distribution it automatically negates itself.

Rancière's notion escapes the fate of positivization, its transformation into just another *arche*, because it is an 'empty' term. The political actor does not stipulate a particular type of equality. Rather the equality of all with all is an empty pseudo-universal yardstick against which particular exclusions from the police order might be measured. It cannot be a particular 'version' without risking its efficacy because the police order is only rocked by its encounter with a figure radically incommensurable with itself. The 'positive' version of equality is simply another police order. Furthermore owing to the architecture of Rancière's model, equality can only be mobilized by the weak against the strong. For politics to be politics it must be performed by the victim of hierarchy (or by those in solidarity) against its beneficiaries. There may be violence in this encounter but it can never be of the centralised 'devastating' variety whereby equality is distributed as norm.

Inflexible politics?

Another anxiety expressed about Rancière's political framework concerns a perception of its rigidity; the argument is that he imposes a set of political rules, or conditions, which are insufficiently sensitive to particular contexts. I think this unease motivates Peter Hallward to ask of Rancière:

Isn't there a quasi-transcendental or at least trans-historical aspect to your idea that the political actor, the universal actor, is always to be found on the side of those who aren't accounted for in the organisation of society?...What leads you to believe that this remains the rule in today's and tomorrow's political conflicts? (Rancière and Hallward 2003a, p.198).

Hallward is right that the structure of dissensus always remains the same, the inferior demanding recognition (or a subject dis-identifying in solidarity with this demand). However I think he is wrong to worry that this is a sign of contextual insensitivity. Rancière evades the problem suffered by other 'general systems' of politics which rely on a positive determining feature by which politics will always proceed and be recognised. For instance this might be represented by the 'crude' Marxist view that action with any hope of effecting progressive social change will always be that which attempts to appropriate the means of production. Activity that does not reach for this goal can be dismissed as miss-directed, the result of false consciousness.

He manages this evasion because equality is not a properly transcendental term containing a positive content, which would set a singular criterion for the practice of dissensus. Under Rancière's system there *is* a structural similarity to each performance of critique, but

because of his systems' quasi-transcendental logic, the 'content' of each iteration *must* always be different. As we have seen equality cannot be imposed. Rather, strictly speaking, it is nothing other than an interval which is the condition of positive social orders in the first place. These differing 'orders' are obviously massively varied in relation to their historical and cultural contexts, but also in terms of the multiplicitous relations of hierarchy existing within one context.

Therefore, in every political action the particular character of the hierarchic relation will colour the demand made by the subjectivizing subject, the identity they contest (worker, gender, racial, or 'other') and the scene of their appearance (from agora to suburban home). These are not particularistic 'identity' struggles if their demand centres on equality and not special dispensation: "[Equality] If it is a transcendental category, its only substance lies in the acts which manifest its effectiveness". (Rancière and Hallward 2003a, p.198).

Conclusion

Rancière's thought - along with that of notable contemporaries - is undoubtedly appealing, providing what Todd May describes as a philosophy of hope (2008, p.144). In a similar vein Nick Hewlett places Rancière in the context of an 'enlightenment' thought devoted to emancipation.

Alain Badiou, Etienne Balibar and Jacques Rancière each work within the intellectual and political tradition which embraces the notion of human emancipation. Associated with political struggle, resistance, and freedom from oppression, the emancipatory paradigm is inspired by the philosophy of Spinoza, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and Marx... such an approach to ideas and politics became less influential in France from the mid-1970's onwards, having been highly prevalent for two hundred years. But Badiou, Balibar and Rancière have each vigorously resisted the trend towards the various types of liberal thought that have become so much more current in France. (Hewlett 2007, p.1).

Rancière manages to re-energise this emancipatory tradition by mobilizing a very particular notion of equality, one which enables the thinking of dissensual political action whilst guarding against 'falling back' onto more 'reassuring' models of politics, those dependent upon a founded world view. We have seen that this achievement is reliant on a 'deconstructive' understanding of equality as a quasi-transcendental 'principle'. 'Foundations' are the preserve of the police, justifying the unequal distribution of the sensible; however this ground is always susceptible to tectonic shifts. Police order can

never be 'complete' or 'total' and is always vulnerable to the radical egalitarian action of subjectivization.

Chapter 1.(b)

Emancipatory Art and Equality

Question: What do you do?

Answer: Nothing much

Question: Nothing? Just try giving us an answer

Answer: Nothing...Erm...Sometimes someone gets a weird idea into their heads and they just start to carry it out

Question: Weird ideas?

Answer: Well the other evening someone kicked over a bottle

Question: What do you do when you just knock around the streets?

Answer: Nothing

Question: What sort of things do you do on an average evening?

Answer: Nothing

Question: Nothing, like what?

Answer: Err, lark about, no nothing

Question: Lark about how?

Answer: Nothing really

(Campbell 2003).

Introduction

This spare dialogue between interviewer and unresponsive interviewee is part of a monologue voice-over to Duncan Campbell's 16mm film *Falls Burns Malone Fiddles* (2003). This chapter begins and ends with a Rancièrian interpretation of Campbell's film; the reading serves both to continue that explanation of emancipatory art, which I began in the introduction, and to argue that *Falls Burns...* is an exemplary example of such practice. Rancièr's model is compared and contrasted with another version of critical art, that of 'dialectical clash' (Rancièr, 2005c, p.6).

The 'promise' of emancipatory aesthetic practices is then shown to be deeply imbricated with the quasi-principle of equality, and it is this which establishes the most profound link between art and politics within Rancièr's philosophy. Following his lead their connection is traced to a shared history; the birth of the aesthetic regime coincides with a certain democratization of Europe, marked, if not inaugurated by, the French revolution (Rancièr

2002; Rancière 2003b, p.197-202). Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790: 1972) is a vitally important text for the aesthetic regime, moving beyond mere influence achieving what Rancière calls the "efficacy of a plot – one that reframes the division of the forms of our experience. This plot has taken shape in theoretical discourses and in practical attitudes, in modes of individual perception and in social institutions – museums [and] libraries..." (2002, p.133-134). Rancière reads the third critique in the context of 1789 and its aftermath. (This historical reading is taken up again in Chapter Two when I excavate one philosophical context for the emergence of Kant's text).

Finally, I outline several political consequences of the "aesthetic revolution" (Rancière 2002). I propose that the institution of art (broadly understood) operates as an 'untenable foundation', and that it enables the 'demonstration of equality', as well as the aforementioned 'emancipatory interpretation'. But first I want to return to Campbell's film.

Falls Burns Malone Fiddles (a)

A disembodied narration by Scottish actor Ewen Bremner accompanies mostly still but sometimes moving images, which provide the core material of *Falls Burns...* Shot in the 70s and 80s and appropriated by the artist from the archives of community photography organisations in West Belfast, the images show the youth of the time captured against a backdrop of housing estates, and other urban locations. These figures drift past high-rises, lean against graffitied walls, sit proudly in customised bedrooms, play guitar; one girl in two-inch white heels and carrying a bag of chips is caught in mid air, leaping across a pavement.

The interview questions, quoted above, are posed by a sociologist, directed at a member of an ethnographic cohort, which possibly corresponds to the individuals who appear in the photographs. The dialogue acts as a synecdoche for the entire film. The sociologist wants to understand the motivation of his interviewee, but the non-descriptive answers can only be met with disappointment, which is expressed in the film by the narrator's return to first person singular, and his frustrated comment: "What a dismal effort" (Campbell 2003). The failure of the interview interrupts the desired smooth flow of information, in much the same way that the film interrupts the presentation of clear meaning. For example the voice-over is spoken in an almost unintelligibly thick Scottish accent, resolutely elliptical *not* conclusive. The indexical veracity of the photographs is questioned by the fictional nature

of the voice-over, which acts in this instance as a recognisably dramatic device, delivered as it is by a well known actor.

Sociologist and spectator are left without answers, or not the ones they were expecting. The film does not attempt to explain, even less to provide *the key* to the puzzle of these people on these estates in that place at that time.

That we expect, or half hope for this clarification is not unreasonable, the film itself provokes this desire. Simply by choosing these photographs, so loaded with socio-political resonance Campbell is positioning his spectator, prompting them to believe he has *something to say* on the issues of, 'The Troubles', or 'social deprivation', or the 'contribution of social deprivation to The Troubles'... I will go on to argue that he manages to suggest much about this material but refrains from offering a singular analytical framework. In fact the voice-over is about the very conundrum of forming such a framework: "How can I hope to deal with such complexity?" (Campbell 2003).

This question is not indicative of a stance of resignation, or quietism within the film. The narrator finds that silence is not an option either. He keeps trying to build an analysis, but each new method for encountering these images seems to confound the previous one. He starts with a description of the sensations evoked by their material presence, and continues with the application of sociology. Each method leads in new directions.

At this point a number of questions arise: Is this refusal of conclusion a failure to communicate? And in this instance a failure to deliver political content? Also, is this a disruption to the efficacy of any political ambition the work might have, for example to mobilise action?

Not according to that model of emancipatory art that Rancière (sometimes tacitly, sometimes more explicitly) supports. The commonsense understanding of interruption, or disruption as incapacitating the transmission of 'some type' of political content is rejected. Rancière's model is in fact a salvaging and reshaping of a very recognisable form of critique, one which has a rich historical heritage and which we shall call 'dialectical clash' (Rancière, 2005c, p.6). A few very famous examples would include Eisenstein's montage, Heartfield's collages and Brecht's theatre... The premise of this technique is that political content can only be expressed through processes of interruption. Disruption is the necessary condition of political artwork.

[Dialectical clash attempts] to produce a sensory form of strangeness, a clash of heterogeneous elements prompting a change in perception... When Brecht represented the Nazi leaders as cauliflower sellers and had them discuss their vegetable business in classical verse, the clash of heterogeneous situations and heterogeneous languages was supposed to bring about the awareness of both the merchant relations hidden behind the hymns to the race and the nation and the forms of economical and political domination hidden behind the dignity of high Art. When Martha Rosler intertwined photographs of the War in Vietnam with ads for petty-bourgeois furniture and household, epitomizing American happiness, that photo-montage was supposed to evince the reality of the imperialist war behind standardized individual happiness and the empire of the commodity behind the wars for the defence of the 'free world'. (Rancière 2008a, p.11-12).

The artwork with political ambitions needs to first disrupt the usual, conventional manner of relating to the world, which is understood as deeply involved with power. To perceive and think *conventionally* is to be in the service of the police order. This habitual mode is displaced through 'clashes of heterogeneity'. One frame of reference for image, word, sound is interrupted by material conventionally outside that frame. Classical verse interrupted by cauliflowers. It is only through this clash that the political message can be transmitted. And in the great majority of work in this tradition, the message reveals a hidden content which exists behind, or below conventional perceiving and thinking, acting as its secret foundation. For Brecht, it is only after breaking the hypnotic effect of theatre, for instance its temptation of character-identification, that an audience can begin to appreciate dramatic action politically. Therefore the lack of naturalism in *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (1941) prevents mobster cauliflower sellers being merely mobster cauliflower sellers, revealing them to be ciphers of Nazism, specifically Nazism as the progeny of capitalism, *and* reveals high art to be complicitous with power. The dark heart of Nazism and art is capital.

However Campbell's work, unlike that made under the logic of dialectical clash does not come to rest in the revelation of any secret foundation for 'everyday experience'. Rather *Falls Burns...* strives towards a type of suggestive irresolution. And this apparent 'failure' is why the film can be described under Rancière's retooled notion of critical art. The problem with dialectical clash is that it operates under an internal contradiction; its break-of-sense, which enables spectators to tear themselves away from conventional representations, cannot be made to come to rest in the stability of a singular explanation without betraying its originary disorder (Rancière 2008a, p11-12). Rancière on the other hand has developed a

model of criticality which supports art that manages to mobilise recognisably 'political' content but yet does not tie this content to one conclusion. In the quotation below his refusal of Brechtian terminology should be seen as an attempt to position his model as different from 'recuperative' critique.

Paul Chan spoke of an "empathetic estrangement," referring to Brecht. As for me, I would speak of a lightening, an alleviation, rather than a distancing. The problem, first of all, is to create some breathing room, to loosen the bonds that enclose spectacles within a form of visibility, bodies within an estimation of their capacity, and possibility within the machine that makes the "state of things" seem evident, unquestionable. (Rancière, Carnevale and Kelsey 2007a, p.261).

The Egalitarian Politics of Aesthetics

Now we are in the position to ascertain that more precise connection between art and politics. They are not only the same because they are both 'compositional' provoking experiential and conceptual effects in subjects. Aesthetic regime art is inherently tied up with an equality analogous to that infrastructural notion of equality (equality under the armature of Rancière's system, the 'pure' equality of all with all) already discussed.

The 'aesthetic regime' is Rancièrian terminology for that historical characterisation of 'art', which receives a significant manifestation in Kant's analysis of aesthetic experience, the *Critique of Judgement* (1790: 1972)¹².

Aesthetics is not the science or philosophy of art in general. Aesthetics is a historical regime of identification of art which was born between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th [and it continues today] (Rancière 2005c, p.2).

It is no coincidence that the beginning of this characterisation of art occurred during a time roughly commensurable with that 'democratic shift' within Western Europe, marked in the French context by the revolution of 1789 and including the workers' movements and upheavals of the 1830s and 40s. Both these 'events' (democratic shift/ new understanding of art) act to enshrine a concept of equality within the social; art via its new 'aesthetic'

¹² Rancière is clear that different conceptions-of-art are historically and politically conditioned, but his notion of constitutive 'regimes' retains a certain flexibility: "I differ from Foucault insofar as his archaeology seems to me to follow a schema of historical necessity according to which, beyond a certain chasm, something is no-longer thinkable, can no longer be formulated. In this way, the aesthetic regime of art, for example, is a system of possibilities that is historically constituted but... does not abolish the representational regime, which was previously dominant. At a given point in time, several regimes coexist and intermingle in the works themselves" (2004c p.50).

status, and democratic government via the successive drawing of constitutions which affirmed citizens' rights (Rancière 2002; Rancière 2003b, p.197-202). It would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that Rancière views aesthetic regime art and modern democracy as involved in a 'common project'.

But what exactly is this aesthetic status and how is it related to equality? To answer this question I must explain how the aesthetic regime supersedes (without abolishing) the previous 'representational' one. This older characterisation of art was premised upon certain social hierarchies, which supported and confirmed inegalitarian social relations. The aesthetic regime on the other hand, if not immune to hierarchy, is at least - in principle - aggressive to it. This is because this new regime is, in some sense, premised upon Kant's theory of aesthetic judgement as elaborated in the third critique (1790: 1972).

According to Rancière 'art' (singular) in its aesthetic manifestation depends upon the untying of the hierarchic rule-bound understanding of 'the arts'¹³. Under the hegemony of the representational regime there were clear rules as to what constituted the borderline between art and life, the strict separations between 'art forms', as well as those relations between any subject-matter and its appropriate means of expression.

Rather than reproducing reality, works within the representational regime obey a series of axioms that define art's proper forms: the hierarchy of genres and subject matter, the principle of appropriateness that adapts forms of expression and action to the subjects represented and to the proper genre. (Rockhill 2004, p. 91).

This system of hierarchization is premised on one final binary distinction; there are those who know enough to participate, who know about the appropriate form to subject relationship etc, and are therefore able to respond to 'the arts' appropriately, and there are those who lack this proper knowledge responding by way of mere animal sense.

As we have seen in relation to police procedures of power, domination is primarily a symbolic process. Before any form of 'actual' exploitation (slavery, the payment of below subsistence wages, etc) there is the cultural positioning of those slaves/workers as 'unequal', therefore in some sense deserving of their exploitation. This symbolic positioning

¹³ Rancière often refers to 'representational' art in the plural to suggest that regimes' insistence on the separation of different art-forms from one another (2004c, pp.21-22).

is based on a conceptualisation of 'the social' as being composed of the deserving and undeserving, the active and the passive, the knowledgeable and the ignorant.

Therefore the hierarchies inherent to the representational regime of art participate in that 'distribution of the sensible' which forms the basis of police domination or, as Rancière has put it:

All those oppositions, looking/knowing...activity/passivity are very much more than logical oppositions. They are what I can call a partition of the sensible, a distribution of the places and of the capacities or incapacities attached to those places. Put in other terms, they are allegories of inequality. (Rancière 2007b, p.277).

'The arts' are absolutely tied into the police distribution of inequality; a belief in the fundamental hierarchic binary of social relations is confirmed by the division within art between those who have knowledge or capacity necessary for inclusion and those who do not.

However under the aesthetic regime all these stable relations are challenged, there are no longer orders of merit among genres - and most importantly - among spectators. Why is this? As already suggested one can understand art's definition and status under the new regime as a manifestation of the Kantian theorization of aesthetic experience, which Rancière summarizes thus:

The spectator who experiences the free play of the aesthetic in front of the 'free appearance' enjoys an autonomy of a very special kind. It is not the autonomy of free Reason, subduing the anarchy of sensation. It is the suspension of that kind of autonomy. It is an autonomy strictly related to a withdrawal of power. The 'free appearance' stands in front of us, unapproachable, unavailable to our knowledge, our aims and desires... The free play and the free appearance, are caught up together in a specific sensorium, cancelling the opposition of activity and passivity, will and resistance. (Rancière 2002, p.136).

The aesthetic experience then is the adequation of knowledge (activity) and sense (passivity), creating a specific sensorium responsible for suspending the 'autonomy of reason', equating to a 'withdrawal of power'. This manifests as a relinquishing of determined stable 'meaning' (provided under the dominance of 'reason'), an opening onto a tumbling irresolvable 'free-play'. The aesthetic experience is a conceptual realm which endlessly disqualifies categorization and thus hierarchy. The new art becomes something like an internally undifferentiated - but importantly dynamic and unstable - concept. This is

the move from the arts to 'art'. Artists can mix and match low subjects with authoritative styles, also art's new categorization is necessarily impossible to finally *categorise* because those rules which would clearly distinguish between art and life are also jeopardised by the new regime; prosaic materials are included where once their exclusion had helped define 'the arts'. The expert loses his traction in this fluid situation. However, most importantly, this new institution of art premised upon the Kantian sensorium unsettles those symbolic categorisations responsible for establishing equals and unequals.

The power of the high classes was supposed to be the power of activity over passivity, of understanding over sensation, of the educated senses over the raw senses, etc. By dismissing that power, the aesthetic experience framed an "equality" (Rancière 2005c, p.3).

This understanding of art as disruptive to conceptual categories is incompatible with the ranked and orderly relations governing the representational regime. If the older regime is co-substantial with repressive police logic then we must understand Kantian aesthetic experience as in some sense 'progressive', 'egalitarian', even political. This interpretation runs counter to many 'leftist' readings of 'the aesthetic'. For example Pierre Bourdieu believes it operates as a false universal imposed by an elite - for their own gains - on the rest of the population. (Chapter Two provides a detailed critical examination of the Bourdieuan perspective). In the *Philosopher and his Poor* (2003b) Rancière accuses Bourdieu of failing to read Kant's critique of judgement historically.

Kant, however, gives the question of "aesthetic common sense" a larger and more precisely dated theatre. One year after the beginning of the French Revolution, his aesthetics presents itself as the contemporary of a century and of populations confronted with the problem of "uniting freedom (and equality) with compulsion (rather of respect and submission from a sense of duty than of fear)". (Rancière 2003b, p.197 citing Kant 1972, p.201)

To understand Kantian aesthetics within its historical context is to appreciate his theory of aesthetic judgment as a philosophical attempt to find an 'arena of experience' in which the new democratic principle of equal rights might be *realized* in the face of so much obvious inequality. For Rancière Kantian aesthetic experience and its later Schillerian development is an attempt to break the common sense understanding that these new democratic principles of equality are worthless because actual reality is striated with difference and rank: The question can be posed thus: "through what means can an equality of sentiment be brought about that gives the proclaimed equality of rights the conditions of their real exercise"? (Rancière 2003b, p.198).

Rancière claims that those who were against this new enshrined freedom justify their resistance to the 'new ideal' because they say it cannot be realized; people are simply unequal. There are those with different competences and social capacity: "the gulf separating working class brutality from bourgeois civility" (Rancière 2003b, p.198) cannot be closed.

The very ones who say that the people are incapable of ever making a reasonable use of freedom claim that the beautiful is a matter of either learned criteria or the pleasure of refined senses (which are, in both cases, outside the sphere of the common people). (Rancière 2003b, p.198).

These enemies of equality do not only make the claim that the new freedoms are impossible because of essential differences, but also point to differences in educational accomplishment. In the second chapter I will pursue Bourdieu's theory of art and culture as an instance of this 'stultifying' discourse.

I now want to unpack, in more detail, the political consequences of this 'aesthetic revolution'. I have conceptualized these in three interrelated ways. The first is what I will call a structural ramification ('untenable foundation') whereas the second and third can be thought as modes of political spectatorship ('aesthetic demonstration' and – the already discussed - 'emancipatory interpretation'). In outlining these consequences I shall elaborate Rancière's understanding of the aesthetic regime as 'historical dynamic'.

Untenable foundation

'The Aesthetic' operates as an untenable foundation. Owing to the 'unstable equalisation' at its heart it cannot act as a conceptual framework on which to found police order. There is no hierarchic dichotomous relation within the aesthetic experience, therefore a social hierarchy cannot be built upon its blueprint; people cannot be ordered according to relations of capacity and incapacity. Therefore a structural separation occurs between the category of art and any police order. This is radically unlike the representational regime which is entirely co-opted, where the same beliefs and assumptions about "innate" hierarchies underlie understandings of art, as well as society more generally. The aesthetic regime is characterised by dissimilarity between art and the police social. The equality within the 'institution of art and the aesthetic' is symmetrical to the enshrined principle of equality already described as operating within western legal or parliamentary institutions.

Aesthetic history

However this situation – art and the aesthetic framing an experience of equality – is subject to historical change. Rancière has constructed a detailed narrative which charts the art history (as well as history more generally) of the last two hundred years as constituting different trajectories through a ‘basic emplotment’. These ‘navigate’ the conceptual coordinates provided by Kant’s theorization of the aesthetic:

Militant workers of the 1840s break out of the circle of domination by reading and writing not popular and militant, but ‘high’ literature. The bourgeois critics of the 1860s denounce Flaubert’s posture of ‘art for art’s sake’ as the embodiment of democracy. Mallarmé wants to separate the ‘essential language’ of poetry from common speech, yet claims that it is poetry that gives the community the ‘seal’ it lacks. Rodchenko takes his photographs of Soviet workers or gymnasts from an overhead angle which squashes their bodies and movements, to construct the surface of an egalitarian equivalence of art and life. Adorno says that art must be entirely self-contained ... We could extend the list *ad infinitum*. All these positions reveal the same basic emplotment of an *and*, the same knot binding together autonomy and heteronomy. (Rancière 2002, p.134)

These historical manifestations can vouchsafe the promise of equality, maintaining art’s position as untenable foundation (and making emancipatory spectatorial experience more likely) or they can betray that promise. Before analyzing particular manifestations let us introduce the terminology that Rancière uses when translating Kant’s formulation into the historical narrative of the aesthetic regime. Kant’s adequation of “rationality and sense” is re-formulated by Rancière as the dynamic between heteronomy and autonomy (Rancière 2002, p.134).

Heteronomy is associated with a “life in common”, “the fabric of collective meaning” (Rancière 2004b, p.80) and autonomy with a disruption to that ‘commonality’ and shared meaning, introducing separation and disjuncture. Heteronomy refers to that *movement* within adequation towards stable meaning. Autonomy rather is that *movement* of separation which thwarts the full realisation of ‘social meaning’. It is when heteronomy and autonomy are held in ‘productive tension’ within any particular historical framing that art and the aesthetic can be said to enable an emancipatory experience of equality. But before I discuss what might be called the properly (improper) functioning of aesthetic regime art I want to describe those historical manifestations – plots, or trajectories –

where the productive tension is not maintained; those moments when a particularly influential 'reading' of art serves to halt the movement between the two poles.

This denial of non-opposite relationality is achieved in two main ways. Firstly through the assertion of the absolute sameness of these two poles, and secondly through the assertion of their absolute opposition. These 'moves' give us two plots or political (read police) logics. In the first heteronomy and autonomy, life and art are collapsed.

[The] common of the community will be woven thus into the fabric of the lived world. This means that the separateness of aesthetic equality and freedom has to be achieved by its self-suppression. It has to be achieved in an unseparate form of common life when art and politics, work and leisure, public and private life are one and the same. (Rancière 2005c, p.3)

In many of the manifestations of this logic art is identified with providing the vessel, or habitus for a new and final form of life. One might see the desires of Russian Constructivist artists as complicit with this plot: art as a category is subsumed within or subordinated to the social, restaging a 'representational' situation where art is complicit with police power. One manifestation of this is that the desired (absolute) melding of art and life acts as an *arche*, or *telos*, the (dreamed for) realisation of a perfect world beyond alienation.

This is why there could be a juncture between the Marxist vanguard and the artistic avant-garde in the 1920s, as each side was attached to the same programme: the construction of new forms of life, in which the self-suppression of politics would match the self-suppression of art. Pushed to this extreme the ordinary logic of the 'aesthetic state' is reversed... Now the fulfilment of that promise is identified with the act of a subject who does away with all such appearances, which were only the dream of something he must now possess as reality. (Rancière 2002, p.138).

This desire for a final politico-aesthetic reality dissolves aesthetic art's role as a *continuing* space of critical separation, which might contribute endless 'inspiration' for social alternatives.

The contra move – as embodied in the work of Adorno (2004b) – is also criticised by Rancière. The attempt to completely disengage art from life – to present them as completely opposite - results in a similar ossification.

The second form, on the contrary, disconnects the two equalities. It disconnects the free and equal space of aesthetic experience from the infinite field of equivalence of art and life. To the self-suppressing

politics of art becoming life, it opposes a politics of the resistant form. (Rancière 2005c, p.3).

Rancière is dismissive of Adorno's or Greenberg's characterisation of modernism as an attempt to give art a proper place and body by excluding its relationship to everything else. In the privileging of art as opposite to life, the category of art is held absolutely (impossibly) separate, denying the constitutive tension of the aesthetic experience: "The claim may be made purely for the sake of art itself, but it may also be made for the sake of the emancipatory power of art. In either case, it is the same basic claim: the sensoria are to be separated" (Rancière 2002, p.147). Structurally art becomes complicit with police authority renouncing *any* possibility that art might (even indirectly) 'inspire' emancipatory interpretation. Strictly speaking the politics of resistant form is no politics at all, rather a police manifestation.

What occurs within these plots is a separation and privileging of one term over the other, 'life' in the first and 'art' in the second. These discourses therefore represent a form of metaphysical violence which attempts to contain the 'aesthetic adequation' and the status of art as minimally separate from the social.

The equality of aesthetic art - generated through unstable adequation - should be thought as the condition of possibility (and impossibility) of the two other plots, and when not suppressed provides the rationale for the dissensual non-total structural separation of the category art from politics. This means that Kant's thought, and later Schiller's (1794: 1967) development of that thought – as well as all 'properly' aesthetic art - supports and plays a role in the new discursive 'text' that is the aesthetic regime. This text includes any democratic political action. Writers, thinkers, and political actors produce through their anti-hierarchical efforts, an unstable quasi-ground, an enshrinement which is accommodating to further anti-hierarchical efforts.

Emancipatory spectating

I will now elucidate those two ways that a subject may encounter this promise-of-equality via the aesthetic. (Under the hegemony of either 'autonomy' or 'heteronomy' these encounters must be understood as constricted)

First there is what I call the aesthetic demonstration of equality. We can exemplify this demonstration via an episode in the life of Gabriel Gauny a philosopher-floor layer involved in the French worker's movement of the 1830s and 40s. In an article uncovered by Rancière

Gauny describes that whilst working on renovations to a property he was able to enjoy “a garden and picturesque horizon” (Gauny 1983, p.45-46 cited in Rancière 2003b, p.199) as well as those who owned the house and land, thus demonstrating an equality with his supposed betters. This is again a consequence of the adequation of knowledge and sense. Knowledge does not enable the aesthetic experience, it may colour it, but expertise is not a necessary requirement. Thereby it is a site where anyone, despite their possible educational ‘shortfall’, can reveal themselves equally ‘able’.

Secondly and as already discussed in the introduction and at the beginning of this chapter, the aesthetic experience produces ‘emancipatory interpretation’. I have described this as a form of *continuing*, fluid ‘evaluation’ which is wedded to socio-political content. (As we have seen in Rancière’s characterization of ‘heteronomy’ as tied-up with ‘life in common’, this ‘social content’ is not an addendum to the aesthetic experience, but absolutely integral to its dynamic functioning). For example in speaking of Anri Sala’s work he says:

[He does not teach] us about a world calling for change or restoring a supposedly lost common world, the similarities and dissimilarities he pursues *interrogate the very criteria* that allow us to recognise what it is that is common. They ask us: what is it we are dealing with? What can we say about it? What can we do about it? The aesthetic link between aesthetics and politics is to be found here first and foremost (2004b p.82, my italics).

Sala is political to the extent that his work does not resolve into the presentation of a ‘common world’, but encourages a spectator to question said commonality.

Both these encounters then serve to undermine foundations. In the deconstructive terms of Chapter One.(a) the adequation of aesthetic experience, the dynamic mutual interruption of concept and sense enables awareness of equality as infrastructure. (Here then equality means two things; it is a method, sense and rationality equalized, and that which is revealed - equality as infrastructure - through this method). This awareness of infrastructure is a negative one. What is apprehended is the lack at the heart of common sense ways of framing the world. This awareness generates an understanding of how these framings might be other, for instance, a world where Gauny possesses the rights of those for whom he works.

However these ‘encounters’ with cannot fully ‘realize’ equality; emancipatory interpretation cannot fix upon one positive ‘social arrangement’. And the equality which Gauny demonstrates cannot be positivized as some general utopian social arrangement. In

both cases what we would then encounter would be the collapse of art into life, that is, the hegemony of the politics of heteronomy; Gauny would be the author of a new positive *arche*, which is always the basis of police order.

We should not underestimate the politicality of the continuing de-grounding process fed both by collective political action, and aesthetic cultural practices. This activity undermines the foundations upon which police order depends, revealing them to be frail. My description of the 'aesthetic institution of art' as 'untenable foundation' is an attempt to name how aesthetic art is, in principle, inherently antagonistic to hierarchy.

But similarly we should be careful not to over-exaggerate the political 'effects' of this situation. It is not that the aesthetic regime releases a 'wave of equality' which supernaturally – or in some absolutely determinist fashion – wipes out actually existing inequality. No, equality in either its aesthetic or political manifestations is simply a condition of possibility, a non-ground which as such enables dissensual interpretation and action.

The distinction between interpretation and action within Rancière's thought is productively blurred. He is very clear that supposedly passive interpretation is a form of action (2007b). Aesthetic spectating if it is properly improper necessarily contributes to the process of un-grounding, and is such political. However, as we have seen, this politics of aesthetics – according to Rancière – is not the politics-of-subjectivization. This latter form of action, which directly confronts the police over a specific instance of inequality, placing an onus on said order to acknowledge the contradiction of hierarchy, cannot be aesthetic practice (Rancière 2007a, p.264).

A question then arises here; can the 'disorderly' politics of aesthetics, those of 'emancipated spectating', be defined without reference to a futural collective politics which directly addresses the police order? It is my position that the politics of radical ambiguity only make sense if considered in light of providing the conditions for (the "first word" in¹⁴) an eventual subjectivization. Otherwise the aesthetic politics of 'modifying the fabric of the sensible', or provided by the promise of 'untenable foundation', would seem to be rather toothless, or circular: modifications upon modifications upon modifications... I

¹⁴ I take this expression from Rancière's description of the 'aesthetic demonstration of equality' by Gauny and other worker-poets of the 1830s and 40s as "the first word of heretical discourse" (2003b, p.200), a discourse which included those direct encounters with the police order exemplified in my discussion of the French tailor's strike.

understand that aesthetic experiences can be personally liberating; Gauny feels less crushed by the weight of the concrete world after the aesthetic demonstration of equality, because under that experience the world reveals itself to be non-necessary, precisely not concrete. However, if we conceive of this emancipation as always remaining private then do we not reduce Rancière's thought to a species of 'self help'; aesthetic emancipatory politics as a private 'positive thinking' whereby the indignities and exploitations suffered in life are made more bearable because one can imaginatively recast them? No, the politicality of emancipatory practice is premised on the notion that *at some point* modifications in the fabric of the sensible will lead to a direct encounter with hierarchy, a meeting between the logic of equality and that of the police. And this is not an end, but a new beginning because subjectivization itself produces 'aesthetic modifications'. This is obviously not to say that emancipatory practice which does not immediately or measurably lead to this encounter is not political, but its politicality should be conceived in terms of this *possible* futural relation to subjectivization. This makes sense conceptually and Rancière very often links the two political logics in this way, presenting the 'disorderly experience of art' as a resource for future collective political action. (See Rancière 2007a, p.264; 2004c pp.64-65).

Finally I want to introduce a distinction here between the types of art that contribute to the aesthetic regime 'text'. There are artworks and discourses which make a more 'passive' contribution, and there are those which *accelerate* the political potential of dynamic irresolution. There is some work which "stages the tensions" (Rancière 2004b, p.80) within the aesthetic regime *in an exemplary fashion* making spectatorial emancipatory interpretation more likely.

This distinction between 'more passive' and 'more active' aesthetic regime works might be difficult to maintain, but Rancière does frequently attempt to divide practice in this way. (He also frequently denies that he does so, not wanting to appear proscriptive)¹⁵. More

¹⁵ An exchange which took place between Rancière and Jonathan Dronsfield at the conference *Aesthetics and Politics: With and around Jacques Rancière*, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 20-21 June 2006, has contributed to my position on this point. The following exchange is taken from an edited transcript which appeared in *Art and Research: a Journal o Ideas, Contexts and Methods* (Rancière et al 2008b).

JD: I would like to ask a question of you [JR] if I may, and it goes back to your saying that the invocation of the ideal effect was ironic on your part. Do you think it is possible for an artwork to present itself without any ostensible political content and still be political? An artwork which makes no appeal of the sort that is being made by this art, for example, to any political event, to any state of affairs, any desired outcome, any change that it wants to bring to bear upon the world, and which perhaps could just be sheer materiality, in a certain descriptive sense, would you allow for the possibility that that artwork could be political, a political artwork, despite its not having any, as you put it, 'readable political signification'?

active or emancipatory art is that which includes some kind of non-totalizing political content, because this then acts as an incentive into the questioning of police orders. The content minimally directs interpretation. Examples would include his positive reading of Anri Sala's videos, Paul Chan's work and the photography of Sophie Ristelhueber. This quotation comes from an essay on Sala: "Those artists are political in the fullest sense of the word who are able to stage this tension between the collective feeling anticipated in the forms and the mute apolitical nature of these forms" (2004b, p.80).

This is not to say that other aesthetic regime work is not political, in that by 'encouraging' wayward interpretations it is generally aggressive to stable 'common sense' categories, and therefore supports the notion of art as a space for such interpretations. Whether this operation leads to a particular questioning of socio-political structure cannot be stated in advance. However my point is that certain artworks seem more likely to lead in this direction, that is, towards the politics of subjectivization.

Falls Burns Malone Fiddles (b)

I can now expand upon that reading of *Falls Burns...* (2003) as a piece of critical art with which I began the chapter. The film's title is an appropriation of a piece of graffiti, which refers to two places in Belfast, Falls road, a site of some of the worst violence of 'The Troubles' and Malone, a more affluent area whose denizens were thought indifferent to their fellow Catholic's plight (Herbert 2008, no page). In this subtle fashion then Campbell can be seen to introduce the socio-political situation that provides the backdrop for his film.

There are indicators of this 'backdrop' everywhere in the film, the Republican murals which cannot but set off chains of associations; 'conditions of near apartheid', 'infringements of

Ranci re evaded the question...

JD: Do I take that as a yes? [Laughter] Are you saying yes?

JR: In itself, no. You ask me to consider it just in itself but the point for me is: what does it mean an artwork 'in itself'?

I take his evasion to be symptomatic of the way Ranci re actively avoids proscription, not wanting to speak as a 'master'. However nearly all those examples of contemporary practice which he describes as 'political' do contain 'readable political signification', and therefore, (and because he was unable to agree with Dronsfield) I take the liberty of describing this 'readable signification' as a condition of exemplary political aesthetic art.

civil liberties', 'extreme dogmatic position taking', 'exploding bombs', 'cycles of hatred...' Similarly images of run-down estates, stained brutalist architecture, litter, weeds and broken paving stones seem indelibly linked to the failure of post-war social projects. We find allusions then, which might inspire us to build our own analytical frameworks; two places to start might be a historical overview of British imperialism or an appreciation of the changing nature of capitalism. However the film does not provide this for us, taking a more indirect route. An attempt is made to release meaning from this material in multiple different ways, rather than chase one perspective to its conclusion.

The film begins with details from photographs, almost unreadable as representations, presenting rather as pattern and texture. The voice-over tries to explain or situate these abstractions. I have mentioned the thwarted attempt to apply sociology to understand the lives of those depicted, but not the section which immediately follows. Here the voice-over turns to storytelling. The lives of those within the photographs become animated by fictional projection: "She walked along the balcony to the lonely stairwell, her childhood had been spent in a nearby house, since then things had changed... He was intrigued and drawn to her..." (Campbell 2003). This narration, which is surprisingly involving and uttered over an un-peopled shot of tower blocks is aborted by Bremner, chastising himself, maybe for reducing the material again; literary conventions replacing the already problematized sociological method.

The three methods grapple with the material, and in different ways draw a spectator into an encounter with these people, their lives and the broader history which envelopes them. But each strategy is ultimately rejected, the information or sensation provoked, immediately questioned or relativized by its replacement with another. This understanding of the constructive, rather than strictly archaeological nature of interpretation is particularly evident in Campbell's use of animated overlays: flat rectangular forms inserted into and across the picture-plane, or diagrams which disintegrate into abstract patterns as well as symbolic elements. At one point strands of barbed wire rendered in silhouette snake from left to right across the screen. These literally interfere with the archive material in their attempt to direct a spectator along different avenues of meaning.

Simply through the decision to work with these loaded images, as well as his thoroughgoing attempt to mine them for meaning, Campbell directs our reading towards that type of understanding described by Rancière as 'collective' or 'social'. However this movement never arrives at the hegemony of the collapse of art and life, in this instance represented

by a fully determined 'political stance'. This is because one is constantly pulled away from any conclusion, blocked by the introduction of a different analysis and taken in a new direction, the net result of which is a movement towards the pole of 'autonomy', or complete abstraction.

I could imagine a criticism of *Falls Burns...* that would centre on its overemphasis on 'style' and would denigrate Campbell's concentration on the details of clothes and hair-cuts. It would challenge the cropping of image to focus on a classic Adidas striped-leaf-logo, or question the choice of an image which draws attention to a piece of 80's knitwear, simply because its tessellating rectangular pattern rhymes some nearby brickwork.

Also the figures that populate the film are often fastidious in their self presentation. One particularly memorable image: a young man wears an immaculate side-parting, dressed in pale denim, cut off white T-shirt with thin braces matching a slim watchstrap. He poses angularly in his parents' red armchair; it is no surprise that Campbell has made videos using images from fashion magazines.

Is this attention to surface superficial? Does it detract from the seriousness of the subject matter? Under a model of dialectical clash I think one could answer in the affirmative. The (socio-economic) bedrock produces and is concealed by these alienated surfaces of the everyday. However for Rancière, these surfaces do not cover some 'secret', rather it is how they are divided or partitioned that is important. Where do the boundaries fall in the production of the distribution of the sensible? Rancière maybe allows us another perspective on these issues of style. Writing about the film *Vanda's Room* by Pedro Costa, Rancière has said:

Pedro Costa paradoxically focuses on the possibilities of life and art specific to that situation of misery: from the strange coloured architectures that result from the degradation of the houses and from demolition itself to the effort made by the inhabitants to recover a voice and a capacity of telling their own story, amidst the effects of drugs and despair. I would like to focus on a little extract that shows three squatters preparing their move. One of the squatters is scratching the stains on the table with his knife; his fellows get nervous and tell him to stop because they will not take the table with them anyway. But he goes on because he cannot stand dirtiness. Perhaps the complicity between the aesthetic sense of the film maker that does not hesitate to exploit all the 'beauty' available in the shanty town and the aesthetic sense of the poor addict gets...to the heart of the question... (Rancière 2008a p.14).

Although the youth of West Belfast would seem less marginalized than those occupying the almost medieval scenes of poverty depicted in Costa's film, there is still a sense that they are considered 'other', in relation to artist and spectator, suitable for attention because they are considered marginalized. And I would argue that this type of suitability is most often conveyed via documentary form. There is complicity between documentary modes and a form of othering, perhaps. Campbell's film avoids this temptation. And this is achieved, partially, through the application of a 'superficial' form of attention. By concentrating on the 'surfaces' of his subjects, he challenges that division between the artistry, or aesthetic sense of the artist on the one hand, and 'photographed subject' as passive, on the other. There are a high proportion of bands, and aspiring musicians in the film. Again in concentrating on these attempts at self expression, or self-definition Campbell asserts an equality between his desires, theirs and those of his spectators, producing an *exemplary* aesthetic effect.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how within 'the aesthetic' the adequation of rationality and sense, or in other terminology the dynamic of heteronomy and autonomy, frames an experience of equality.

We have seen how, although heteronomy and autonomy are absolutely connected they exhibit different political 'effects', what Rancière calls two different politics, plots, etc. Heteronomy, the in-distinction of art and life, the fabric of collective meaning, is necessary to think 'forms of community', to imagine how society might be different or better. Autonomy, the non-total extraction of art from life, the interruption or muting of collective meaning and thinking, is necessary to 'find space' away from *existing* communal logic, with its inevitable inscription of inequality.

These two terms are intimately connected, tied up with one another; they cannot in fact be separated. And yet as we have seen, Rancière, pursuing a similar logic to Derrida's work on the dichotomising and hierarchic tendencies within 'western metaphysics' identifies that a misreading which does in fact 'isolate' and validate one term at the expense of its (not quite) other has often occurred within the aesthetic regime. Attitudes for interpreting or confronting 'life' as apparently divergent as Marxism, the Constructivist art movement and the avant-gardist separatism of Adorno are determined by the dominance of one of the two politics of art and life; art as separate from life, or art as indistinguishable from life.

We can also place the model of dialectical clash, examined at the start of the chapter, in this territory. Brecht and Rosler attempt to reveal the secret foundation of 'the everyday' and as such their artwork proposes one political interpretation, which amounts to the presentation of an alternative *arche*, the collapse of art and life. (This 'issue' is examined in depth in the next chapter in relation to Rancière's concept of 'mastery').

However for an emancipatory interpretation to emerge the connection between these two plots must be revealed. This properly (improper) aesthetic experience causes Gauny to suppose his equality, and, so long as that equality is not read as a utopian *telos* to be *realised*, his supposition is emancipating.

Also we have seen how, what I have called exemplary aesthetic work, for instance Campbell's *Falls Burns...* manages to "stage the tensions" within the aesthetic; throughout his film the viewer is pulled between an experience of heteronomy, figured in this instance as an attempt to establish a determined political response to the provocative, loaded images, and that of autonomy which interrupts this 'meaning-making'. This does not amount to a stance of resignation or passivity but produces an active and fluid interpretation: The subject of Schiller's (and Rancière's) aesthetic 'play' is not so much impersonal or dis-interested as re-interested, or interested in new, more imaginative and less restrictive ways (Hallward 2005, p.39).

Or, in a slightly different register, this 'play' serves to disrupt the social order framed by the artwork, showing it to be less concrete than previously imagined. In this instance what is apprehended is the 'lack', or infrastructure (equality) at the heart of the everyday; which reveals itself to be a non-total construction of ways of saying, doing and making, and thus can always be re-formed.

Chapter 2

Unveiling the Aesthetic; *Pierre Bourdieu and Mastery*

Introduction

Bourdieu and Rancière both share a preoccupation with 'the aesthetic'. Both view the *Critique of Judgment* (1790: 1972) to have a continuing influence on the way modern western societies are organized. As I have outlined in Chapter One.(b) Rancière views Kant's formulation of the aesthetic experience as parcelled up with the democratic shift of the 18th century, which represented a move away from the political organization of the European ancient regime. Kantian aesthetic theory marked, or gave credence to, a theory of 'experiential disorder' which fed into and contributed to the broader disorganization of authority during this period (Rancière 2003b, p.197-202). And aesthetic regime art continues to retain this capacity for disorder and dissensus in our contemporary world.

Bourdieu reads this narrative very differently. The aesthetic experience is not connected to the democratic zeal of the late 18th Century, but rather represents the 'character' of the bourgeois class which emerged as dominant in this period (Bourdieu 2004, p.493). For him the aesthetic experience is entirely reducible to a form of 'social power', dedicated to the reproduction of an unequal hierarchic status quo: "that is why art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences" (2004, p.7). Bourdieu's argument against the aesthetic focuses on the Kantian assertion of its universality; this claim is factually incorrect as the aesthetic experience 'belongs' to a particular section of society, contributing to this group's class perspective (Bourdieu 2004, p.493). Also the claim for universality is not an innocent mistake, but a motivated lie, an ideology. The secret specificity of the aesthetic and the ideological use to which this secret specificity is put serves to reproduce social hierarchy, which for Bourdieu is always premised upon cultural inheritance. Aesthetic practice and judgment, which is co-extensive with the field of legitimate culture (including the field of

art) always serves - through displays of 'distinction' – (Bourdieu 2004, p.56) to reinforce the unequal distribution of 'cultures' or 'class lifestyles' which in turn feeds into the reproduction of social inequality within the economic or political fields (2004, p.165). The aesthetic can be entirely reduced to this reproduction, which therefore represents the 'truth' of aesthetic practice and judgment. For the purposes of my project Bourdieu's critique has to be dealt with because it is suspicious of 'the aesthetic' to the extent that it wants to debunk any 'promise' that it might hold.

The primary aim of this chapter will be to argue that there are two fundamental problems with Bourdieu's interpretation. Both result from the perhaps surprising way that he utilizes a species of metaphysical logic within his sociology, and both relate ultimately to his consequent theoretical circumscription of the aesthetic as a site for resistance or dissensus. First, I will claim that in attempting to debunk the false universality he sees in Kant's characterisation of disinterestedness Bourdieu actually re-installs another metaphysical term. Bourdieu's use of the word "reproduction" (2000) (of the hierarchy of cultural inheritance) represents an instance of what, following Derrida, I will call "transcendental contraband" (1990, p.244a).

A second problem or problem-set arises around Bourdieu's own formulation of 'resistance', or critique, which is premised upon his scientific method, and which ultimately secures for him a position of - what Rancière terms – "mastery" (Rancière 1991).

To set the scene for my first criticism I should say that Bourdieu broadly conceives of 'discourse' as ideological (2002 p.43), a realm of 'miss-recognition' (2004 p.172), within which subjects cannot realize the ways in which their words and actions are imbricated with power. For instance, to believe in the operation of the aesthetic, as described by Kant, whereby disinterest might enable 'some' discontinuity with 'everyday' experience (for all) is to already be in the implacable grip of social reproduction. To hold this belief is to immediately expel oneself from the possibility of recognising, rearticulating, or intervening against power; to attempt to do so 'aesthetically' is indeed a contradiction in terms for Bourdieu.

My discovery of transcendental contraband within the sociologist's system is supported by Judith Butler's reading of *Language and Symbolic Power* (Bourdieu 2002), in which she claims that Bourdieu 'resurrects' a base/superstructure model (Butler 1997, p.57). Butler highlights the way Bourdieu's positing of power as separate from the mere epiphenomena

of speech and other performative action, makes resistance through symbolic means difficult to conceptualise. In terms of my argument this 'conceptual inhibition' is a consequence of Bourdieu's metaphysical thinking, a fallacious reduction of agency premised on an impossible extra-discursivity of power as reproduction. I therefore accuse Bourdieu of *overestimating* the 'strength' of power.

However Bourdieu does envisage one escape from social reproduction; there is a knowledge (a scientific discourse *beyond* discourse) which manages to pierce the superficial, obfuscating, symbolically violent effect of the aesthetic: "[the] science of taste and of cultural consumption begins with a transgression that is in no way aesthetic: it has to abolish the sacred frontier which makes legitimate culture a separate universe" (Bourdieu 2004, p.6). If the focus of the first section of this chapter is to challenge the way Bourdieu denigrates the possibility of resisting power from within discourse – of which 'aesthetic discourse' provides one example – then the second section focuses on Bourdieu's work as critical practice. The sociologist both observes the functioning of reproduction and can implement correctives, to mitigate, or halt this social machine (Bourdieu 2004, p.XIV, p.1). The 'knowledge and action' of the sociologist might seem to throw-a-spanner-in-the-works of social power in a manner similar to Rancière's political action in dissensus with the police. However an important difference registers around Bourdieu's continuing metaphysical attachment. For him the issue of social reproduction tends to be viewed singularly, a matter of cultural-economic inheritance (ultimately a matter of class). This is where we encounter the power relation of mastery. The master supposes the singular nature of power and utilises a methodological approach which Rancière calls a 'hermeneutics of suspicion', or a 'science of the hidden' (Rancière 2004c, p.49). This method is calibrated to uncover the metaphysically conceived source of power.

The relation of master to non-master is adopted when a person with the special knowledge of singular power seeks to *reveal* said power, exposing its motivation and functioning so as to educate a public. Within this discourse 'the people' once armed with the 'key knowledge' might be able to resist, breaking from power. The problem arises because mastery functions by splitting a social constituency into two, those capable of resisting and those incapable, thus stultifying the potential of all to emancipate themselves (Rancière 2007b, p.275). I therefore accuse Bourdieu of also *underestimating* the multiplicity of power, and in so doing instantiating a relationship of mastery with the public he wishes to emancipate. This is a version of Rancière's criticism of Bourdieu in *The Philosopher and his*

Poor neatly expressed thus: “It seemed to me essential that I denounce the complicity between sociological demystifications of aesthetic “distinction” and the old philosophy of “everyone in his place” (2003b, p.221).

I then read the practice and discourse of artist Andrea Fraser as representing a form of Bourdieuan mastery. I understand that Fraser’s work cannot be entirely ‘reduced’ to the sociology of Bourdieu. However she strongly self-identifies as a follower of his ideas on art and culture, and her work represents a sustained attempt to translate/develop his theory into an art practice. She has written of the important role the sociologist has played in her development.

I credit Bourdieu with freeing me, or helping me free myself, from the sense of illegitimacy – what he later called symbolic violence – imposed by legitimate culture, “a product of domination predisposed to express or legitimate domination”. (Fraser 2005b, p.83).

Fraser is famous for performances which intervene into museum and gallery spaces and parody the multiple pretensions of art. Here Bourdieu describes Fraser’s work, reciprocating her dedication to his sociology with praise:

What we have here [in Fraser’s practice] is thus a perfectly exemplary intellectual act, lucid and courageous, which breaks with all the complicities and complacencies of the ordinary routine of artistic life and casts a brutal, cold, and sometimes blinding light on the sacrosanct mysteries of the cult of the artwork’. (Bourdieu 2005c, p.XIV).

I will analyse one such intervention *Official Welcome*, a monologue by the artist, commissioned by the MICA Foundation and first performed in 2001, which functions as a parody of those inaugural welcome speeches that artists and their supporters are asked to give at the opening of exhibitions.

Reading Bourdieu and Fraser together allows me to introduce the figure of the artist who communicates as master, providing a transition between my criticism of Bourdieu’s reading of the aesthetic and a more general discussion of mastery within much so called critical art. I will argue that Fraser’s adoption of a position of mastery has two main consequences.

Firstly, she communicates with her audience in ‘determined messages’. In fact to utilise a hermeneutics of suspicion (Rancière 2004c, p.49), so as to reveal the secret emanation of power to an audience, can only produce a determined message. She communicates from

outside the discourse of the aesthetic, her work performing as a 'reflexive reveal' onto the true nature of art, she 'reveals' thereby showing her audience how power can be intervened upon¹⁶. But this intervention must follow a set route, and aim to arrive at a determined point. Again the audience is performatively separated, as followers, from the master artist.

Secondly she is led to denigrate the validity of activist practices within art. Ultimately these 'well meaning' attempts to advocate for minority groups operate as distractions from the *central* reproduction of power within art. And worse still in producing a 'distraction' they *feed* the implacable reproduction of inequality (Fraser 2005b, p.40).

At this point I broaden my discussion to include two examples of work representative of much critical practice within art, which unwittingly adopts an attitude of mastery. Stephan Dillemath and Nils Norman's video *I'm Short Your House* (2007) is used to illustrate the 'standard reveal' which devotes itself to uncovering the secret determining workings of capitalism, the spectacle, or any other structural bedrock. Renzo Martens' *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* (2008) stands for the 'overidentifying reveal' which does the same as the standard one but dispenses with its supposedly sanctimonious distance¹⁷.

In conclusion I return to the historical narrative which underpins Rancière's characterisation of the aesthetic, however this time the terrain is slightly different from that navigated in Chapter One.(b) as it is composed of the thought of Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury (1617-1713), Christian Wolff (1679-1754) and those attempts at distributive emancipation by the German state during the contemporaneous process of *Bildung* (Bennett 2007). This is done both to 'chase down' the crux of Bourdieu's mistaken reading of Kantian aesthetic judgement, and to again recommend the alternative proposed by Rancière. Here the 'functionality' of Rancière's 'story of art', the way it manages to elegantly account for the entwining of art with political projects over the last 200 years, recommends his dissensual understanding of 'the aesthetic' over and above

¹⁶ I have borrowed the term 'reflexive' from Bourdieu as applied to his sociological method, where critical attention is returned to itself ("*re-flectere* means to "bend back"" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2005a p.36)) so as to analyse the social conditions of possibility which precede practice, including intellectual practice.

¹⁷ Art practices which use 'the reveal' share much with dialectical clash art as described in Chapter One.(b). However the examples chosen to illustrate the attitude of mastery which is endemic to contemporary critical art dispense with the methodology of colliding heterogeneous 'materials', and proceed rather more directly to the revelation of "profound secrets".

Bourdieu's stultified reading.

Rancière's notion of critical art does not 'reveal'. The critical artist is committed to the destabilization of all false assertions of totality, even her own. However I part company with Rancière over exactly how this non-foundational commitment might be pursued in art, perceiving his tacit rejection of a type of activist art practice as an unjustifiable narrowing of the category of 'political art'. In Chapter Three I expand the category of non foundational critique by accommodating the artist as *direct* 'political subject'. Commitment when expressed within political subjectivization is not the revelation of a secret, but a questioning of the very existence of all secret, or otherwise, totalizations of power. Messages within art if communicated by a subjectivising subject must escape the co-ordinates of mastery.

Reading Bourdieu

Let us begin with 'habitus'.

The conditions associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practises and representations. (Bourdieu 1990, p.53).

Habitus describes the effect of cultural conditioning, producing what Bourdieu terms "durable dispositions", "practices" and "representations". These effects might be described using other terminology as the attitudes, beliefs or opinions held by a subject, which for Bourdieu express themselves not only in discourse but also physically in bodily postures, gestures and gaits. However habitus is also that symbolic amniotic and those 'practices' which produce these effects; 'dispositions et al' are "structuring structures" which "generate and organise practices and representations". Habitus as both 'process' and 'result' of social conditioning itself operates within a set of coordinates "the conditions associated with a particular class..." For Bourdieu, these objective conditions - which at times in his descriptions blur into the category of habitus - consist of complex interrelations between wealth, both economic and symbolic, and educational background. From now on I will call these co-ordinates responsible for the production of specific habitus types a subject's 'cultural inheritance'.

There is a sense in which one's habitus is constantly performed. For instance each expression of a class specific 'opinion' or judgement serves to entrench habitus. Therefore

this 'opinion' does not relate to a 'natural' core of identity, which is then simply expressed, but this identity is, and needs to be, constantly re-iterated so as to remain an operative category¹⁸. This reiteration is therefore a process of construction, or in Bourdieu's terminology "reproduction" (2000).

One mode of the expression and reproduction of habitus occurs through judgements of taste. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (2004) Bourdieu famously attempts to build a picture of class 'identity' based on these cultural preferences, asserting that Kantian aesthetic judgement is inextricably tied up with the habitus of the dominant. In fact the 'aesthetic disposition' provides the cornerstone of legitimate bourgeois culture. And this assertion necessarily proceeds via a critique of Kant.

[Like] all philosophical thought worthy of the name... perfectly ethnocentric, since it takes for its sole datum the lived experience of a *homo aestheticus* who is none other than the subject of aesthetic discourse constituted as the universal subject of aesthetic experience – Kant's analysis of the judgement of taste finds its real basis in a set of aesthetic principles which are the universalization of the dispositions associated with a particular social and economic condition. (Bourdieu 2004, p.493).

Kant as a typical philosopher fails to realize that the aesthetic experience, which he expressly theorizes as a formal universal, capable of being experienced by anyone, is in fact a facet of the 'lived experience' or 'disposition' of his own class; the newly powerful ruling bourgeoisie.

The 'disposition' of disinterest, is the product of an 'objective feature' out of which the habitus or culture of the dominant emerges. Bourdieu describes this as a distance from the material necessities of life. It is in fact a disposition which comes from affluence: "the paradoxical product of conditioning by negative economic necessities – a life of ease – that tends to induce an active distance from necessity" (2004 p.5). The upper classes, detached from necessity, are afforded a "playful seriousness" (2004, p.54). This aesthetic sense is part of a confident relation to the world, a sense of distinction.

It seems that the 'objective condition' of affluence should be understood as the foundation for the generation of 'homo aestheticus'. However this statement needs to be supplemented. Firstly we must understand this notion of affluence includes a type of

¹⁸ For Judith Butler Bourdieu's theorization of 'performativity' is problematically 'static'. Each enactment exactly repeats a prior model given by and within habitus. Butler criticises Bourdieu for not recognising how repetition necessarily produces 'semiotic slippage' and therefore change, and movement.

'memory-of-affluence', and does not necessarily refer to the wealth a particular agent currently has 'in the bank'. This 'wealth' is just as likely to be the possession of a 'symbolic capital' gained by one's class through history, the memory of which is carried unconsciously within the dominant habitus¹⁹.

Also *everyone* needs to be educated into the aesthetic disposition. The objective condition of a 'life of ease' (one facet of a cultural inheritance), out of which the aesthetic disposition 'evolved' is channelled by education. Again, contra the explicit content of Kant's theory, which views aesthetic experience as 'decentering' normally dominant rational knowledge, Bourdieu views the aesthetic as secretly reliant upon knowledge.

To perceive a work in a specifically aesthetic way, that is, as a signifier meaning nothing other than itself, consists not, as is sometimes suggested, of regarding it without relating it to anything other than itself, either emotionally or intellectually, in other words surrendering oneself to the work taken in its irreducible uniqueness, but in picking out its distinctive stylistic characteristics by relating to the works constituting the class of which it is a part, and to these works alone. (1991, p.40).

At the other end of the scale are the working class who are less able to adopt an aesthetic attitude than those classes and class factions above them. This is because they are formed via their own habitus, which dictates particular cultural preferences. Bourdieu characterises the working class relation to culture as the "choice of the necessary" (2004, p.372). This means that the working-class are less likely to make aesthetic-type choices, their relationship with 'objects' is marked by 'practicality' or a type of ethical simplicity. Owing to their close relation to necessity they find the distancing and abstraction necessary for aesthetic contemplation difficult, or without merit²⁰. Therefore, according to Bourdieu, the universality of the aesthetic experience is simply wrong, there are those who are socially

¹⁹ This is one reason why artists and intellectuals as the dominated sector of the dominant class, although perhaps materially poor still live according to the attitudes which evolved from the conditions of a life of ease. However judging by the example of the parvenu, which we shall look at in more depth later, it is possible, however unlikely, that the aesthetic disposition might be gained by a member of the working class who, both at present and within their collective class memory, has never 'experienced' a life of economic ease. Therefore the aesthetic disposition evolved from the economically affluent position of the upper classes but can be adopted or won – albeit with great effort – in the absence of affluence.

²⁰ For 'them' all choice has to fulfil some purpose whether practical or ethical. This is because the limitation of their resources creates a particular relationship to – a horror of – waste. Even wasted energy, for instance 'play', is looked at with suspicion. To 'waste' time, energy and resources through deliberating the non-essential is to risk destitution. The Kantian aesthetic disposition seen in this context then is by definition a form of wasted energy, because it requires a suspension of material or ethical concerns and is thus foreign to the working class: "nothing is more alien to working class women than the typically bourgeois idea of making each object in the home the occasion for an aesthetic choice" (2004, p.379).

and educationally more likely to be able to experience in this way being 'better constructed' than others.

That the working class habitus is predisposed to eschew aesthetic attitudes has more wide-ranging consequences than a simple if unfortunate narrowing of their cultural outlook. Most insidiously the aesthetic acts as a powerful ideology securing the 'naturalness' of hierarchy and in so doing reproducing the unequal status quo. To understand this important point we must return to Bourdieu's critique of Kant.

The Aesthetic as Ideology

The universality of the aesthetic is not only wrong, an 'innocent' positing of the particular as universal, but it is also a motivated lie designed to reproduce the existing distribution of bodies in particular habitus arrangements.

Firstly, the ideology falsely 'legitimizes' dominant culture, placing it at the apex of a hierarchy. The culture of the wealthy and powerful (historically and at present) is not intrinsically better than the culture of the 'poor', but is seen as such simply because it is the culture of the wealthy and the powerful. The working class – as well as all other classes – miss-recognize legitimate culture's privileged position seeing it as essentially valuable, when, in fact, its value is simply the corollary of the economic and political position of the class to which it 'belongs'. For Bourdieu culture is essentially arbitrary because there exists no universal yardstick with which to measure the quality of one culture against another (Bourdieu, Darbel and Schnapper 1991, p.109).

Secondly, as I have shown, for Bourdieu the 'working class' fail to participate successfully in legitimate culture because they possess the 'wrong' habitus. However this reason, which is rooted in the inequality of social positions, is *presented* within aesthetic ideology as their own innate flaw. Under the Kantian illusion, aesthetic experience is theorized as a formal universality; all humanity can experience in this way. And yet there are sections of society who seem unable or unwilling to do so. Under the Kantian logic then, there must be something essentially in-human about those groups. They are the victims of ignoble and insensitive natures.

The privileged classes of bourgeois society replace the difference between two cultures, products of history reproduced by education, with the basic difference between two natures, one nature naturally cultivated, another nature naturally natural...Thus the sanctification of art...fulfils a vital function by contributing to the consecration of

the social order. (Bourdieu 1991, p.111).

Therefore every performance of 'the aesthetic disposition' - every act of distinction - is also a manifestation of working class exclusion, as well as and at the same time a justification of that exclusion. Therefore performances of distinction possess a 'force', both *demonstrating* the 'natural' difference between the dominant and dominated *and* therefore *exerting* this hierarchical difference.

The established order, and the distribution of capital which is its basis, contribute to their own perpetuation [reproduction] through their very existence, through the symbolic effect that they exert as soon as they are publicly and officially declared and are thereby misrecognized. (Bourdieu 1990, p.135).

Also and at the same time the exclusion prevents the working classes from accruing the high-value cultural capital associated with legitimate culture therefore further limiting their social mobility.

This layer of ideology associated with art and the aesthetic means that whatever course you take within the field, if acting in accordance with a belief in the 'worth' of the aesthetic you will simply reproduce power. This inability of an agent to escape the reproduction of power from within the discourse of 'the aesthetic' can be clearly seen in Bourdieu's understanding of 'art appreciation'.

The correct reading of a painting by Jackson Pollock, for instance, would be to pick out the meaningful relations between this piece of modernist expressionism and its significant forebears, perhaps works by Picasso or 'the Surrealists'. This knowledge enables one to recognize the lineage and therefore value of such a work. And in Bourdieu's terms this show of "distinction" can only mark and enforce a difference between constituencies: "[taste] is an acquired disposition to 'differentiate' and 'appreciate', as Kant says – in other words, to establish and mark differences by a process of distinction" (2004, p.466). Bourdieu argues that the failure to perform the 'correct reading' also invariably leads to reproduction. A member of the working class then who is ignorant of the specific type of 'abstract' understanding which the 'educated' aesthete has acquired, will read artwork inappropriately, perhaps through the lens of their own prosaic experiences, ethics or desires. The unfortunate spectator will feel alienated and dissatisfied with their encounter: "A beholder who lacks the specific code feels lost in a chaos of sounds and rhythms, colours and lines, without rhyme or reason" (Bourdieu, 2004, p.2). And this misfiring proves to the spectator and anyone else witnessing his faltering performance that he is inferior. Again

reproduction follows.

The Parvenu

However Bourdieu does allow for a type of atypical agency within his system, whereby a subject moves *against* those expectations and 'lifestyle choices' encoded in their habitus. "Thus the dominated have only two options: loyalty to self and the group (always liable to relapse into shame), or the individual effort to assimilate the dominant ideal" (Bourdieu 2004 p.384).

The latter option represents the tale of the parvenu, a dominated subject who so strongly identifies with the values of the dominant that she manages to escape her own habitus, unmooring herself so as to re-dock with another more profitable one, thereby entirely transcending her cultural inheritance. This movement explains the aesthete or artist with working class roots²¹. Does not this counter-hierarchic movement escape the coordinates of reproduction? Not for Bourdieu, the same problematic reoccurs; the parvenu simply by misrecognizing the worth of art and the aesthetic and by performing in concert with that belief can only re-inscribe the hierarchic social split.

The argument goes like this: In order to truly become part of the 'aesthetic class', one must buy-into the ideology of art that obfuscates the importance of cultural inheritance and the learnt expertise necessary to actually become part of 'the club'. "Culture is only achieved by denying itself as such, namely as artificial and artificially acquired" (Bourdieu, Darbel and Schnapper 1991, p.110). The parvenu must misrecognise the blood sweat and tears which have enabled her access to dominant taste, because dominant taste 'requires' it be conceived of as the result of innate sensitivity. The parvenu comes to believe that she could only have covered the distance from her natural culture to the culture of the dominant, if she had already been innately suited to the possession of an aesthetic sensibility. She always was a diamond in the rough. The parvenu's cultural journey then far from revealing the logic of 'inheritance' under the veneer of aesthetic equality, actually shores-up this

²¹ Bourdieu's theory then does allow for the parvenu's atypical social journey. However to read some of his critics one would think that he disqualifies *all* such movement, that he posits the habitus as an absolute 'iron-cage' from which individuals can never escape: "The fact that such dispositions [of habitus] still leave room for agents to be better or worse at achieving their strategic goals does not alter the fact that they take their own identity and the definition of the situation as limits within which to act. Just as a player cannot stop playing one game and suddenly play another, agents can become good at their social role, but not adopt some other role or identity" (Bohman 1999, p.134). It seems to me that the parvenu is indeed an agent who has started to 'play another game'. Therefore the determinism within Bourdieu's system cannot be traced back to his concept of habitus (narrowly defined) but, as I argue below, is a feature of his theorization of 'reproduction'.

facade through the self-repression of her own herculean effort to break with 'social constraints'.

The result of her effort is to change her *personal relationship* to the domination of 'the social system'. She can now enjoy the symbolic capital denied that class from which she escaped. However the system is reproduced, the status quo claims another adherent. The structure of hierarchy is not challenged, and she becomes a part of that aesthetic ideology which is responsible directly for obscuring the real reason for the cultural exclusion of other members of her class; i.e. that they were born to the wrong parents.

The "parvenu" of education appears doubly as a traitor to his class: individually, in forcing himself to acquire the "dispositions" that allow the privileged classes to assimilate legitimate culture; and collectively, in masking with his own success the global effect of elimination. (Rancière 2003b, p.175-6).

Therefore the victories and defeats within games of distinction are but epiphenomena, fully determined by the 'reproduction of the hierarchy of cultural inheritance'. This reproduction of power is presented by Bourdieu as beyond the 'discourse' of the aesthetic, and as such represents the site of 'transcendental contraband' (Derrida 1990, 244a).

Transcendental Contraband

In *Structure Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* (2001, p.351-370) Derrida addresses structuralism, drawing attention to the problematic status of the concept of 'centre' within this tradition.

The concept of centred structure - although it represents coherence itself, the condition of the *epistēmē* as philosophy or science—is contradictorily coherent. And as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire. The concept of centred structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play. (2001, p.352).

Bourdieu's conception of 'reproduction' would seem to represent a 'classical' or metaphysical understanding of 'centre', "which is by definition unique, constitut[ing] that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality" (Derrida 2001, p.352). As already discussed in Chapter One.(a), and reiterated in the quotation above this notion of a concept beyond 'play' is self contradictory, a metaphysical or transcendental 'illusion'.

Derrida has also drawn attention to another discourse within the philosophical tradition which attempts to critique the hubris of transcendental thinking, but which fails to adequately account for its own position.

[Each] time a discourse contra the transcendental is held, a matrix – the (con)striction itself constrains the discourse to place the non-transcendental, the outside of the transcendental field, the excluded in the structuring position. The matrix in question constitutes the excluded as transcendental of the transcendental, as imitation transcendental: transcendental contraband. (1990, 244a).

In terms of my problematic, there is an attempt to *explain* the transcendental term, to reveal its pretensions with reference to a resolutely *material* force (the fundamental ground). However this ‘material force’ cannot be the antidote to the philosophical transcendental because it is transcendental itself. Bennington has clearly outlined this conceptual situation in relation to the ‘human sciences’:

Let us imagine that one attempt to criticize, as is often the case, transcendental discourse in the name of the concrete realities of life, by saying for example that this discourse is an attempt at legitimation on the part of one class (or its representatives) trying to maintain its concrete domination over another class. And so one would say that the transcendental discourse is in reality the ideological product of an historical situation whose truth would be found, for example, in the economy. In doing so, one has quite simply put the economic in a transcendental position without being able to think that fact...This is what we earlier called transcendental contraband. (Bennington and Derrida 1999, p.281).

Bourdieu relies on the logic of transcendental contraband to denounce the false universality of Kantian aesthetic experience. His contraband is not represented by the economy (narrowly defined) but by the ‘reproduction of the hierarchy of cultural inheritance’. In his denunciation of Kant he commits a form of symbolic violence, resolutely occluding ‘that’ which cannot be accommodated under his master discourse. In my reading this manifests as an unjustifiable circumscription of aesthetic dissensual agency; that ability of the agent to ‘resist’ power from within this discourse is occluded by Bourdieu’s sociology.

Before moving on I want to briefly invoke Judith Butler’s reading of Bourdieu in *Excitable Speech* (1997). This is done because her interpretation supports my own, adding weight to the evaluation of Bourdieu as a metaphysical thinker. Also she offers another vocabulary, which complements Rancière’s, for theorizing aesthetic practices as performative ones.

Butler, Bourdieu and Performativity

Butler finds that Bourdieu's system cannot adequately theorise those moments when individuals or groups without the prior 'backing' of power are able to challenge that very power which marginalises them via a speech, or another act.

[Bourdieu's] conservative account of the speech act presumes that the conventions that will authorize the performative are already in place, thus failing to account for the Derridean "break" with context that utterances perform (Butler 1997, p.142).

My complaint about Bourdieu's contraband (reproduction) is of the same order as Butler's critique of his notion of "delegation" (Butler 1997, p.156 citing Bourdieu 2002, p.115), as that which implacably precedes and determines performative action.

Butler describes how Bourdieu in *Authorized language: The social conditions for the effectiveness of Ritual Discourse* (Bourdieu 2002, p.107-116) seeks to supplement J.L. Austin's seminal account of the performative force of speech acts (1976) with a theory of social power. Bourdieu believes that Austin fails to supply an adequate explanation of how certain utterances manage to command or successfully facilitate a set of results.

For the sociologist Austin's account of performativity remains incipiently formalist, too focussed on convention as a linguistic formulation, a matter of the internal rules and functions of language. This focus is at the expense of developing a theory of how forms of power, external to language impinge on its functioning. The partial obfuscation of 'the social' in Austin's account is problematic because it is precisely this extra-linguistic site that provides a rationale for why some performances possess force and others do not.

[Austin] thinks that he has found in discourse itself – in the specifically linguistic substance of speech, as it were – the key to the efficacy of speech. By trying to understand the power of linguistic manifestations linguistically, by looking at language for the principle underlying the logic and effectiveness of the language of institutions, one forgets that authority comes to language from outside...Language at most represents this authority, manifests and symbolizes it. (Bourdieu 2002, p.109).

For Bourdieu then the effectiveness of a speech act depends on the positioning of any speaker in an appropriate position of power which precedes his linguistic act; It is the pre-constituted 'social placement' which serves to force through the effect of any statement. As Butler rightly identifies Bourdieu's understanding of the "base structure" (Butler 1997, p.157) of power which precedes and determines 'performances', seems to suggest that he

conceives of this power structure, or in my terms, the process of power reproduction, as fundamentally not symbolic consisting of a different more 'concrete' material.

Butler claims that *even if* performative acts may (most) often attain their force, as Bourdieu describes, by way of their prior 'backing', his tendency to view that backing as untouchable by ideological 'discourse' means that his system is not sensitive to the way resistance or dissensus produces change. That words and actions *can* sometimes 'rock' power suggests that power cannot be metaphysically 'separate', but is premised upon symbolic and 'sensible' relations, which can be contested by symbolic and sensible means. (As I outlined in Chapter One.(b) this does not mean that Rancière, or Butler for that matter, are proposing a liberal model of freedom in which subjects act independently from power. Power provides the multiplicitous terrain of action; however this does not necessitate a theorisation of power as inaccessible to discourse).

Several other commentators have criticised this 'blind spot' in Bourdieu. For a critique of the absence of an account of political agency in his work see J. McLeod, (2005). Also Bohman (1999) has argued that subjects cannot be so mired in misidentification that social constraints will *never* be recognised in (and challenged by) non-sociological forms of discourse.

There is no reason to believe that practical and public reasoning cannot detect at least *some* of these cultural biases and constraints, and that at least *some* reflective agents may be able to convince others that suppressed forms of expression and alternatives absent from deliberation ought to be seriously considered on their merits. (1999, p.147).

These critiques along with Butler's rebuttal as well as my discovery of 'transcendental contraband' translates as a severe challenge to Bourdieu's postulate that 'aesthetic judgement', or as I would prefer 'aesthetic interpretation' always serves to reproduce power. Following Butler's comments, there seems to be no reason to suggest that the performance of aesthetic experience, or its failure, should always implacably be determined by – and reproduce - power. With a minor alteration we can cite Butler again in support of this point; "Such experiences [as the aesthetic] are not property; they assume a life and a purpose for which they were never intended. They are not to be seen as merely tainted goods" (1997, p.161). This argument concerning the always possible 're-articulation' of words, and I would add interpretations and experiences as well, when combined with Rancière's alternative reading of the emergence of the aesthetic regime

produces a convincing critique of, and alternative vision to Bourdieu's metaphysical, determinist understanding of the 'aesthetic experience'.

Mastery

However, there is another twist within Bourdieu's thinking with which we must contend. Bourdieu *does* formulate a way out of the reproduction of power. In fact his sociology is designed to cut through ideological miasma (2004, p.1) to reveal the functioning of power so as to mitigate its effects. This revelation and mitigation would ultimately manifest as a cultural situation devoid of domination.

At all events, there is nothing more universal than the project of objectifying the mental structures associated with the particularity of a social structure... the critique... of culture invites each reader... to reproduce on his or her own behalf the critical break... For this reason it is perhaps the only rational basis for a truly *universal culture*. (Bourdieu 2004, p.XIV, my italics).

However this escape route, provided by the "critical break" does not invalidate my criticism of Bourdieu as a metaphysical thinker. His method for revealing and intervening into power retains a problematic premise, that of power's *singularity*. Again this metaphysical logic results in the theoretical and performative circumscription of agency-as-resistance. However in this case the 'violence' is best described using Rancière's term mastery.

"There is no science [...] but of the hidden" is a phrase by Bachelard that had been taken up by the Althusserians. Thus, it was an ironic quotation [by Rancière] against the vision that presupposes the necessity of finding or constructing the hidden. It was an ironic quotation directed at Althusser's philosophy as well as at Bourdieu's sociology or the history of the Annales School. I by no means think, for my part, that there is no science but of the hidden. I always try to think in terms of horizontal distributions, combinations between systems of possibilities, not in terms of surface and substratum. Where one searches for the hidden beneath the apparent, a position of mastery is established. (Rancière 2004c, p.49).

'The science of the hidden' or the 'hermeneutics of suspicion', is premised on the assumption of the *singular emanation* of power and acts as a methodology to discover this 'source'. As we have seen Bourdieu understands power in this way, as always enforcing hierarchy along the one axis of cultural inheritance. Within this tradition power is conceived as existing below, in fact hidden by, ordinary discourse and action. In terms of

my discussion of Bourdieu, the rhetoric of aesthetic experience obfuscates the way in which performances of distinction perpetuate hierarchy. The obscured and singular operation of power provides a rationale for an expert, or experts to uncover its secret and become specialists in its functioning, so as to educate a public in the character of their exploitation. This is the very process of becoming a master.

The 'classic' example of mastery within the conventional arena of politics can be found in the relationship between a singular notion of the 'economy', the avant-garde party, and 'the people'.

If the fundamental site of oppression lies in the economy, it perhaps falls to those who are adept at economic analysis to take up the task of directing the revolution. It is they who understand how the economy works, therefore how history unfolds, therefore how struggle ought to occur. There is an alliance between a politics that privileges a certain type of oppression and the creation of an avant-garde party. (May 2008, pp.80-81).

The 'avant-garde party' is an axiomatic instance of 'mastery', in that the party is considered necessary to educate, mould and direct those that do not know how to liberate themselves. Party members are tacitly regarded as possessing the knowledge-of-liberation. And this knowledge is what separates them from those outside the party structure.

One might ask why this is a problem? Why describe mastery as an unnecessary power relation? If a minority have discovered *the source* of power, do they not have a duty to lead? However, what is in dispute is precisely this 'unitary source'. Once this singularity is assumed then resistance to said power must also be unitary and the logic of mastery becomes unavoidable; there will always be those who have expertise in the 'topic' of unitary power, over and above those who do not. There is no justifiable way of rejecting the expertise of the master without challenging the idea that power is singular, otherwise the master's claims are entirely reasonable. Therefore to get to grips with the unnecessary, arbitrary nature of mastery and to think alternatives, we need to challenge this notion.

First a deconstructive argument can be made. The positing of power as singular is simply a different perspective upon the problem of conceiving any concept as beyond infrastructure. Therefore the construal of power as impossibly singular is of a piece with what I have already described as the impossible positing of power's total separateness. However the fallacious positing of power as singular – rather than the fallacious positing of power as separate (which I have already addressed) – is the motor for the specific violence

of mastery. Here Bourdieu *underestimates* the multiplicitous nature of power.

Secondly, the feminist reception of Bourdieuan thought exemplifies my point, as this theory has often focussed on the 'narrowness' of his conception of social constraint: "Bourdieu's work is most vulnerable to criticism here by feminist challenges to the centrality he accords class as the source of the unity of habitus" (Bennett 2007, p.226). And although Bourdieu has been extensively utilised by feminist inspired sociology (see most obviously *Feminism after Bourdieu* (Adkins and Skeggs 2005)), they have often significantly recalibrated his 'class focus'. This is the particular concern of Elizabeth Silva's *Cultural Capital and Visual Art in the Contemporary UK* (2008). Considerable lengths are taken to make the Bourdieuan perspective sensitive to exclusions organised around gender and ethnicity. Her study suggest both that power creates hierarchies across many fronts *and* that Bourdieu's sociology, because it posits power as the hierarchy of cultural inheritance, is unable to recognise - without significant critique and reworking - this multiplicity.

However before we can identify the specific violence of mastery we need to unsettle another related justification for its imposition; 'there are some people who are simply unable to emancipate themselves'. Firstly, Rancière simply pre-supposes that this is incorrect, surmising that all people can (this doesn't mean that they necessarily will) both recognise when they are dominated and respond to this domination. This is a consequence of his thesis of equal intelligence, which does not distinguish between those supposedly 'duped' by ideology, and those capable of objective scientific rationalizing: "From the ignorant person to the scientist who builds hypotheses, it is always the same intelligence that is at work: an intelligence that makes figures and comparisons to communicate its intellectual adventures and to understand what another intelligence is trying to communicate to it in turn" (2007b p.275).

And secondly, if power is multiplicitous it is therefore likely that those most affected by a particular binary hierarchy are best situated to respond to that inequality. If power operates multiplicitously around the issue of equality then it is less likely that there will be one person, or group who are, or can claim to be experts in all possible 'topics' of power, therefore able to lead others against power on multiple fronts.

And as we have already discussed, in contradistinction to that impossible strength-in-separation that Bourdieu reserves for reproduction, Rancière does not overestimate power. Not only are police distributions created of that 'symbolic stuff' that we can all

manipulate, power's attempt to binarize is also imperfect, falling into contradiction as its attempted polarisations of equals and unequals falter. As we have seen hierarchy cannot be maintained because it is *not* the total autonomous opposite of equality, but depends on and is thus thwarted by equality as its condition of im-possibility. Social hierarchy therefore is never secure and always bears the marks of equality on its very surface. Every order given by a superior that is understood by a supposed inferior exhibits this contradiction which is not hidden, but available to anyone. As we have seen these contradictions become emphasized to the point of crisis under political action.

These insights taken together reveal the non-necessary nature of the relation of mastery. And as such we are in a position to examine that violence that the master imposes, which is based on the performative effect of his actions. Simply in presupposing the singularity and hidden nature of power he divides himself from those who do not possess his privileged knowledge, those who are not privy to the emanation of power. Every encounter with his 'ignorant' constituency serves to reinforce the idea that this expert must be followed to achieve emancipation. This following is misconstrued, because power does not operate singularly. To follow a master is not necessarily to be lead on a wild goose chase, but the process of following – being positioned as follower - does tend to stultify an awareness that power might be recognized by anyone, not only a master. It is the obfuscation of everyone's capacity to identify and react to inequality that is the 'crime' of mastery. Below Rancière addresses this theme through the lens of conventional pedagogy.

The primary knowledge that the master owns is the "knowledge of ignorance". It is the presupposition of a radical break between two forms of intelligence. This is also the primary knowledge that he transmits to the student: the knowledge that he must have things explained to him in order to understand, the knowledge that he cannot understand on his own. It is the knowledge of his incapacity. In this way... instruction is the endless verification of its starting point: inequality. That endless verification of inequality is what Jacotot calls the process of stultification. (Rancière 2007b, p.275).

Bourdieu adopts a position of mastery in relation to art and the aesthetic; in positing the one genuine escape-route from reproduction within art, that is, the sociological demystification of the 'ideology of the aesthetic' he limits the *possibility* of artwork, artists and art institutions operating as sites of resistance or dissent.

The Artist as Master

I now want to discuss how Andrea Fraser's *Official Welcome* (2001) translates Bourdieu's

theoretical position into an artwork; Fraser's practice of the 'reflexive reveal' secures for herself the position of master which at the same time 'stultifies' her spectators.

The performance begins with Fraser standing at a lectern and addressing an invited crowd. The format is that of an inaugural presentation for an exhibition or other event. In the version I have seen, her speech is ostensibly to welcome the first visitors to her solo exhibition *Works 1983 to 2003* (2003) at *Hamburg Kunstverein*. However it soon becomes clear that her expressions of apparent heartfelt thanks to the museum director, support staff and well wishers should not be taken at face value. She abruptly adopts a different voice and mannerisms, and after a few minutes changes again. In all she passes through roughly ten different characterizations, which alternate between roles which represent 'artists' and those that might be labelled their 'supporters', the latter heaping praise on the former.

Fraser's scripted monologue consists entirely of direct quotations. These are primarily the words of art world figures (artists, critics, curators and collectors) and have been appropriated from journal articles, interviews, catalogue essays and other assorted sources. The characters crafted by Fraser, although anonymous represent certain 'types'; the sincere, sensitive practitioner, who offers up emotional truths; the bad boy rebel, revelling in breaking taboos ('How about, "kiss my fucking ass!" That's a great statement anywhere, right?' (Fraser 2005b, p.220)); the inarticulate 'maker' of objects, more at home in his studio habitat than on the public stage and the authoritative theorist who rails against hegemonic spectacle culture. One can track down the sources and see which real world figures provide the templates for the characters. The bad-boy is a Hirst/Ofili composite, and Buchloh provides the basis for the Debordian theorist. However there is no sense that Fraser's characterisations are portraits of particular figures, being too general, without individual detail. They are more stereotypes than naturalistic representations.

During her presentation Fraser performs a striptease, removing her dress, then brassier, then Gucci Thong and heels, straightforwardly and with minimal fuss. She then redresses before the end of her monologue. The performance of stripping operates at a curious meta-level within *Official Welcome*, acting as an analogy for her critical practice. Her method which conceives of itself as revealing the hidden reality behind the obfuscating surface of 'the art world' is redoubled in her public disrobing.

Fraser's acting technique is close to impersonation. For the majority of the performance she doesn't strive to suspend an audience's disbelief, so that we may become completely absorbed in theatrical fiction. Rather, we are aware of her techniques of characterisation, as when an impressionist morphs into a celebrity. Similarly with *Official Welcome* we recognise the 'types' portrayed without investing in the characters. As in standard 'impressionism' an awareness of the 'means' by which a character has been created is pushed to the forefront.

However there is one set of circumstances which unsettles the audience's ability to discriminate between actor and character. When Fraser appears to play herself, or at least someone with a practice very similar to her own a strange thing happens, the distinction between the performer and the character performed collapses. Here the voice and gestures witnessed on stage become the apparently authentic expressions of an individual's personality. *Official Welcome* begins with one such situation in which Fraser presents herself, straightforwardly as herself. These moments of collapse are absolutely key, the performance becomes dangerously flooded with fiction and the distinction between actor and acting bleeds away; ultimately the actor becomes fictionalised.

Her technique of impersonation attunes us to the artificiality and constructed quality of the voices and gestures we see behind the lectern. Thereby when she apparently drops the charade and plays herself we are left with a niggling doubt, we are attuned to view her 'genuine actions' as equally artificial.

What this means is that the difference between 'real art world' figures and the parodic impersonations become blurred. This happens locally, in terms of the real Fraser as indistinct from the fictional Fraser, but ultimately we are encouraged to see the entire intersubjective fabric of the art world, its cast, script, and directions, as equally *staged*.

And this is precisely Fraser's desired effect, she wants to show the beliefs, opinions, and posturing of artists and art professionals to be aspects of highly managed personas.

She also wants to reveal how the performance of these 'dispositions' serves a secret and insidious purpose which she cleverly foregrounds by using the 'inaugural speech' format, which is most often characterised by a form of congratulatory rhetoric. In *Official Welcome* each artist character is lauded, flattered and praised by a 'well wisher', 'friend', 'fellow traveller', or 'fan'. These *explicit* legitimations or conferrals of value highlight the way that every performance behind the lectern is a parody of an attempt to secure this type of

validation, that which Bourdieu calls distinction. Therefore every performance of 'that specialised canonical knowledge' both excludes a certain constituency, and justifies their exclusion.

Fraser's characters must be understood as parodies of myriad forms of performance designed to secure legitimacy. For Fraser the attitudes expressed by these art world types: the sincere sensitive artist, the bad boy, the authoritative critic are of a piece with Bourdieu's definition of 'the aesthetic'. Despite superficial differences the postures she performs are similar to the aesthetic in that they are both erroneously valuable and exclude, whilst pretending that they do-not. They represent specialised forms of 'cultural competence', often naturalised in shows of 'innate ability' (the natural genius or wild and intuitive rebel) but are in fact the product of socialisation. Perhaps these attitudes mobilised by Fraser should be described as variations on the aesthetic theme.

Through a combination of parody and a clever choice of format Fraser reveals the 'natural order' of art-world-speak, those apparent spontaneous expressions by talented individuals, to be performances of distinction. And more than this 'distinction = reproduction'. This is the ultimate truth revealed by *Official Welcome* (2001), and in revealing this truth she interrupts the efficacy of the performances. For instance the exaggerated claims made on behalf of art and artists are made to seem pompous, faintly ridiculous and laughable. This ritual of legitimation is undermined, revealed to be empty, an arbitrary socio-symbolic process.

Being convinced that, "like symptoms", museums "cover over conflicts with displaced representations" she is able, like a sorcerer's apprentice, to trigger a social mechanism, a sort of *machine infernale* whose operation causes the hidden truth of social reality to reveal itself, exposing or calling up underlying power relationships and confronting human agents with an unblinking view of what they are doing. (Bourdieu 2005c p.XIV).

However from our deconstructive perspective the assertion that art and the aesthetic will *always* reproduce (or be prevented from reproducing by the activity of the master) along the front of 'distinction' is an overly determined, and therefore unrealistic model. Rancière describes the 'rigidity' of reproduction thus: "It is impossible that an order, as long as it still exists, will ever cease to work "through its very existence" towards its own perpetuation" (2003b, p.179). When one takes into account the fluidity of signification, including the fluidity of power, how can one confidently predict that a particular performance will always

result in the same problematic? As we have seen, in fact, Rancière offers a very convincing analysis of how demonstrations of distinction, when performed by those considered 'unequal', do not reproduce power but question the very basis for its functioning. And because this form of resistance is premised on the 'empty' principle of equality, a positive term (like class reproduction) is *not* reintroduced, as it is with Bourdieu and Fraser's 'master discourse'.

Fraser's 'reveal' seeks to move an audience from a position of ignorance into a place of "unblinking" enlightenment, that is, into possession of the objective knowledge of the true *front* of power. And in so doing she also provides the necessary solution to fight that power, to push the front back, mitigating its insidious effects. This 'total knowledge' is a fantasy²² and introduces a problematic mono-focus which, in the now familiar logic, 'stultifies'; the obsession with 'one source of power' and 'one course of action against that power' constricts awareness of other power fronts, or the mutation of existing ones. And again, simply encountering the master who wields the authority-of-certainty therefore positions the spectator as follower, performatively deterring her from personally identifying and reacting to inequality.

The biggest laugh of *Official Welcome* is provided by Fraser's mimicry of a critic who effusively describes an artist's work as open-ended, rich in meanings, to the extent that we don't need to know "exactly what they mean" (Fraser 2005b, p.216). This advocacy for a 'grey area' within interpretation can only seem ridiculous as well as suspicious to Fraser, who following Bourdieu sees artworks as precisely 'coded'. As we have seen, either a spectator understands the code and achieves distinction, or is blocked by the code. In both cases reproduction follows. That the 'confusion' provided by 'difficult' or 'aesthetic'

²² Although the exploitation identified by Fraser and Bourdieu is *not* the fantasmatic centre of power, this does not mean that Bourdieu's theory is *necessarily* entirely invalid. Using the terms laid out by Todd May in the quotation below, it should be possible to recast Bourdieu's theory of 'exploitation' in a broader context of 'domination'.

We might say that the central concept for Rancière is not that of exploitation but of domination, and, in keeping with this, define domination as the instantiation of the presupposition of inequality in a police order. This does not require him, of course, to abandon the claim that exploitation exists. Exploitation is a type of domination, but seen thus, it is a political rather than an economic concept. The wrong of exploitation is not that it extracts surplus value from the worker, but that it refuses to recognize the equality of the worker. The extraction of surplus value is a symptom of this refusal. (May 2008, p.81)

This means that it might be theoretically possible to combine a Bourdieuan perspective with a Rancièrian one. However this task is not within the scope of my current project.

artwork might spur resistance – to an instance of power – via ‘fluid interpretation’ is not countenanced.

Finally, the clearest *statement* of Fraser’s exclusion of non sanctioned forms of resistance within art has been made in relation to activist practice. Her denigration of this work is again the logical outcome of her position of Bourdieuan mastery.

Contemporary politicized forms of such cultural production [activist art]... do not, I would say, depart much from the history of artistic activity as the site of struggles by artists to reproduce their legitimacy. While these struggles formerly revolved around status as determined by economic conditions and distance from social norms of behaviour, they now encompass other forms of domination—according to gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation. But to the extent that they are located primarily in the field of art (as opposed to collectively based cultural activism working on representations and media in non-artistic sites), such symbolic struggles largely reproduce the hierarchical structuring they ostensibly oppose. This is because they often conceal or misrecognize the domination imposed by the specialization of cultural production and monopolization of cultural competence the artistic field itself represents. And while one may be happier about some groups representing and reproducing themselves than others, the logic of such preferences—and the politics that orient them—has very little bearing on the structure, function, and effects of legitimate cultural production itself. (2005b, p.40).

Firstly, simply by conducting their “struggles” within the field of art, as opposed to across “media, or non-art sites” these activist are guilty of engaging in a type of specialist “cultural competence”. To perform in this way is to necessarily “reproduce the hierarchical structuring they ostensibly oppose”. A practitioner might think that they are fighting for equality or in solidarity with some marginalised group, but actually they are always already winning points within a cruel game loaded to maintain class hierarchy. Therefore it is her positing of power as *only* functioning on the front of class hierarchy which causes Fraser to denigrate art activism. Her attitude of mastery bleeds the category of art and the aesthetic of the possibility of causing *any* (non-sanctioned) political dissensus with power.

Modes of Mastery

I now want to broaden my discussion to briefly examine the ways in which much contemporary art seems embroiled with relations of mastery. In this I follow Rancière when he says:

There is a whole school of so-called critical thought and art that, despite its oppositional rhetoric, is entirely integrated within the space of consensus. I'm thinking of all those works that pretend to reveal to us the omnipotence of market flows, the reign of the spectacle, the pornography of power. I think of the statufication of media icons a la Jeff Koons's *Michael Jackson and Bubbles* (1988). I think of Paul McCarthy and Jason Rhoades's spectacular 2002 installation *Shit Plug*, which placed the excrement of visitors to Documenta 11 in containers to show us the gigantic waste of the society of the spectacle and to reveal the participation of art in the empire of merchandise and spectacle... If there is a circulation that should be stopped at this point, it's this circulation of stereotypes that critique stereotypes. (2007a, p.264-265).

Again the crux of Rancière's criticism would seem to be that these artists 'stereotype' power. In the vocabulary I have been using this represents a reduction of the multiplicitous functioning of the police, to a few tired old terms beloved by the critiquer, for instance, the "omnipotence of market flows" and the "society of the spectacle", etc. These names represent fully determined conceptualizations which serve to obscure the true frailty of the police, that is, its non-totality. The critiquer imagines he uncovers 'objective conditions' which precede and account for our 'alienated', 'ideological' status quo. For instance McCarthy shows the reality of economic and political exploitation as underpinning the hegemony of American popular culture. He collapses these two levels together showing the 'perversity' of naked power intertwined with the family values of Disney et al. Mickey mouse now *visibly* propped by the "pornography of power".

Again, Rancière is not saying that these forms of exploitation do not exist, simply that they do not represent the final site of power. And also their very ubiquity as well as their monofocus serves to 'dazzle' spectators, preventing them from apprehending and dissenting from those constraints which might weigh more immediately on their own life-worlds.

Let us add two more examples. The first performs what I shall describe as the classic reveal. *I'm Short Your House* is a video by Stephan Dillemath and Nils Norman which was shown at *Vilma Gold* in 2007 and accompanied by an installation. This *mise-en-scène* consisted of a sound piece broadcast from the gallery's intercom, a sculptural figure and an LED display situated above a papier-mâché entrance archway, through which one had to pass to view the film. The video in many ways is a fascinating piece of work, constructed from rough documentary footage of the urban area surrounding the gallery, off-the-cuff character acting, allusions to other films and a scripted voice-over dense with complex terminology and analysis. Shot in 2007 the film takes the contemporaneous financial bubble as its

subject. The script is partially composed of quotations from financial newspapers and begins in an upbeat fashion. The whispering narrator, who we suppose to be a beneficiary of 'the bubble', lays down criteria to help those wishing to invest in art; "look for an established art-star with a five year track record"(Dillemuth and Norman 2007). All the while the camera pans and pauses over stretches of East End London capturing those sites undergoing rapid development, including the fungal growth of galleries. The video exhibits the links between art, the economic boom and gentrification. Retrospectively the prescience of the artists' analysis is impressive. Before 'the crunch' truly took hold in popular consciousness with the run on Northern Rock, Norman and Dillemuth were ruminating on the possible effects of subprime mortgages, predicting a large-scale "financial event" (Dillemuth and Norman 2007). Also the video is pretty funny and vaguely menacing all at once. A humpback figure, wearing an elongated nose, repeatedly circles shadowy hackney back streets accompanied by a tense and dramatic score that Melanie Gilligan identifies as "the music from Luchino Visconti's film *The Damned*" (2007b). The same music confers a humorous effect on several vapid mobile conversations between an artist figure and his dealer: "Blah blah... fantastic...blah, blah, blah... see you in Basel" (Dillemuth and Norman 2007). These scenes parody the blatant, empty consumerism at the heart of certain art-world relationships. But the obviousness, even laziness of the critical gesture neatly contrasts with the melodramatic music. I laughed. Also clever is the dog-like shadow puppet cast from a hand which appears on location in several shots. This character also supplies a narration of sorts, at one point citing John Maynard Keynes' term for naive market optimism, that is, 'animal spirits'. Thereby the shadow puppet reveals itself to be a low-rent metaphor for the type of unsustainable logic that underpinned the boom.

However, entertaining as I found the video its critical procedure is problematic, producing relations of mastery. First there is the fetishization of 'the economy' as the secret hand behind all social affairs. We might endorse the analysis of markets as per their relationship to property and art prices, which - behind the sometimes complex terminology - is, in the end, quite straight forward. However the final pronouncement of the 'animal spirit' reveals the ultimate message of the work to be 'fully determined'.

The shadow puppet quoting from the Australian conceptual artist Ian Burn (Gilligan 2007b) states:

While it may once have seemed an exaggeration of economic determinism to regard works of art as merely commodities in an economic exchange it is now pretty plain that our entire lives have

become extensively constituted in these terms that we cannot any longer pretend otherwise. Not only do works of art end up as commodities but there is also an overwhelming sense in which works of art start off as commodities. (Dillemuth and Norman 2007)

Again a metaphoric spotlight is shone in the eyes of any spectator; the analysis is clear, a rather generalised macro-conception of capitalism “extensively constitutes” our “entire lives”. There is little room here for discussion of those possibilities or framings *not exhausted* by economic relations. And their strategy of ‘reveal’ is also ‘reflexive’. ‘Art’ is shown to be entirely incorporated both at the point of production and reception. Their audience is indoctrinated into this knowledge of the ‘one-front-of-power’ not only by the video, but also via the sound piece and LED display. These helpfully define the financial terminology used in the video, and in so doing draw each viewer, step-by-step, along *the* path toward enlightenment. However, as we have seen, for Rancière this enlightenment is rather a form of stultification: “emancipation can't be expected from forms of art that presuppose the imbecility of the viewer while anticipating their precise effect on that viewer: for example, exhibitions that capitalize on the denunciation of the "society of the spectacle" or of "consumer society"--bugbears that have already been denounced a hundred times”(2007a, p.258) Dillemuth and Norman’s efforts in *I’m Short Your House* should be seen as adding their voices to this chorus.

I now want to address what I have called the ‘overidentifying reveal’, specifically Renzo Martins’ recent film *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* (2008). I borrow the term overidentification from Slavoj Žižek²³ (1997) but am primarily interested in the way it can be used to describe

²³ For Žižek this procedure reverses what is normally understood by ‘the critical procedure’. Judith Butler’s theory of performative parody provides him with an example of the conventional model. His reading suggests that Butler advocates a form of distanciation, whereby the critical subject ‘divorces’ itself from, for instance, heteronormative identities so as to inhabit a borderline position where critical parody of these symbolic norms can begin. Žižek turns this notion on its head and asserts that it is precisely this distance from ‘norms’ - set in place by a power structure – which enables said structure to effectively function. For ideology to interpolate ‘subjects’ there must first be ‘beings’ who believe they are in the natural possession of certain ‘qualities’. Žižek’s examples of these ‘qualities’ are: “the belief that behind the ideological mask there is a ‘rich human person’” who holds dear “notions and sentiments of solidarity, justice, belonging to a community, etc” (1997, p.21). For Žižek, without prior subjects-with-qualities there can be no ideology. For ideology to work there must be a ‘bit’ of one’s personality that cannot be reduced to the ideology. That ‘bit’ was there before inculcation and will remain in place after, there is a distance between ‘it’ (naturally pre-given qualities) and the discourse of power. They are not conjoined. This ‘gap’ not only provides the basis for ideology but at one and the same time makes its imposition bearable for the subject. Giving oneself to a particular power discourse, being placed in a position within a symbolic order becomes acceptable because one holds something in reserve. The true ‘you’ is kept private, not reducible to the values, opinions and expectations of the ‘official you’. For the subject this distance appears as freedom. However this freedom is false, because it enables the (constraining) system to function. So on this basis overidentifying with any social order, by jettisoning that part on which it ‘binds’, causes problems for said order, which becomes like a building without foundations. Secondly to rid oneself of that freedom offered by the system is to be positioned in an unbearable place. Here Žižek’s wager is that something cataclysmic will occur, the social order will be severely challenged by this ‘pressurized’ subject. He gives the example of the trainee soldier in the film *Full Metal Jacket* who so identifies with his role as merciless killing

a popular critical-art strategy. (Santiago Sierra is perhaps the most famous example). It is this version that I want to examine through a Rancièrian lens. The 'overidentifying reveal' is like the standard version in that it does 'divine' and attempt to expose the singular source of power, but it differs in its methods of revelation. As we have seen Bourdieu achieves a critical break with the miss-identification endemic to conventional social relations, enabling access to 'scientific knowledge'. This knowledge allows the newly liberated subject to step outside the endless circle of reproduction and to begin to reveal this truth to others. On the other hand, in the case of overidentification the critical break is followed by an accurate *imitation* of power. The critiquer does not step outside the circuits of exploitation but adopts the clothes, attitudes and practices of the most callous beneficiaries of that social order. This is not a conservative ploy, an attempt to suture the incision opened by the critical break. No, this move is performed with such exuberance and enthusiasm that the exploitation or repression which is taken for granted under the usual functioning of 'the social' is exacerbated, doubled, revealed and therefore shown to be intolerable.

We can see that Dilemuth and Norman's film fits squarely into the category of the 'standard reveal'. Their detailed analysis of capitalism identifies the adversary as external. The intent of those scenes that parody vacuous art-world figures is absolutely clear, Dilemuth and Norman do not identify with these characters. A spectator is left in no doubt which side the artists are on, their commitments and affiliations are as clear as the target of their critique. Fraser's work on the other hand would seem to exhibit elements of overidentification. For instance those moments when one is unable to tell if she performs as herself or parodies another exhibit the sort of queasy dissolution of interpretive stability characteristic of this strategy. It is destabilizing because spectators are left unsure where the performer's affiliations lie. The viewer, as when watching a morally ambiguous film, is unsure who to 'root for'.

This brings us to Martin's film *Enjoy Poverty*, which records his expedition to The Democratic Republic of Congo. His footage functions as a video diary of the places he visits and the people he meets. He interviews desperately poor plantation workers, their bosses – getting into a discussion about the acceptable level of child mortality among the children of

machine that he suffers a psychotic breakdown embarking on a killing spree in which he murders members of his unit. This is a *passage à l'acte* (Žižek 1997, p.21) which effectively damages the immediate 'social order', that of the U.S army. Žižek's formulation would seem to be incompatible not only with Butler's theory of performativity but also Rancière's understanding of subjectivization. Unfortunately it is not within the scope of my current project to cross compare these different models. (However, if I were to analyse Žižek formulation I would begin by examining the exact nature of that extra-ideological kernel upon which a 'power-discourse' rests; how can this 'bit' not in itself be constructed through ideology..?)

those who work the fields - as well as speaking to members of NGOs. He notices how these organizations are obsessed with branding. They hand out blankets and supplies all neatly imprinted with their logo. The early part of the film resembles a fairly conventional 'socially responsible' documentary. But as Martins begins to 'overidentify' things start to take a more unsettling path. He deliberately plays the role of the 'haughty colonial'. In most of his dealings with Congolese people he exhibits a superior attitude. For instance, he offers unasked for advice in an authoritative tone, chastising fisherman for continuing in their profession when their catches are so meagre. Similarly he insists on stitching logos onto the ragged cloths of a small child before taking her photograph, thus mirroring the NGO's practice. This is the intersubjective version of Santiago Sierra tattooing exploited sections of society, a doubling of indignity to expose indignity.

But most significantly he generates a situation whereby he can act as a 'personification' of the rigidity of those relations of power which hold the Congolese poor in their place. Let me explain; in the crucial central section of the film he attempts to rescue a local photography business that belongs to several young men. Martins conceives a new business strategy for his protégées. They are to take photographs of their own 'desperate situation', pictures of undernourished children, the corpses of those killed in guerrilla fighting, etc. Martins' reasons that if western photographers get well paid for their newsworthy images of these scenes, why shouldn't the same apply to those native to the land? Why should these young men not 'enjoy' the benefits of their own poverty and exploit it like a natural resource? But, obviously, the project fails; the Congolese photographers lack the specific skill and equipment necessary. Ultimately no one will buy their work. The hope which Martins' project engenders is almost immediately dashed. The artist wanders away from the photographers declaring that the project – after all – is hopeless. This incident thus dramatizes the implacable nature of exploitation, the vicious circumscription of Congolese desires. Martins is the very agent of these men's dashed hope, the project is an instance of failed aspiration and acts metaphorically signifying the general condition of these men's lives as without any prospect of change or improvement.

The film concludes with the artist erecting a neon sign emblazoned with the words 'enjoy poverty'. The occasion results in a party, villagers crowd around. Martins explains to anyone who asks that this sign means that they, the Congolese poor, must learn to resign themselves to their fate. There is no escape from their entrapment in absolute poverty.

The problem with Martin's strategy is that it still rests upon a metaphysical assumption. Overidentification, at least in this version, divines the source of power, 'western economic exploitation', which is then revealed through a performance which demonstrates an excessive enthusiasm for the 'figures' and subjective relations which manifest this power; playing the 'haughty colonial', etc. Unlike the Bourdieuan model this 'critical break', which uncovers the 'secret centre of power' is not presented as providing a potential escape route from the cycle of domination. In fact Martin's universe is one in which alternatives to the current order are presented as strictly impossible.

By 'playing at exploitation', by folding his critical position back into that which is being criticized he contributes to the 'apprehension' that this power is absolutely impervious-to-change; in this way his work exhibits the logic, already discussed in relation to Bourdieu, whereby the strength of power is *overestimated*. This is a consequence of its metaphysical formulation as a concrete reality beyond performative intervention. I'm obviously not saying that relations of capitalist exploitation are 'easy to overthrow' – damn near impossible I'm sure - but any attempt to challenge particular instances of inequality *must* begin within an understanding that the social order *can change*. It is this *minimal* 'hope' which I'm accusing *Enjoy Poverty...* of quashing.

It is a point of pride for the artist that he has managed to capture 'unvarnished reality'. In a conversation with J.J. Charlesworth at Wilkinson gallery he constantly emphasizes the objectivity of his film, the way it dispenses with Aristotelian catharsis to present us with the truth of exploitation. Unlike standard documentaries which most often conclude on a note of optimism Martins is clear that things 'will not get any better' and his film reflects this unflinching 'realism' (Martins 2009). In these instances his opinion differs little from that expressed by the 'Renzo Martin's persona' within the film. I'm thinking of those moments when he lectures the Congolese poor, arguing that they must accept and come to terms with their 'objective condition' as eternal victims.

The crux of the problem is that Martins' efforts to reveal this situation to be 'unbearable', 'untenable' and as such necessitating change precisely coincides with his presentation of the situation as entirely concrete, and impossibly strong. The critical intent of the piece breaks down because it at one and the same time represents a police logic, the presentation of the current order as the only possible one. The film succeeds in highlighting a sickening level of exploitation, whilst at the same time disabling any "confidence" that

this situation might be other. In this way it exhibits, in an excessively exaggerated way, that 'contradiction' which plagues much 'critical art'.

In its most general expression, critical art is a type of art that sets out to build an awareness of the mechanisms of domination to turn the spectator into a conscious agent of world transformation. The quandary that plagues the project is well known. On the one hand, understanding does not, in and of itself, help to transform intellectual attitudes and situations. The exploited rarely require an explanation of the laws of subordination because they misunderstand the existing state of affairs but because they lack the confidence in their capacity to transform it. (Rancière 2009, p.45)

Now, the 'Martins persona' is clear that this film is not to be shown to a Congolese audience. He tells a bemused villager that the video has been made only for a European art crowd. Therefore we can assume that there will not be a meeting between this piece of critical art and those whose domination it describes, and, I would add, to which it performatively contributes. However the western audience is potentially one of solidarity, one that could respond to the intolerability of the scenes presented. However the same problematic emerges. Judging by the responses of people who attended the artist Q & A session the overwhelming sensation provoked by the film was one of guilty powerlessness, an anxious handwringing in the face of an impossible situation and as such Martins film is an example of a *very effective* stultifying practice.

I now return to the central focus of this discussion, that is, the critique of Bourdieu's stultifying account of 'the aesthetic'.

Kant in Context

In this chapter, until now, I have argued in favour of Rancière's 'take' on the aesthetic from an a-historical perspective, claiming that his 'deconstructive' theory represents a philosophically and politically productive 'solution' to the issue of dissensus within the aesthetic. However Rancière's claim is not simply that art *can* be interpreted 'politically' (in Rancière's specific sense of politics as dissensus) but that the historical impact of Kantian aesthetic theory on our western social objectivity is *inherently political*. Therefore Bourdieu's metaphysical 'mistake' of reading art as entirely co-opted by power must be a problem of historical interpretation. In fact this error would seem to be one that Rancière predicts. Bourdieu's sociological critique of Kant is, in fact, one possible 'emplotment' provided by the conceptual matrix of the aesthetic regime. And the sociologist's

conclusions are the result of the 'stultifying' course he plots, one which fails to remain faithful to the dynamism and unpredictability of 'the aesthetic'.

I now want to trace the reasons for that error to the way Bourdieu's neglects key features of the socio-cultural and political context in which the *Critique of Judgement* (1790) was produced, and thereby generates a lopsided reading.

As both Rancière and Jean-Phillippe Uzel have noted, this occlusion [of important features of Kantian aesthetic theory] is fostered by Bourdieu's failure to take account of the date of publication of Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790) and the contemporary political and cultural controversies with which it engaged. (Bennett 2007, p.216).

In Chapter One.(b) I addressed Rancière's commentary of the *Critique of Judgement* as an attempt to think through the egalitarian impulses released by the French Revolution and its immediate aftermath. Now I want to focus more closely on the *philosophical* context which provided a backdrop for Kant's aesthetic theory so as to isolate the exact nature of the 'occlusion' fostered by Bourdieu²⁴. In this I follow Tony Bennett's account of Kant's relation to two contemporaneous 'bodies' of thought: "first, the role played by the eighteenth-century British civic humanist literature on taste, particularly represented by Shaftsbury...and second, the connections that had been forged between aesthetics and poliziewissenschaften in the context of the Prussian state" (Bennett 2007 p.217).

The crux of Bourdieu's error relates to his reading of disinterestedness, he underestimates the complexity of the linkages between what Rancière terms 'autonomy and heteronomy' *within* the Kantian concept of disinterestedness: "Bourdieu's account of the relations between autonomy and heteronomy [views them] as opposing principles defined in a relationship of simple antagonism to one another" (Bennett 2007, p.218).

Let us begin by recapping Bourdieu's argument against disinterestedness, as it pertains to Rancière's terminology of autonomy and heteronomy.

[Bourdieu reads Kantian] disinterestedness... as the emblem of [his] critique of the respects in which claims to disinterestedness in aesthetic judgement serve as a cover for a class interest in distancing bourgeois taste from the interestedness manifest in working-class taste for the necessary. (Bennett 2007, p.216).

For Bourdieu a disinterested attitude is a rejection of the culture of the dominated, which secures distinction for the dominant and a continuing lowly positing for the working class.

²⁴ In so doing I will necessarily have to retread some of the territory covered in Chapter One.(b).

Disinterestedness secures reproduction. This rejection translates as an eschewal of that which exists outside the self-referential discourse that is the positive content of disinterestedness. In other terminology the autonomy of disinterestedness is secured by the rejection of heteronomy. For example, judgements which relate to the 'agreeability' of sensual pleasure, judgements which relate to the ethical, or useful and relatedly (and most importantly for our discussion), judgements pertaining to political good, or social order, are all ostracized from disinterestedness under Bourdieu's interpretation.

Therefore it is his characterisation of disinterestedness as the rejection of all this 'heteronomy' which is the basis for his understanding of the aesthetic as the simple securing of distinction. His polarisation of disinterestedness (autonomy) and heteronomy is therefore at the heart of, if not solely responsible for, his metaphysical reduction of the aesthetic as always responsible for reproduction. Contesting the accuracy of Bourdieu's interpretation of Kant as performing this polarization therefore disables the logic of his reductive reading. Similarly, his attitude of mastery in relation to the aesthetic as founded upon art-as-reproduction must also be undermined in this move.

This is precisely what Rancière's reading accomplishes since he does not interpret Kantian aesthetic disinterestedness as simply the expulsion of heteronomy, but as a form of autonomy which is bound-up with those 'ways of doing and making' which might be considered 'beyond' its proper 'sphere'; the crux of the issue is that under the Kantian formulation art and the aesthetic no longer have a proper sphere, that is, a stable, determined category that might be called 'its own'. It is the instability of the parameters of art and the aesthetic which account for its paradoxical sounding relation to an outside; the autonomy of art is its heteronomy as well (Rancière 2002, p.134-5).

As we have seen Rancière explains the character of the Kantian aesthetic through a narrative of its emergence from a previous hegemonic understanding, the representational regime. In this regime art was categorically separate from other forms of doing and making; the products and practices of art, paintings of war horses, and sculpting in marble were categorized as distinct from, for instance, the mechanical arts. There were strict rules which distinguished the practices of the arts from other practices.

This separation belied a more significant unity between 'the arts' and that which was beyond its borders. In fact the separation of the arts from other 'ways of doing' was *responsible* for that underlying unity. Because art was securely categorized, posited as

'separate practice' it served the distribution of the sensible responsible for inequality and hierarchy. Art and the aesthetic *as separate* functioned as part of the general operation of the police order.

This can be explained with reference to British civic humanist literature on taste, from now on termed 'the Shaftesbury model'. In this theorisation the separation of art as a particular category of objects and practices translated as the separation of those who could appreciate these cultural pursuits from those who could not. This partition within the 'cultural constituency' mimicked and reinforced that political division within society more generally whereby some, by dint of their occupations (which afforded them time, as well as the capacity to care, and take responsibility for the common good), were seen as fit to govern. Those on the other side of the partition were seen as suitable only to be ruled. In Rancière's parlance both partitions are manifestations of the same distribution of the sensible.

[The] "distribution of the sensible" operates similarly in the relations between liberal and mechanical occupations within the discourse of eighteenth-century civic humanism – in Joshua Reynolds's theory of painting for example. In this discourse civic entitlements, just as much as the capacity to appreciate beauty disinterestedly, were restricted to those whose ownership of the land and/or pursuit of liberal occupations both freed their minds from the routine drudgery of mechanical occupations so as to be able to take a "disinterested" interest in the common good. (Bennett 2007 p.217).

It is Shaftesbury's model – before the Kantian intervention – that closely resembles Bourdieu's characterisation of disinterestedness within aesthetic judgement: disinterestedness as that 'mode of attention' specific to that recognisable category of objects (art) operates as a legitimation of the ruling class. (Bourdieu and Shaftesbury resemble one another as a negative to positive image, for, of course, Bourdieu wants to denounce the type of division that Shaftesbury recommends²⁵).

However, the important point is that contra Bourdieu's interpretation Kant's aesthetic theory actually unsettled this partition of the sensible. Under Kant's modification

²⁵ However they do not precisely coincide – even in this inverted form - because Bourdieu does *not* view distinction, in the way that it is framed by Shaftesbury as an immediately political concern, having a direct import on the entitlement to govern. As we have seen Bourdieu views distinction rather in terms of the reproduction of unequal economies of value; "What matters from this perspective is less, as in Bourdieu's account, disinterestedness as a means of establishing a distance in *social space* from those whose horizons are limited to necessity by dint of their occupations than the role of disinterestedness in producing a position in *political space* that confers on those who can exercise command over and control of the self the capacity to direct the conduct of others" (Bennett 2007, pp.217-218).

disinterestedness as a measure of the capacity-for-rule of the dominant could no-longer function. Before I address this modification I want to draw a link between Shaftesbury's version of disinterestedness and the philosophy of Christian Wolff, identified by Bennett as another important reference point for Kant.

[By] legitimating the subordination of the lower faculty of judgement to the higher one of reason (and, thereby, of the people to philosopher bureaucrats) ... [Wolff] served as the philosophical high priest of the Prussian state. (Bennett 2007, p.217).

Wolff's attitude can be clearly seen in his work *Real Happiness of a People Under a Philosophical King* (1750: 2003). Of particular relevance is his commentary on "when and why a ruler may be in fault" (2003, p.9). Here he clearly divides the faculty which enables good governance from that which threatens the social equilibrium. Wolff's and Shaftesbury's theories are important 'texts' of the representational regime. Shaftesbury's disinterestedness as the proper response to the determined category of artworks, is of the same order as Wolff's 'reason'; in the example taken from Reynolds' treatise, the ownership of land or 'pursuit of liberal occupations' enables one to be 'reasoned' in art appreciation and governance.

Kant's theorisation of aesthetic disinterest should be seen as destabilising this secure, binary situation. According to Rancière Kantian disinterestedness or autonomy is the rejection of art as a stable, distinct category: paintings of war horses or the sculpting of marble. The aesthetic becomes a sensorium *detached* from a particular category or sphere in which it might be 'properly' exercised. Artworks are still associated with this sensorium, but their 'character' is no-longer predetermined, artwork might be recognised in all manner of unexpected objects, or practices because they have been 'gazed upon' with disinterest; the aesthetic discovers artworks, rather than being linked to a determined recognisable category of 'things and ways of doing'. This sensorium detaches itself – in its autonomy – from any 'distinct', or 'categorically separate' notion of art, and in so doing blurs into 'the world'. To the extent that an object of 'life' and a practice of art are now muddled, a final distinction between art and other ways of making and doing becomes impossible to sustain (Rancière, 2002).

How does Kant secure the 'detached' unstable nature of this sensorium? Art gains its autonomy by being defined as a form of judgement that cannot be recuperated by rationality (understood as that power responsible for the production of determined categories). Rationality, normally conceived as playing the dominant role in 'judgement', is

undermined, its authority withdrawn and its deciding vote annulled. Kant theorises 'sense' as performing this interruption, but not with the result of instating an alternative authority, for instance, 'the intuitive', but enabling an irresolvable tension between rationality and sense (Rancière, 2002).

The toppling of rationality is the means by which the sensorium of the aesthetic gains its independence from categorisation. The capacity to make an aesthetic judgement no-longer depends, as do other judgements on 'knowledge'. For instance, the experience of art is no-longer guaranteed by knowledge of which particular king sits astride which war horse, or what type of honour is conferred on a subject by its particular treatment: "In aesthetic judgement, Kant affirms the exercise of a capacity different from that of knowledge, whether erudite or mundane" (Rancière 2003b, p.187). Art is now experienced as a free-play in which knowledge and sense are irresolvably intertwined. As we have seen this means that a particular determined class of objects and practices will no longer be the (only) site of aesthetic appreciation, but also and at the same time there can no-longer be a particular constituency (category) of people qualified to perform the aesthetic. This is because 'qualification' (knowledge) is no guarantee of disinterestedness. Finally this character of the sensorium explains why heteronomy cannot be 'complete', there cannot be the absolute integration of art into the realm of 'life', defined as it is in terms of determined categories. Art is always finally resistant to such categorisations.

Having escaped its categorical separation art can no longer serve as an alibi for marking divisions in the order of social occupations. In fact, the ruining of the clear distinction between art and everything else, which is also the ruination of the distinction between knowledge and sense, undermines division in the order of social occupations. Therefore the experience of the autonomy of art is the experience of the suspension of the order of division and hierarchy, and thus a site of potential for a new egalitarian order inspired by this equality within 'the aesthetic'.

The experience of the autonomy of art at the moment when the orders of the sensible are suspended becomes a moment and space, an opportunity, for free self-shaping that is, in principle, available to all. (Bennett 2007, p.219).

Or, in terms of Friedrich Schiller's Kantian inspired aesthetic insight:

In the days following the terror, Schiller will develop this utopian content of Kantian aesthetic: the ability to enjoy the appearance that is the education of humanity, the fragile promise of a freedom gained

beyond the opposition between working-class savagery and civilized barbarism. (Rancière 2003b, p.198-99).

Rancière has argued that this description of the aesthetic is therefore adequate to explain those 'social inscriptions' which followed Kant's theorisation, Bennett brings up the specifically German inscription of *Bildung* as an example.

It is therefore easy to see how, as one of its social inscriptions, this conception of the aesthetic came to be connected to the programs of *Bildung* that were concerned, beyond the ethical training of state bureaucrats and the private cultivation of the bourgeois, to translate culture, in its Kantian conception, into programs of public education through which the governed were to be drawn into the orbit of practices of self-government (2007, p.219).

Bennett rightly identifies that *Bildung* – along with many other examples – was precisely made possible by the muddying of the relations between art and life inaugurated by the aesthetic regime with its desire to connect "art to the task of changing life" (Bennett 2007, p.219). And it is Bourdieu's inability to theoretically accommodate this 'muddying' which accounts for his lopsided account of the aesthetic and its various social inscriptions.

Bourdieu's neglect of these considerations means that he ignores what has been and remains a tension within the rhetorics and practices of the public cultural institutions developed in the nineteenth century – art galleries, libraries, concert halls – to the extent that these have operated both as key sites for the operation of practices of distinction while also, and often at the same time, aspiring to function as institutions of civic governance committed to spreading the reach of art. (Bennett 2007, p.219).

Therefore Rancière's conception of the knotted relation of autonomy and heteronomy would appear to accurately account for those different manifestations of art's relationship to those projects of social reform which have occurred over the last 200 years. And for the same reason we can see why the aesthetic conception of art has been and can be utilised - not only by governments for the disciplining of citizens – but by those very citizens as a method of resistance. For example, as already mentioned those individuals involved in the 19th century French worker's movement, demonstrated their equality 'aesthetically' and thereby confirmed the invalidity of that 'order of the sensible' which maintained a separation between those able to appreciate art and enjoy civic entitlement and those not so lucky. As we have seen Rancière describes these types of 'realisation' as the 'first word' (2003b, p.200) of a political project of emancipation.

Conclusion

For Bourdieu 'the aesthetic' only serves the eternal reproduction of the hierarchy of cultural inheritance. As we have seen his argument takes two paths: First those subjects 'within the aesthetic' are viewed as incapable of intervening into reproduction, which is conceived as entirely separate from all discourse (with the exception of Bourdieu's sociological one). Secondly reproduction is conceived singularly; power's actual multiplicity and the concomitant necessity for a non avant-gardist approach to resistance is not recognised. This is the fundamental problematic of mastery. Taken together these moves deny any possibility of a non-sociologically sanctioned form of politics within art and the aesthetic, either for spectators or practitioners.

I have challenged these conclusions philosophically, claiming they are premised on a metaphysical assumption, which violently and fallaciously circumscribes dissensual agency. I have also shown Bourdieu's historical analysis on which these conclusions are premised is 'shaky', unable to account for the multiple social inscriptions of art and politics within the aesthetic periodization.

Alternatively, Rancière does not read the universality of the aesthetic as a false 'abstraction' that is simply the positive 'class lifestyle' of the dominant. Rather his deconstructive reading of disinterest allows him to interpret the aesthetic experience as dissensual to its aporetic core. More than this, Rancière posits his interpretation as the actual historic-social impact of Kantian aesthetic theory (the aesthetic regime), which seems borne out by nuanced readings of aesthetic and political history.

For Rancière everyone can perform non-total disinterestedness, which is universal (quasi-transcendental) precisely because this experience doesn't have a 'proper' character and can never be resolved in any particular form. Disinterestedness then can provide a promise of equality to be used in registering and challenging actually existing inequality across multiple fronts and contexts. Therefore Rancière's deconstruction rescues, what I have called, a methodological equality from the aesthetic experience which acts as a 'motor' for those types of slippage and re-articulation which both Butler and Rancière conceive as the condition of possibility for those without power to force change into the status quo.

Chapter 3

The Performance of Subjectivization as Art: *How Activist Practices can be Aesthetic Practices*

By subjectivization I mean the production through a series of actions of an instance and a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose identification is of a pair with the reconfiguration of experience. (Rancière 1999, p.35).

Introduction

The primary purpose of this chapter is to make some room within Rancière's system for certain activist art practices as critique; my example is Suzanne Lacy's extended work *Three Weeks In May*, specifically the public performance *In Mourning and In Rage* (1977). I protect such work against what I read as Rancière's tacit exclusion of them. To put it bluntly any 'conventional' reading of Rancière's writing, especially those recent texts, which contribute to his "aesthetic turn or shift" (Rancière 2005a, p.13) will be pushed towards an interpretation of activist art as destructive of the political potential of aesthetic experience²⁶. I will argue that this is an unjustifiable restriction of the art and politics interconnection. Specifically, there is no necessary reason why Rancière cannot countenance an artist *directly* performing a subjectivization within their practice. For him, that form of collective political action which contests police authority by way of a demand cannot occur directly within art practice without destroying the emancipatory potential contained within the aesthetic (Rancière 2008a, p. 11). Art is barred from acting politically in this respect, which I propose to be a non-necessary limitation of the political agency of art and artists. Therefore the purpose of this chapter is to challenge the delimitation of art practice along this specific frontier.

²⁶ Peter Hallward has described this shift as marked by the publication of *La Parole muette* in 1998. "Since then you seem to have been working mainly on topics relating to art, literature, and aesthetics. Why this shift in interest? (Rancière and Hallward 2003a, p.203)

In so doing I will produce a theory of art, as it relates to politics, which utilises Rancièrian aesthetics, but stretches this category beyond recognition. Chapter One.(b) outlined a theory of art as political, exemplified by Duncan Campbell's *Falls Burns Malone Fiddles* (2003) a work which conforms to Rancière's notion of 'emancipatory art'. This chapter will unfold a theory that has room for both Campbell's work as well as activist practices.

One way that Rancière articulates this 'frontier' concerns his understanding of the problematic nature of messages within art; in his terms messages manifest a determined semantic content, which is - strictly speaking - alien to art, defined as a disruption of straightforward communication²⁷. Activist art, in its adoption of causes and its 'vocal' denunciation of the status quo makes use of messages and therefore must be seen – in these terms – as betraying the disorderly character of the aesthetic regime, of re-installing "the aesthetic break in the representational continuity" (Rancière 2008a, p. 11).

However, in my attempt to unsettle Rancière's prohibition on certain 'messages' I must be wary not simply to fall back onto other models of critique already rejected; for instance 'the reveal' and 'dialectical clash'. As established in the previous chapter what all these methods of critique share is that their ultimate aim is to mobilise 'a public' into political action based on the revelation of a 'given' exploitation. In this way these techniques of critique presuppose a split in the intelligence of different constituencies that runs counter to Rancière's description of emancipation. Therefore to guard against this eventuality I will again make reference to Andrea Fraser's *Official Welcome* (2001), this time as a point of counter-comparison with *In Mourning and in Rage* (1977).

The type of critique I want to endorse is one wrapped up with a Rancièrian democratic politics and not mastery, but is different to the models of emancipatory spectating already

²⁷ In the example below Rancière's distinction between that which is art and that which is simply 'communication' is clearly stated in terms of two different types of image: a non-art image and the 'disassembling' art-image.

'Image' therefore refers to two different things. There is the simple relationship that produces the likeness of an original: not necessarily its faithful copy, but simply what suffices to stand in for it. And there is the interplay of operations that produces what we call art: or precisely an alteration of resemblance. This alteration can take a myriad of forms. It might be the visibility given to brush-strokes that are superfluous when it comes to revealing who is represented by the portrait; an elongation of bodies that expresses their motion at the expense of their proportions; a turn of language that accentuates the expression of a feeling or renders the perception of an idea more complex; a word or a shot in place of the ones that seemed bound to follow; and so on and so forth...All these relations define images...In the first place, the images of art are, as such, dissemblances. (2007c P.7).

discussed. I want to think a form of critique that is involved in the production of subjectivization, or follows along in an existing wake of political activity, either as the expression of the part without part, or in solidarity with that part. The primary addressee for this 'activity' would be the police order, and because of the specific (becoming) character of political subjectivization, its ultimate reference is the quasi-concept of equality. For this reason, although pressure is placed on the police order to change, this alteration is not done on the insistence of 'the one true way'. This critique avoids mastery, its trace preparing the ground for future political activity. As an aside, the term 'critique' is so associated with the strategies and assumptions of 'the reveal' that a better phrase for the model I'm proposing might simply be 'democratic politics'.

The advantage of accommodating 'democratic politics' (subjectivization) as art-critique is that it affords the possibility that art practice might function with the same political force as any other Rancièrian dissensual sequence. The chapter attempts to hurdle the barriers erected by Rancière to exclude subjectivization so as to appropriate the political traction that this model possesses for a form of activist art practice.

Subjectivization "truly distinguished" from emancipatory art

As we have seen subjectivization is a collective demonstration acting in dissensus or disagreement with the police order. This disagreement is pursued via all manner of public demands, arguments and proofs directed by political subjects at specific representatives of the police.

Rancière's position is that subjectivization cannot operate within art and the aesthetic; there is something about this collective, public dis-identification that causes it to be disqualified. In the quotation below Rancière explicitly makes a distinction between the emancipatory politics of aesthetics and the politics of subjectivization.

A political declaration or manifestation, like an artistic form, is an arrangement of words, a montage of gestures, an occupation of spaces. In both cases what is produced is a modification of the fabric of the sensible, a transformation of the visible given, intensities, names that one can give to things, the landscape of the possible. *What truly distinguishes political actions* is that these operations are the acts of a collective subject offering itself as a representative of everyone, and of the capacity of everyone. This type of creativity is specific, but it is based on modifications to the fabric of the sensible, produced in particular by artistic reconfigurations of space and time, forms and meanings. (Rancière 2007a p.264, my italics).

The “collective subject offering itself as a representative of everyone, and of the capacity of everyone” is another way of describing subjectivization. And this type of “creativity” is “truly” distinct from an emancipatory politics of art. In the terms I have been using, this emancipatory politics of art takes two forms. First, there is work like Duncan Campbell’s *Falls Burns Malone Fiddles* (2003) which causes “modifications to the fabric of the sensible”, for instance interrupting the documentary veracity of photographs with animated formal elements, and fictional voiceover. These “modifications” or sensory clashes induce disordered interpretation of the reality presented by the artwork and thus disrupt ‘conventional’ police framings. This is emancipatory to the extent that it might prepare the ground for possible democratic action, by highlighting (to a subject) the non-totality of the police order; the “sensible modifications” produced by an artwork suggest that the given world can indeed be different.

Secondly we can argue that ‘the aesthetic’ *per se* enables an experience of equality. Again we can draw on the example of Gauny; his ability to experience disinterestedly in the exact manner of his supposed betters collapses any prior hierarchic relation. But again Rancière equates this demonstration with a personal, spectatorial experience; a private confirmation of capacity that might then be taken forward into collective political struggles.

Therefore Rancière erects a bar between the politics of art and that of subjectivization. When explaining why these emancipatory politics of art must never play a more *direct* role in collective political struggles he very often frames the issue in this way: for an artwork to become directly involved in such a struggle it will attempt to hail a spectator so as to join a cause. (See also (2009, p.45; 2004c p60-66)). This hailing is the transmission of a message.

Now this political effect operates under the condition of an original disjunction, of an original effect, which is the suspension of any straight cause-effect relationship... That tension had long been concealed as the politics of art was identified with the paradigm of ‘critical art’. Critical art plugs the gap by defining a straight relation between its aims and its means: its ends would be to provoke an awareness of political situations leading to political mobilization. (Rancière 2008a, p. 11).

I would concur with Rancière that messages-in-art do “plug the gap”, and in so doing introduce many problematic ramifications into the scene of art and politics. However it is possible to envisage the situation differently: the artist becomes directly involved in a political struggle as a subjectivising subject who makes demands upon the police. In this

modality the negative consequences of messages-in-art dissipate because now the issue is one of demands-in-art.

Let us now thoroughly outline the ramifications of 'messages' so that we can identify how demands operate differently.

Emancipatory art cannot use political messages

An art is emancipated and emancipating when it renounces the *authority* of the imposed message, the target audience, and the univocal mode of explicating the world, when, in other words, it stops *wanting* to emancipate us. (Rancière 2007a, p.258).

The content and tone of this paragraph are immediately familiar; we have covered this territory before. In Chapter One.(b) I discussed Rancière's modelling of the "dialectical clash" methodology. Brecht's work afforded one example, valued by Rancière for its dissonant clashing of signifiers and theatrical techniques, but critiqued because this discordant 'play' comes to a rest in a final meaning: capitalism as *the* dark and motivating force behind everyday life (Rancière, 2005c, p.6; Rancière 2008a, p.11-12). This 'final meaning' is of the same order as those 'hidden secrets' that today's critical artists 'reveal' to their spectators. This should come as no surprise because they both belong to the 'school of the science of the hidden' (Rancière 2004c, p.49).

For Rancière then a 'message' within art, if it has a political motivation ("wanting to emancipate us") is short-hand for 'recuperated meaning' or the transcendental 'front of power' already discussed in previous chapters. There are three ways that 'messages' produce their authoritarian effects.

1. The univocal determined message

A message represents univocal objective knowledge. And this objective knowledge, or in the terms of the previous chapter 'singular-term-of-power' is produced by fallaciously isolating it from 'structurality', thereby determining its fixed and unified status. Univocality is therefore a consequence of determination, the halting of 'play' to produce singular meaning.

Strictly speaking messages cannot be 'art' for Rancière because art involves the withdrawal of the kind of determination which creates messages. As we have seen 'knowledge' which normally produces determined concepts, is 'interrupted' within the aesthetic experience,

drawn into an unstable adequation with sense disqualifying the closure upon which concepts rely. The presentation of a straight-forward message within an artwork is an ossification of the political possibilities contained within the aesthetic, which, when functioning properly (improperly) allows spectators to see their world in non-determined, multiple ways (Rancière 2004b p.82). Art draws attention to, rather than hiding the relationality, or contingency of all meaning.

2. Message are imposed, they want something from us

Secondly, messages impose themselves trying to make us think and feel in a specific way. Simply by being univocal, they ask that we as spectators accept their fixed picture-of-the-world. Political messages would like us to do something: overthrow (singular) exploitation. As we have seen in Chapter Two artists who use messages seek to transform ignorant spectators into those possessing objective knowledge securing for themselves the status of master. Rancière also sometimes discusses this imposition, as 'ethical': an artwork that wants its viewers to think and act in a certain way imposes an ethics. He uses the term pejoratively seeing it as commensurate with police classification. "Ethics, then, is the kind of thinking in which an identity is established between an environment, a way of being and a principle of action" (2009, p.110).

Imposed univocality (ethical or not) 'stultifies' and therefore destroys aesthetic regime art as emancipatory; for instance, the critical messages' obsession with 'one source of power' serves to restrict art as a disorderly site of interpretation. Imposed messages place an onus on spectators to follow one course of resistance, but art under the aesthetic regime is properly *wayward*, and therefore cannot plot-out any particular path to be followed: "[Artworks cannot] avoid the aesthetic cut that separates the outcomes from the intentions and forbids any straight way toward an 'other side' of the words and the images" (2008a, p.14). To suppress the 'loss' or to attempt to suture this cut is to establish the artwork as message, to produce a "rhetoric of persuasion about what has to be done" (2008a, p.11).

3. Messages target audiences

Thirdly messages address specific constituencies. In the most extreme version a well meaning, politically minded artist might seek out those most excluded under a particular socio-political hegemony: ethnic minorities, illegal immigrants, the homeless, etc. However for Rancière this gesture confirms and entrenches the partition of people into *peoples*.

Simply in seeking out 'the homeless' to address 'their problems' is to fantasize a coherent group identity. The artist's actions will be based on a received understanding (an 'ethical categorization') of what a homeless person might want or expect from life²⁸.

This approach again cannot but betray the political promise of aesthetic art, which is premised on the incapacitating of any partitions of 'difference' and thus hierarchy; that everyone can experience aesthetically, renders the categorization and ranking of peoples inoperative. The parvenu spectator in her ability to perform disinterestedness recognises her equality, and this recognition might inspire the development of a collective political project which attempts to oblige the police order to do so too.

Does *In Mourning and in Rage* harbour a political message?

It is my contention that Rancière's rejection of messages, has contributed to a contemporary discourse which holds to a rather un-nuanced assertion that art must avoid messages to attain the desired 'radical ambiguity'. This viewpoint asserts that for work to be 'art' it must evoke - in Kantian terms – a free play of mental faculties. Rancière's specific contribution is to insist that this free play corresponds to art's politicality. Obviously, as the efforts of my previous chapters have shown, I am not against this political interpretation. In fact I have demonstrated this perspective to be more productive, and historically more convincing than that foundational understanding of art represented by Bourdieu and Fraser. Rancière offers more space for art to become a site of resistance to the social given. (However the argument of this chapter is that he could offer more space still).

However I find the general denigration of messages within art overly prescriptive, ignoring as it does different modalities of message. I find problematic the way artists and critics assume that the expression of commitment, or an assertion about how the world might be different, or better, is the limit-point for spectatorial mental free play in art. To express or

²⁸ I take this to be the criticism Rancière makes of Rene Fransisco's contribution to the 26th Sao Paulo biennial in 2004:

With a group of artists, [Fransisco] dedicated the money of an art foundation to survey the needs of the inhabitants of a poor district. But it is not enough to survey their needs, it is necessary to respond to them. Rene Fransisco's video shows the artist/artisans taking up the doing up of the plumbing and painting of an old couple's house... The problem is that the indisputable effort of very many artists to shatter the dominant consensus and reconsider the existing order tends to [return] artistic power back to the provocation of the ethical task of testifying to the common world and of assistance to the most disadvantaged... It is the forms taken today by [Fransisco's art]... of individual assistance to the most destitute [that] rejects the equality of recent artistic avant-gardes and builders of socialism (Rancière 2005b).

assert in this way is to render one's art instrumental, to betray the potential politics of aesthetic experience. This is the particular edict that I hope to disrupt in the following chapter. I do not mean to justify all messages, or expressions of commitment in art, or anywhere else for that matter, as often these statements *are* tied up with the types of critical mastery already addressed. I have in mind rather a very particular type of message, what I call a political demand.

I take Suzanne Lacy's video *In Mourning and in Rage* to be a particularly good example of the use of demands within art. Her public performance now exists as photographic, textual and video documentation. Below is a description of the event:

On the morning of December 13th, 1977, a funeral motorcade of twenty two cars filled with women followed a hearse from the Woman's Building Los Angeles to City Hall. At which point nine black-clad women wearing headdresses with veils to give them an imposing height and presence emerged from the hearse and took up positions on the steps facing the street. Women from the motorcade filled in behind them and unfurled a banner that read, "In memory of our sisters, Women fight back." Then, with City Hall behind them and the assembled local press in front, the first mourner walked to the microphone and said, "I am here for the ten women who have been raped and strangled between October 18 and November 29," after which she was echoed by the chorus of mourners who chanted, "In memory of our sisters, women fight back." In succession, each of the nine veiled women made statements that connected the Hillside Strangler murders with the larger social and political issues of violence against women, and each, in turn, was echoed by the chorus in the performance of what Lacy called "a modern tragedy." (Kelley 1995, p.241)

In Mourning and in Rage then, as described, and in the terms offered under Rancière's characterisation of 'messages' would seem not to be emancipated or emancipating. There is a strong content within the work, which is clearly expressed. The 'truth' of the statements in the artwork are (apparently) not open to negotiation, a reality is being identified and 'revealed', to this extent the work appears univocal. There is *little* room for a spectator to freely interpret the video's message; the differential and indefinitely deferred nature of making meaning is not emphasised. To this extent – to the extent that any message can be entirely 'compulsory' – the message is imposed. And by staging the performance on the steps of the town hall, deliberately directing her message at those in institutional power, she targets a specific audience.

However this negative assessment is only possible if the *context of its enunciation* is ignored. As part of second wave feminism Lacy represented a subjectivizing subject, and her artwork operated as a demand in dissensus with the police order. It is my contention that this situation confers upon *In Mourning and In Rage* a special status which makes it non-instrumental (enough) to be included under the umbrella of 'the aesthetic'. In this way I use Rancière's own definition of the political subject against him; his post-foundational description of political activity can explain how some political messages (demands) might avoid authoritarian proscription. His ruling on the conservative nature of political messages within art can be ignored if the message is voiced by his own political subject, that is, if the message is a demand.

Subjectivization via demands

'As your equals we women, precarious workers, immigrants want to be able to unionise, to be paid fairly, to be subject to the law in the way that others are'. Is this statement a message? I intend to answer that it is not, or not quite. Rather this declaration is what I shall call a 'demand'. Demands made as part of political subjectivization do not fulfil those criteria which Rancière establishes so as to dismiss political messages within art. In fact demands function 'aesthetically', and as such can be positioned within art without travesty of its political promise. In order to explain how demands function I first need to recap and finesse my description of politics, specifically the emergence of the subjectivizing group from a police order. The role that 'demands' play within this political scene confers their special status.

The police functions through 'determination', or in other words, the imposition of categories; for instance typologies of identity, social role and civic entitlement. All are secured in their 'positivity' by being placed – across multiple fronts (gender, ethnicity, age, disability, economic bracket...) – in binary relations of hierarchy. The Roman patrician is secured in his absolute opposition to the lowly plebeian, (1999, p.24) the 18th Century liberal professional's right to govern established against the manual labourer (Bennett 2007 p.217), whose work (supposedly) did not afford the time for any 'higher calling'. The distribution of the sensible is the (imperfect) totality of these hierarchic relations between those symbolically positioned to partake in power, and those not.

However power's attempt to binarize is flawed, falling into contradiction as its attempted polarisations falter. Subjectivization works to exacerbate this faltering. Rancière has

described subjectivization as an “impossible identification” (2003a p.196), one which exists *between* determined, recognised categories-of-people.

Let me rephrase this: a subject is an outsider or, more, an in-between...political subjectivization is the enactment of equality – or the handling of a wrong – by people who are together to the extent that they are between. It is a crossing of identities, relying on a crossing of names: names that link the name of a group or a class to the name of no group or no class, a being to a nonbeing or not-yet-being. (1992, p.61).

Those names subjectivization “crosses” belong to a known identity cast as unequal within the police order and that same identity, this time, recast as equal. The recognised lowly “group or class” is linked to that of a “non-being, or not-yet-being” which should be understood as that same “class or group” ‘proposed to be’ the equal of everyone else.

What *does not* happen when a collective subject presupposes and demonstrates its equality is that the police suddenly, as cause follows effect, accept the newly equal constituency. No, politics takes place in that hiatus between a given identity and a new identity figured as equal. The argument made by ‘the subordinated’ as per their equality is not straightforwardly recognised.

[In politics] there is the dispute over the object of the dispute, the dispute over the existence of the dispute and the parties confronting each other in it. For the idea that speaking beings are equal because of their common capacity for speech is a reasonable-unreasonable idea – unreasonable, in regard to the way societies are structured, from the holy kingdoms of Antiquity to our modern societies of experts. (Rancière 1999, p.55).

Subjectivization continues so long as it retains its status as lacuna within ‘social objectivity’, which is to say so long as the beneficiaries of hierarchy are in disagreement with the validity of the subordinates’ assertion of equality. The process of dissensus and disagreement produces a ‘zone of indeterminacy’ within social objectivity, whereby an understanding (inkling) of the *validity* of the subordinates claim oscillates with an understanding of the unequal as simply unequal. Rancière describes this situation as the paradoxical emergence of ‘two worlds in one’, two alternative realities jostling within the same social space.

Politics makes visible that which had no reason to be seen, it lodges one world into another (for instance, the world where the factory is a public space within the one where it is considered a private one, the world where workers speak out vis-à-vis the one where their voices are merely cries expressing pain) (2001, p.7).

Importantly this 'jostling' reveals the contradiction of hierarchy in spite of (an enabling and ruining) equality, and thereby undermines hierarchy as a valid social arrangement.

To restate then the inherent frailty, or contradiction of the police order as hierarchy-despite-equality is highlighted in subjectivization, but the veracity of this contradiction is not fully endorsed by the police order, who 'disagree' until the end of the political sequence, whereby the demonstration of equality is repressed. Or, alternatively becomes (non-dialectically) inscribed into the social: "[a] verification [of equality] becomes 'social', causes equality to have real social effect, only when it mobilizes an *obligation* to hear" (Rancière 1995, p.86).

I will address this inscription in more depth later in the chapter, but first I want to specify how demands operate within subjectivization.

The demand

By way of an example lets us return to the French Tailor's strike. If we remember the workers, through statements and argumentation, pointed out the contradictory position of the public prosecutors (Monsieur Persil and Schwartz) who continued to deny workers had an 'equal status'.

In this example then, "the crossing of identities" occurs through a verbal, or written *demand*, which acts semantically, i.e. it argues for worker's equal status using the preamble of the French Charter as leverage. These demands demonstrate at the level of content (as well as form). A 'litigious' equal relation is established where before there was none.

[Dissensus with police order] passes through the constitution of specific subjects that take the wrong upon themselves, give it shape, invent new forms and names for it, and conduct its processing in a specific montage of *proofs*: "logical" arguments [demands] that are at the same time a way of shaping the relationship between speech and its *account* as well as the perceptible configuration...Political subjectivization redefines the field of experience which gave to each their identity with their lot. (1999, p.40)

Therefore 'the demand' is a key feature of subjectivization. The performative effect of these words is to tear the workers away from their determined police identity as unequal, and drag them towards a not-yet-being of shared status

And this movement away from a lowly position towards an equal one is a process of destabilization which confronts the false totality of the police order by highlighting its non-

totality. The contradiction of hierarchy-in-spite-of-equality is starkly dramatized, two worlds forcibly emerge in one – the world of hierarchy is shown to be invalid when exhibited alongside (and dependent upon) the one where all are equal with all.

Demands are aesthetic

On the basis of this nuanced account of subjectivization let us establish those ways that demands operate aesthetically and in so doing distinguish themselves from messages.

1. Demands are not univocal

As we have seen the experience of art under the aesthetic regime involves a dynamic adequation of rationality and sense. Or in other terms, art induces an experiential shuttling between autonomy and heteronomy. Thought and sensory experience within the aesthetic remain open to the possibility of re-articulating the social *indefinitely*. In this way art is multiplicitous, with different political interpretations always possible.

Also I have established that messages, on the other hand are the product of the normal functioning of rationality, determined as fully figured, or present, and therefore resolutely univocal. The messages' relational inscription in a structure of meaning, and therefore always possible re-articulation (in play), is suppressed so as to present a picture of finality: 'the way of the world', 'objective conditions', the 'singular emanation of power'. Therefore messages cannot be utilized within aesthetic regime art without travesty its irresolution, and thereby political promise.

However a demand, under subjectivization, is *not* univocal existing within and responsible for a lacuna in the normal determining functioning of the police order. A demand produces indeterminacy, the condition of two worlds in one. Subjectivization via demand exists in a state of suspension before, or between the determining order. Until the police come to a decision on the status of a demand – or the project is simply abandoned - those bodies and subjectivities to which it refers, indeed the entire political scene 'hovers' before police suppression or (non-dialectical) accommodation.

On these grounds 'the demand' *cannot* be rejected from the aesthetic experience. In Kantian terms the demand exists between (or approaches) knowledge, rationality or 'conceptual thinking'. Or in Rancière's own terminology the demand, or political scene of which it is a part, represents a movement between the politics of autonomy, that is

distance from any 'community of meaning' and a secure, stable social position/meaning (heteronomy).

2. Demands impose aesthetically

Univocal messages are imposing. They tell us what to think and how to act. I want to show that demands, although they impose on the police, do so differently from messages. But first I need to re-examine the *force* that Rancière theorises for politics.

The police does not preside over the action of politics, remaining aloof, and deciding upon its eventual codification on a kind of whim, either magnanimously including the subjectivizing group, or pitilessly rejecting them. No, the police is not like some Roman Emperor in a Hollywood film, turning his thumb to decide whether a gladiator is put to death, or spared. The police, if "obliged to hear" are deeply implicated by a political action, placed under a type of stress, which forces the beneficiaries of hierarchy to accommodate the unequal subject, or, it must be admitted, forces them to suppress the existence of this equality. My point is that politics presses the police into a situation that demands a reaction. Politics has a force, places an onus on power in a way that it finds difficult – although, of course, not impossible – to resist.

On the other hand, and as indicated in my introduction, Rancière often seems to suggest that emancipatory art exists in a more passive relation with its audience, to restate: "It is up to the various forms of politics to appropriate, for their own proper use, the modes of presentation or the means of establishing explanatory sequences produced by artistic practices rather than the other way round". (2004c p.65).

Does the 'imposition' that political subjectivization places on the police prevent 'demands' from becoming aesthetic art? Imposition is problematic, if conceived in terms of an artwork offering a blue-print for action to spectators as potential political subjects, that is, members of a future subjectivizing group. This is how messages impose.

Let us discuss this issue in terms of a supposed strategy of resistance wherein a police order is met by a 'critical' message. Here a message confronts the police order with (another) false totality. In Bourdieu and Fraser's terms the implacable reproduction of cultural inheritance is confronted with the 'objective knowledge' of this power as autonomous and singular. Under this knowledge power is diagnosed, and a positive cure is proposed to remedy its insidious effect. This singular front upon which battle must proceed

is, in Derridean terms, a metaphysical 'centre beyond structurality'. In the case of the political message a metaphysical problem – the false totality of police order – is compounded by another metaphysical problem – the false totality of the 'critical message'. And, as we are by now familiar, the net result of the political message is the establishment of a relation of mastery. The obsession with 'one source of power' and 'one course of action against that power' constricts awareness of other power fronts, or the mutation of existing ones. And again, simply encountering the master who wields the authority-of-certainty therefore positions the spectator as follower, performatively deterring her from personally identifying and reacting to inequality.

However a demand operates in quite a different way. As we have seen subjectivization, via demand highlights the contradiction of hierarchy-in-spite-of-equality, the false certitude of the police order is met with a performative demonstration of its frailty. And it is so long as this zone of indeterminacy is maintained that politics has force, can show the police order to be non-total. While the subjectivizing group can maintain this dissensus the police order is placed under a type of stress. Derrida has described how the exposure of the dream of totality provokes *anxiety*.

And on the basis of this certitude anxiety can be mastered, anxiety is invariably the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game, of being caught by the game, of being as it were at stake in the game from the outset (2001, p.352).

Subjectivization via demand only has force, only truly 'rattles' the police-order so long as an alternative blueprint-for-order is *not* provided. The force of politics coincides with the emptiness of equality. Sure, demands will contain explanations, arguments, and proofs as to why a certain group is marginalised; in terms of feminism, for instance, the signifier 'patriarchy' often fulfils this role. However in subjectivization these proofs do not 'determine' the 'stake of equality' around which the struggle turns. As we have seen, Rancière's position is that under the architecture of subjectivization the principle of equality is pushed to the fore (even if the word is not directly used) (Rancière 1999, p. 30). This produces the opposite effect to mastery. The highlighting of the non-totality of police order through the performance of its contradictory nature is emancipatory showing that it might be challenged but not proscribing a 'front of resistance'; possible future subjectivizing groups are facilitated, but not directed.

Therefore what a demand 'wants' (the problem with which it engages) is exactly the same thing that Rancière's emancipatory art practice 'wants', that is, the acknowledgement of the non-totality of police order.

The problem (for emancipatory practice), first of all, is to create some breathing room, to loosen the bonds that enclose spectacles within a form of visibility, bodies within an estimation of their capacity, and possibility within the machine that makes the "state of things" seem evident, unquestionable. (Rancière 2007a, p.261).

Therefore there is no reason that the specific type of imposition a demand places on the police should cause it to be ejected from the category of emancipatory aesthetic art.

The beggar's pantomime

Before I move on I want to briefly address Melanie Gilligan's critique of Rancière's performative understanding of politics in her article *The Beggar's Pantomime: Performance and its Appropriations* (2007a), in which she sketches a contemporary world of capitalist production that is saturated by a pervasive logic of performativity.

Theorists across disciplines have identified a generalized condition of performativity in contemporary labour - one emerging from the current regime of production, which produces and exploits communication and social relations in addition to conventional, tangible commodities (2007a, p.5).

Her criticism of Rancière's political theory is that like certain contemporary artists, specifically Catherine Sullivan, he unwittingly rehearses this tectonic shift within capitalism, giving a subversive 'spin' to what is actually the simple manifestation of a new capitalist order. Where Rancière sees subjects redistributing the sensible through actions of dissensus Gilligan sees 'performers' merely channelling the operations of post-fordist capitalism.

In this sense, Rancière's notion of fleeting political events and transitory roles coincides perhaps too well with a model of accumulation dependent on movement, flexibility, and performative labour... Also working to undermine the critical traction of Rancière's ideas is the fact that redistributions and disruptions of the sensible are a primary operation of contemporary commerce. Advertising and media thrive on disruptive frisson; re-orderings and subversions of existing visual, affective, and semiotic codes (e.g., guerrilla marketing) can generate revenue. (2007a, p.7).

The portrayal of Rancière's politics as the advocacy of a certain hectic adoption of different identities and roles allows Gilligan to find a correspondence between his philosophy and

Sullivan's highly choreographed art-performances, famous for a certain hysterical or schizophrenic role playing, *and* to damn them both as manifestations of – rather than critical interventions into – our contemporary (capitalist) status quo.

However what Gilligan neglects is the importance of equality in Rancière's theorisation of the force of politics. As we have seen it is only through a collective demonstration of equality, which is brought into contact with an instance of police hierarchy that any traction can be expected. Rancière would definitely not see Sullivan's piece *The Chittendens* (2005) - as does Gilligan - as an example of subjectivization. It falls short of all the criteria he sets: the equality of actors' identifies' is not at stake and there is no sense that this scene partakes in a broader collective struggle. Not to mention the fact that Rancière does not admit that subjectivization can be art. Gilligan, in deducting equality from Rancière's theory of political performance has removed its 'decentred heart' creating a straw man. And I would argue that so long as relations of hierarchy are with us collective performances of equality – based around specific demands – will continue to possess traction on the police, in spite of that order's promotion of myriad *other* forms of self invention and renewal.

3. Demands target audiences aesthetically

To return to our central discussion, we have seen that one problem of the 'imposed message' within aesthetic regime art is that in seeking to produce a determined effect it aims to address a particular pre-given group of people. This 'targeting' relies on a categorisation of one's audience, which is, in the final instance an (unavoidable) stereotyping of their capacity and thus entitlements. To target an audience is to position a set of bodies in a particular 'destination'.

However, as we have seen: "Aesthetic experience has a political effect to the extent that the loss of destination that it presupposes disturbs the way in which bodies fit their functions and destinations" (Rancière 2008a, p.11).

The formal universality of the aesthetic experience operates as a site for the demonstration of equality beyond distinct categorizations and hierarchy. The experience of 'autonomy' is the suspension of the partitioned orders of identity and profession, whereas the process of 'targeting' serves to shore-up this structure.

A demand under subjectivization is often targeted; the 19th century French tailors direct their argument at Monsieur Persil and Schwartz, the public prosecutors. This might seem

reason to reject 'the demand' from aesthetic regime art, but to do so would again be mistaken. The net result of the directed demand is to disorder, rather than entrench, the given identities of both addresser and addressee within political speech. We have already analysed the way demands tear the identities of those who make them away from given police allotment. However within the political scene the identities of the beneficiaries of hierarchy are also thrown into doubt. When the equality of all-with-all emerges with the 'world of hierarchy' the latter is shown to be entirely contingent. And thus the identities of those beneficiaries premised on police hierarchy are similarly subverted. Again, the 'experience' of a political scene is 'aesthetic' because – for all concerned – the entrenched hierarchic allotment of identity is 'suspended'.

The (non dialectical) accommodation of politics by the police

I have shown that the critical practice which proceeds via demands differs radically from that which utilises messages. The former disturbs univocality; the latter offers another version of univocality. However I have also mentioned that for police order to be lastingly altered, that is, to be moved from one distribution of the sensible to another, the 'excessive' egalitarianism of politics must – to a certain extent - be tamed. A new distribution involves establishing positive orders and categories which can never be adequate to the quasi-transcendental of equality. Therefore if the result of a critical practice as demand is another univocal order, then what - in the end - is the difference between this dissensual operation and that which utilises messages? For change *can* occur via the implementation of messages.

The question that needs to be addressed is whether the process of 'taming', or accommodation, wherein a settlement is negotiated with police power means that political action operates as a perfect circuit, returning in its conclusion to its point of departure? If this is the case Rancière's conception of politics would be antagonistic to 'progress', rather positing a static model where the police order always has the final word. In this reading politics is fundamentally pointless because hierarchy always re-emerges at the end of any subjectivization. These are Nick Hewlett and Bob Jessop's worries.

As Bob Jessop... suggests, there seems to be a 'recurrent cycle' whereby when political insurrection takes place, it is bound to fail and is 'doomed to re-institutionalization'. It is not at all clear that there is a possibility of ongoing democratic and egalitarian politics because the interruption of the police seems bound to be temporary and fleeting, because it is defined as an exception to the status quo

rather than a potentially normal and ongoing state of things (or slowly evolving situation) in its own right. Failure of radical politics seems to be built into radical politics' very definition...This seems to break with an enlightenment concept of progress, without convincingly replacing it with another. (Hewlett 2007, p.106, citing Jessop 2003, p.17).

However this criticism underestimates the significant change that politics introduces into the police. A distribution which results after a political sequence has obliged accommodation is definitely *not* the same as that which existed before the sequence.

First, a new group has 'won' rights and status previously denied. They now possess a new role and greater share. This is a significant – life changing – victory for the group in question. Would this group feel that their action had been, on some fundamental level, a failure? They definitely did not fail themselves.

But the stronger point is that political action serves to weaken the justifiability of police orders *per se*. Politics 'breaks' the police in a way that is impossible to entirely 'fix'.

There is a worse and a better police - the better one, incidentally, not being the one that adheres to the supposedly natural order of society or the science of legislators, but the one that all the breaking and entering perpetrated by egalitarian logic has most often jolted out of its "natural" logic. (Rancière 1999, p30-31).

The 'better' police orders, are those that have been most interrupted by politics, each mobilization pushing to the surface the constitutive contradiction of hierarchy making it available for further utilisation in political action. Therefore even under the 'accommodation' of political action, the principle of equality remains to the fore. In this register 'equality' is *remembered* as the primary stake of a particular struggle. This is most obvious when equality becomes enshrined in those institutions transformed by political action (Rancière 1995, p.48). These traces are reminders of the frailty of the police, marking with an X the site of its non-totality, or acting as a wound on the otherwise seemingly healthy body politic. (Art as 'untenable foundation' operates as one such wound). This enshrined principle - again - enables further resistance, facilitating dissensus without directing its path. Alternatively this is *not* the case if a 'message' achieves a social effect. What occurs here is that one police order is simply replaced by another; police orders *per se* are not tested and shown to be inadequate. Let us dramatize this situation by imagining an institution produced through the accommodation of a message:

This institution is founded on a positive order conceived as 'solving' the previous

hegemonic situation. And thus, in this register, the result of accommodating a 'message' is not significantly different from the result of a successful demanding political action. However an important divergence registers in the fact that our 'imaginary institution' becomes resistant to further change. The 'truth' of exploitation having been discovered and dealt with, would render further claims for change or reform seemingly unnecessary. (Unless they could precisely situate themselves within the logic of the 'first' round of changes). If the new institution is a *manifestation* of 'the solution', why maintain a rigorous self critical attitude, why listen to those deluded souls who still feel dominated? In other words this new order produced via the accommodation of a 'message' institutes an *arche*, which - unlike the 'wound' left by political action - stultifies the possibility of futural change. Therefore in this important register the *legacy* of a 'critical practice of demand' is also significantly different to the legacy of 'critical message'.

And therefore Hewlett and Jessop's criticisms would seem to miss their mark. Rancière's theorization of political action can only be judged to be a 'precisely recurring cycle', or a 'failure' if one ignores the significant gains made by subjectivizing communities *and* if one conceptualises the police order as emerging unscathed - as strong as ever - from every encounter with politics. Rancière does, it seems to me, replace the enlightenment notion of progress with one which desires a police order ever more accommodating of different claims to equality, *without* dictating how these claims are made, or who might voice them.

In Mourning and in Rage

Now I would like to think through this notion of demand as art in relation to *In Mourning and in Rage* (1977). I will also again discuss Fraser's *Official Welcome* (2001) to show how this piece functions differently utilizing the logic of 'the message'.

The form of Lacy's work would seem to mimic the political scene as described by Rancière, whereby a particular group is excluded from rights accorded to everyone else and demonstrates their equality partly via 'demands' so as to challenge this partition.

However I want to proceed more slowly to establish the co-ordinates of this political scene because only then can we begin to see if those discourses and actions mobilised have equality as their final reference. Perhaps the first question to ask is whether Lacy and her "group" can be seen as the victims of hierarchy?

I contend that 'women' were (still are) barred from that right bestowed by civil society, where it is reasonable for *everyone* to feel safe on the streets of a city. We can see this

marginalisation in the English petit-police's near contemporaneous response to the case of the 70's Yorkshire Ripper murders. The subsequent Reclaim the Night marches provide another good example of political action.

In 1977 The Yorkshire Ripper was still terrorising the north of England and the police had been advising that, to avoid attack, women should stay inside after dark. The [Reclaim the Night] march responded directly to this warning (placards read "No curfew on women - curfew on men") and hundreds of women shouted about their anger at being kept off the streets - the supposedly public highways, after all - by the threat of male violence. (Bindel 2006).

Police imposed a curfew on women. This was flouted demanding that it should be 'men' who be kept indoors, as the perpetrator was a man. This gesture exposed the inequality in societies' regard for woman. Women had their rights curtailed, 'for their own good', when it would have been just as logical, perhaps more so, to curtail the rights of men. The march revealed the favour men are granted in the 'right to safety'.

So it would seem that the police category of 'woman' – at the time of the performance – was marginalised in some ways 'outside' the benefits of supposed universal rights (the right to feel safe on the streets). In both cases women belong to a category - *on this issue* - unequal/invisible/marginal to other parts of society. Therefore we can begin to see *In Mourning and in Rage*, as part of the broader movement of second-wave feminism, as a particular collective contestation of unequal positioning, a political gesture, in which there is a meeting of an egalitarian logic and a police logic.

Although none of the performers – as far as I can gather – uses the word equality, I think that an 'egalitarian demonstration' operates at several levels within the work. It is worth mentioning that it is sometimes not always obvious whether an 'action' circulates around an issue of equality, and is therefore political, or whether it does not and therefore falls short of Rancière's criteria. This is made explicit, as in the case of *In Mourning and In Rage* when the word 'equality' is not spoken. Todd May addresses this issue in relation to striking workers.

One might even take issue with Rancière's example [of the striking French Tailors], arguing that the issue at stake there was not equality, but wages and working conditions...Whether or not this particular strike was an expression of equality, Rancière has shown in his analysis how it can be that a strike is such an expression. It would seem that most strikes for higher wages and better working conditions contain at least an element of active equality. Because they arise from a sense that those who work deserve to be treated in

a more nearly equal way to those who employ them, there is an orientation of such strikes towards the presupposition of equality, even when they are not explicitly or deeply implicitly tied to that presupposition. (2008, p.54-55).

I think the demand by Lacy's 'group' is that women not be treated as victims. Again and again, on the steps of the town hall the phrase "women fight back" (Kelley 1995, p.241) is spoken. For me this demand is of the same order as a picket's claims for better wages, in that although not *manifestly* concerning equality (the word is not used) an attempt is made to escape one lowly position in favour of an equal one; a place where the best that can be hoped for is a passive acceptance of pity, to one where a (metaphoric) even contest is proposed, women as equally active to their male counterparts: "Women fight back". This chant is responsible for tearing the performers' identities away from police positioning and establishing that lacuna in social objectivity within which politics occurs and which accounts for its force.

The staging of the performance at City Hall is also important in this respect serving to emphasize that the performers and their statements are of equal importance to any other public representative located in, or 'affair of governance' addressed within this building. This appropriation of a recognised 'political' location so as to press equality emphasises the gap which usually exists between the universal values manifested in City Hall and the identity 'woman'. Again we witness the symbolic leap, whereby the performers disengage from previous understandings of 'woman'²⁹ and push towards the virtual or future community where they are identified as equal. It is interesting how much the speakers emphasise their own visibility or presence, both in the imposing costumes, but also in phrases like "I am here..." (Kelley 1995, p.241). It is as if they are trying to force themselves into 'being', within a sensible distribution which cannot apprehend them.

It is in this moment when the marginal group voice their grievances – or more accurately when this marginal group comes into being by 'disagreeing' – that the partisan statement is precisely *not* univocal, *not* a message but a demand. A univocal statement identifies a particular reality, a reality not open to negotiation. However the 'world' to which Lacy's performers refer, one in which women are equal citizens (under this civil issue) was 'open to negotiation' because this issue was in 'dispute'. The 'referents' of their representations, including their own identities were in doubt, not authoritatively singular, but oscillating, emergent, contingent, in a word political.

²⁹ The different 'content' of these understandings is less important than their implicit positioning of women as private, marginal beings.

Also, because the demand takes place under subjectivization, a performance of equality which reveals the non totality of the police order, an emancipatory effect results. The central stake of the disagreement is registered as the struggle against inequality. This is not 'filled-in', or determined by a legitimating discourse (for instance patriarchy as the cause of all social ills) and thus serves as an incision on the surface of the police, marking its frailty and encouraging (without directing) further subjectivization.

Finally in choosing city hall Lacy targets a particular constituency of politicians and civic figures, directing the force of her collective performance at those not only implicated in the exclusions against which she protests, but also in a position to begin the (non-dialectical) transformation of demand into determined police reality. But this transformation can only occur – as it does within Lacy's performance – if the targeted demand undoes the orders of hierarchy between politicians and everyone else, provoking 'anxiety' and obliging the police to act.

Therefore the demands and demonstrations which structure Lacy's collective performance are not univocal. They are targeted, but only so as to untie orders of authority, they are imposed, but only to *press* the police through a demonstration of its non-totally. Therefore *In Mourning and In Rage* is a form of art that fully embraces the political promise of the aesthetic.

How does Lacy's performance compare with Fraser's *Official Welcome*?

Fraser, although performing multiple shifting personas, does not perform a subjectivization. She does not create a political scene by taking issue with her own exclusion, by a police order, or in solidarity with others. The uncanny nature of her performed characters is not the result of bringing together a previous identity, beyond the pale of certain rights, and a new identity for which those rights are demanded on account of equality. There is no obvious meeting of a police logic and a political logic.

Rather, I have argued that Fraser's impersonations parody those types of art world performance designed to secure distinction. And this is done to *reveal* distinction as the method whereby the hierarchy of social inheritance is reproduced. Fraser thereby communicates a univocal message, a final explanation for the operation of power within art and the social more generally. Her texts are very important in this respect. They are considered to be a facet of her practice, and they serve to anchor her production to this

reading. Again the problem is not that she 'spells out meaning', but that her meaning takes the form of a message.

Let us pause for a second and give Fraser's work a more generous – from my perspective - reading. What if she *is* revealing the inequality at the heart of the social, showing that some are excluded from symbolic capital, some are treated less equally than others? This is undoubtedly part of her and Bourdieu's project. The ultimate motivating force for them is a reordering of social relations so as to mitigate social exclusion. Is this not the same as political action?

No it is not. She postulates *one reason* for this exclusion, which is presented as unchanging and beyond negotiation. This content positivizes the claim for equality – fills it in, and as such obfuscates its emancipatory potential. This 'content' is pushed to the fore in her practice inducing stultification and mastery.

Finally, even if we except that Fraser's analysis might actually mitigate the symbolic violence suffered by some – which is debateable – then the 'trace' which the implementation of the project leaves on the social, its discursive/affective legacy is *still* problematic. This trace is a confirmation of a break in intelligences between those (artist sociologists) able to perform the correct analysis, and everyone else whose interpretation is invalid.

Conclusion: why subjectivization and art?

Why should a political subjectivization be positioned as art? This question splits in two: firstly, what does this concept gain from being included in art? And secondly what might 'art' gain from this inclusion?

First, I will not answer these questions directly but rather re-iterate an explanation for why it might be *likely* to occur. I have indorsed the view that Rancièrian political activity is more likely in a context in which equality is already written into the fabric of society (Rancièrè 1995, p. 48). And I have argued in Chapters One.(b) and Two that art under the aesthetic regime is part of this inscription. Within our contemporary notion of art lurks the promise of equality. The discourse of aesthetic regime art, as well as those museums and galleries which – at least in part – might be taken as monuments to this promise are available sites within which to demonstrate one's equal capacity (Gauny 1983, p.45-46 cited in Rancièrè 2003b, p.199). Thus art and the aesthetic in symmetry with the enshrined promise of democracy encourages political action operating as a marker against which instances of inequality can be measured and contested.

Therefore it is unsurprising that art and the aesthetic (its general 'discourse' as well as its institutions) would have been and continues to be an arena for subjectivization. As a side note, this places art activist practices which campaign for inclusion within the arts themselves in an interesting position. The Guerrilla Girls (Flanagan et al., 2007; Withers 1988) subjectivize around a demand for women to be fairly included in the machinery of art - i.e. 'We want fair representation: more women artists in survey shows'. Here, art reveals itself to be like democratic government, or 'the law', both agents of the police as well as harbouring the seeds of their own egalitarian transformation. This shows something that we already knew, that the promise of art to enact equality under the aesthetic regime is often, perhaps most often, betrayed by the actually existing machinery of art. This is no reason to give up on that promise, to see, as does Bourdieu, this equality as an ideological cover for one deeper truth. Bourdieu's option is the worse one, leading to the endless reproduction of the pre-supposition of inequality.

However in order to begin to answer our first question let us return to a more 'stable' example, that of an activist art practice for which the immediate target is not the institution of art but another facet of police order. As we have seen with Lacy the semantic demand: "we want to be able to unionise, to be paid fairly, to be subject to the law in the way that others are" is accompanied by an aesthetic demonstration, whereby the subjectivizing group demonstrates the equality of their intelligence through games of abstraction, or appropriation. I introduce this 'stable' example only to add a complication.

As we have seen *all* political scenes are doubled in this way. Simply to contest one's mute position in society by speaking is to demonstrate one's equality aesthetically. However in the standard political scene this *will* always accompany a specific demand as part of a disagreement. In the classic case the Roman plebeians performed a kind of wild appropriation. Simply by using language 'formally', by adopting the etiquette and conventions of their superiors, they demonstrated their equality as well as semantically demanding it (Rancière 1999, p.24). The double demonstration in art then might be said to place an added emphasis on the aesthetic dimensions of the political demand; I am thinking of the way that the formal demonstration of visibility/audibility made within *In Mourning and in Rage* is highly exaggerated, utilizing 'imposing costumes' and loudly chanted speech. The non-instrumentality of art and the aesthetic seems to give greater licence to those subjectivizations that occur under its 'umbrella' (performed by artists, or

within museums, galleries etc) to amplify the 'formal' or (narrowly) aesthetic aspect of political action.

Could we say then that a political subjectivization that occurs in art - because its 'formal' aspect is more heightened - is therefore more effective than the absolute standard scene? I think this is a step too far. We could argue that the heightening of this formal aspect might add weight to political action; the use of theatricality and spectacle producing more 'noise' and thus increasing the likelihood of placing the police order under stress, the stress of the recognition of social contradiction.

But the counter argument can just as easily be made: the exaggerated (narrowly) aesthetic dimension might interfere with the police response to any disagreement, making it simpler to dismiss the premises upon which any claims are made. The police could use the fact that certain demands are made within art as a justification for rejecting them as unrealistic or unserious

Therefore the primary theoretical move made by this thesis does not – has not attempted – to *improve* Rancière's concept of subjectivization by inserting it into 'art'. However, to answer the second question posed above, the inclusion of subjectivization under the rubric of art and the aesthetic is a significant boon for an art practitioner wishing to make political work. My aim has been to appropriate the force of Rancière's theory of politics for the practice of art-critique (democratic action as art). This force resides in the way the collective performance of equality attacks hierarchy at its weak point with lasting emancipatory consequences. Furthermore subjectivization focuses its energies on a particular issue, or point of dissensus, and can target a specific beneficiary of hierarchy, positioned so as to be obliged to hear (and act) on said demand. All things considered, subjectivization within art should be as effective as a 'standard' demonstration. These factors would seem to make this form of aesthetico-political action more politically direct than the more passive politics of emancipatory art. However this does not invalidate the politics of 'radical ambiguity'; art under the aesthetic regime if properly improper spurs all manner of disorderly interpretations and will (very often) involve a political stake. And as my analysis of *Falls Burns Malone Fiddles* (2003) confirms, I believe some art mobilizes an emancipatory politics more effectively than others. This work spurs multiple political interpretations, which might have any number of ramifications, and in this 'openness' resides its strength.

This chapter has performed a deconstructive-type procedure which shows that there is an inconsistency in Rancière's attempt to hold apart political action as subjectivization, and 'aesthetic action'. This chapter is therefore a polemical intervention into Rancière's influential discourse, a questioning of the validity of his ethico-theoretical decision to exclude a specific type of commitment from art. This does not invalidate Rancière's understanding of emancipatory artwork but expands its frame of reference so as to accommodate the 'demand' in art. In this way I have managed to further democratise Rancière's democratic theory of the aesthetic.

Conclusion

This project began as an attempt to understand and assimilate Rancière's politico-aesthetic philosophy. In the process of its production an apparent discrepancy began to show itself. Both emancipatory art practice and collective political action were explained as bringing a paradoxical figure of equality into contact with police distributions, undermining their status as natural or given. And yet these two political logics, although tied together were – ultimately - held apart. In my favoured terminology, subjectivization was barred from 'the aesthetic'. Why was this?

The chapter structure of the thesis, to a certain extent, represents both the framing of this discrepancy and an attempt to find a 'resolution'. Chapter One.(a) examines Rancière's notion of equality showing it to be the quasi-transcendental condition of (im)possibility for police order, therefore causing the hierarchic constitution of that order to be necessarily weak. Out of this frailty the collective political subjects emerges, from Roman plebeians through nineteenth century French tailors, to second wave feminists. They all demand a historically contingent and specifically manifested case of equality which precisely corresponds to the non-totality of hierarchy. The introduction of this contentious equality of all-with-all creates a lacuna within the social which provokes anxiety among the beneficiaries of the status quo.

Chapter One.(b) shows how an equality 'symmetrical' to the (strictly) political one is unlocked by the 'aesthetic revolution', founding a new historical regime on the unstable grounds of Kant's formulation of disinterestedness; an 'infectious idea', which moved beyond mere influence representing the "efficacy of a plot" (2002, p.133-134). This aesthetic distribution deposed the previously dominant representational one, under which art was seamlessly integrated with the police.

The third Earl of Shaftesbury was an influential propagator of representational logic. For him those who owned land or pursued 'liberal occupations' were in possession of a capacity (linked to reason) and leisure which enabled a proper appreciation of 'the arts'. And these 'gifts' were precisely those which also rendered this class both capable and

worthy of rule. Manual workers, on the other hand, lacked the reasoned-refinement as well as the spare-time for aesthetic appreciation *and* affairs of government. The Kantian intervention undermined the dominant role of reason. From this point on disinterestedness involved a 'free-play' in which all are theoretically able to participate, invalidating the notion of constituencies able to appreciate art and those unable. And at one and the same time, the attack on the 'hegemony of reason' subverted those arguments which sought to secure the legitimation of a specific class of rulers.

Thus we can see that the cancelling of hierarchy within 'the aesthetic' is tightly bound-up with the suspension of hierarchy under subjectivization, their common stake being the demonstration of an equality antithetic to determination and categorization. They are both inherently political.

However, to restate, according to Rancière, the two 'equalities' can never precisely overlay. And after the work of Chapter One.(b) we can see why this is the case: aesthetic art provides a 'first step' towards collective political activity, but cannot 'directly' involve itself in such a project without travestyng its aesthetic status, that is, without re-introducing the dominance of 'rational determination', which is - by definition - withdrawn within the aesthetic. However this consequence has often been ignored by artists and theorists who put art in the immediate service of politics by producing texts, objects and images which attempt "to build awareness of the mechanisms of domination to turn the spectator into a conscious agent of world transformation" (Rancière 2009, p.45). In this scenario objective knowledge, "the mechanisms of domination", is mined and then revealed to an audience. In other words, rationality again prevails. Emancipatory interpretation generated by free play, in which the social is imagined in different non-total configurations comes to a rest in the final blueprint for an alternative police order. To make art, or to theorise in this way is to communicate in 'messages' and to secure for oneself a position of mastery.

Chapter Two diagnosed Bourdieu's theorization of the aesthetic as the erroneous reduction of art to the status of 'message'. For him aesthetic practices, recast as 'performances of distinction' *always* serve the reproduction of hierarchies of cultural inheritance (Bourdieu 1990, p.135). This concept of reproduction was found to represent the metaphysical centre of Bourdieu's system, an instance of transcendental contraband that determined the structure of his thought whilst being theorized as beyond all structurality. I then analysed how the advocacy of the theory of the 'secret centre' performatively reduces the likelihood of multiple, 'democratic' resistances to domination. This can be explained by the fact that

there *is no one secret centre*, power rather operates multipliciously across many fronts, with the consequence that different agents will be better positioned to apprehend and respond to specific instances of hierarchy. The centralized logic of mastery obfuscates this multiple functioning and therefore reduces the likelihood of diverse resistances. Mastery is an instance of police distribution, serving to naturalize and thus reinforce hierarchy; 'I know *the way* better than you'.

Official Welcome (2001) falls into this authoritarian category. However not all political commitment within art need be so foundational. Chapter Three formulates a model in which artwork directly participates in collective 'paradoxical' political action thereby avoiding mastery. In this instance a futural political subject is not hailed, rather the artist communicates under subjectivization in a demanding dissensus with the police order, and in so doing demonstrates the impossibility of final foundations *per se*. This then represents my 'solution' to the discrepancy mentioned above. Under the specific circumstance of a subjectivization coinciding with aesthetic practice the politics of art and that of collective action collapse into one another without introducing determination into the aesthetic. This scenario does not invalidate Rancière's critique of 'messages' but provides another option for aesthetic practice, that of 'art as demand'.

This enables me to situate a type of activist work, exemplified by Suzanne Lacy's *In Mourning and In Rage* as an example of emancipatory art. The benefit of which is that a description of the politicality of this work can draw on Rancière's sophisticated characterization of the originary knotting of art and politics. I have found this framework to be more convincing than that 'lopsided' version offered by Bourdieu, providing a schema to understand the many manifestations of art in relation to its (supposed) outside, from the program of *Bildung*, the French artist-poet-workers of the 1830's, Russian constructivism, the avant-garde 'separatism' of Adorno, etc.

But also by validating subjectivization as aesthetic I compliment Rancière's 'passive' understanding of art's political efficacy with a more targeted version. (I have argued that Rancière understands art-politics - narrowly understood - provides a defuse and general destabilising of grounds, which might then be used within collective political action). In my contribution particular agents of police power can be addressed, those persons who occupy a social position which enables them to redistribute the binary relations being contested. (In Lacy's example L.A City officials and politicians) These beneficiaries are placed under stress, obliged to hear the contradiction of their position. The force of

subjectivization coincides with its negativity and thus allows its accommodation under the category of the aesthetic; art-demands cannot be univocal as they split the social-given into 'two worlds', they *are* targeted but only so as to untie relations of authority, they *are* imposed, but only to press the police through a demonstration of its non-totality.

Finally the work of clarifying the conditions of mastery and message as against those of subjectivization and demand enables a sophisticated navigation of a current art world discourse, which, as we have seen, is structured around a rather un-nuanced binary understanding of the politics of art. As discussed there are those who support 'radical ambiguity' and those who favour the position of 'saying what you believe'. My contribution cuts across this dichotomy by introducing a form of committed art under the umbrella of 'radical ambiguity'. One consequence of this move is to provide criteria with which to judge the political positions paraded under the banner of 'say what you believe'. Let me offer a final example. Mark Nash's article *Reality in the Age of Aesthetics* (Nash 2008, no page numbers) can be interpreted as offering tentative support for this second model. His argument is premised on what Rancière might call an 'emplotment', or trajectory through the possibilities given within the dichotomy just mentioned. This plot can be stated thus: 'effective political art practice must communicate a determined political stance, this coherency is challenged by formal, or aesthetic indeterminacy'. First he describes the characteristic quality of much art associated with the documentary turn:

Artists often take an indirect route when engaging with issues that have an important political dimension. The idea of commitment can be uncool. Instead, the increasingly conventional aesthetic is minimalist, refusing to tell you what to think about what you are seeing. Rather, you have to make up your own mind, based on a very fragmentary mosaic (in linguistic terms there is no meta-discourse). (Nash 2008, no page number).

Later he describes this aversion to commitment as potentially problematic, a bar on the political efficacy of such work. He gives Steve McQueen's film installation *Gravesend* (2007) as an example. The work takes as its starting point coltan mines in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The miners work hard and in dangerous conditions, and Nash explains that their exploitation must be understood in terms of the broader historical and political context. However McQueen responds to this subject matter with an unapologetically abstract approach utilizing "a few key close-ups (hands breaking rock), set against "the blood-red sunset over the river Thames from which Joseph Conrad's Marlow sets off to explore the 'heart of darkness'" (Nash 2008, no page number).

For Nash the drawback of the film is that it is “too withholding” (2008, no page number). Although he is sympathetic to *Gravesend* he seems to crave a meta-discourse which would stabilize the disorderly fragmentation of the work into a more coherent political proclamation. The problem to which I want to draw attention is that this political proclamation is figured as desirable (or effective) because of its distance from ambiguity. Politicality is figured as the opposite of, or endangered by, indeterminacy. This might suggest why so many calls for political commitment in contemporary art are bound-up with the validation of a foundational position (i.e. those pronouncements by Freee and Stallabross both quoted in the introduction). However from my Rancièrian perspective this attempt to counteract the inconclusiveness associated with aesthetic practice is authoritarian.

Instead what I have proposed is a post-foundational model of commitment which embraces politics as a form of directed indeterminacy. Political activity produces aesthetic irresolution and is not the ‘reassuring’ opposite of Nash’s ‘minimal practices’, rather occupying a similar territory. A demand, expressed by a subjectivizing subject challenges the police order with a demonstration of its non-totality, and it is this mobilization of indeterminacy which is the very reason for its political efficacy.

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PhD Corrections:

Between Mastery and Subjectivization; Jacques Rancière and a Politics of Art without Foundation

Steve Klee

1. Briefly expand Rancière's understanding of equality, especially as developed in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.

My response to this request consists of two parts.

Part One

The following section should be read in relation to page 23 of original document:

Rancière *is* saying that all people have an equal intellectual capacity. This means that, if we are to follow the spirit of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, everyone is potentially *as proficient at all subjects* as everyone else. There are two claims here; anyone can learn *any* subject: "Jacotot's printer had a retarded son. They had despaired of making something of him. Jacotot taught him Hebrew. Later the child became an excellent lithographer" (Rancière 1991 p. 18).

Those who deny this equal ability of everyone 'across the board' who say that there are those who are good at philosophy but bad at maths are in fact anti-equality. They secretly set one proficiency, normally their own, above and beyond others' in a hierarchy of embodied expertise, that is, a hierarchy of persons attached to specific expertises.

The second claim is that anyone can learn a subject equally as well as any other person³⁰. This can be seen in the following quotation, attributed to Baptise Froussard, a director of a

³⁰ But even in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Rancière's most uncompromising text on equal intelligence, he does seem to equivocate over the assertion that everyone might have the capacity to achieve a given intellectual task *equally well*. For example there is a section on artistic proficiency where he says: "Undoubtedly, there is a great distance from this to making masterpieces. The visitors who appreciated the literary compositions of Jacotot's students often made a wry face at their paintings and drawings. But it's not a matter of making great painters; it's a matter of making the emancipated: people capable of saying, "me too, I'm a painter"" (Rancière 1991 p. 66-67)

school in Grenoble who visited Jacotot's institution to see for himself the remarkable pedagogic results about which he had heard.

After an hour, a new astonishment came over him when he heard the quality of the compositions written beneath his nose, and the improvised commentaries that justified them. He particularly admired an explication of art done on a passage from *Athalie*, along with a justification or verification, which was comparable, in his opinion, to the most brilliant literary lesson he had ever heard. (Rancière 1991 p.43)

To restate: these feats of learning are reducible to intellectual equality. We *all* possess the ability to learn any subject, and learn any subject as well as anyone else. If we fail to do so this is not because of a lack of innate ability but because of a lack of will.

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*. This is what opens the way to all adventure in the land of knowledge (Rancière 1991 p. 27).

However there is no need to *necessarily* defend the most uncompromising claims made in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* in order that the assertion of the 'equality of intelligences' retains its *political* usefulness. For example we need not claim that everyone is equally capable of a certain gold standard of proficiency in all subjects, that we could all become astrophysicists and brain surgeons (or astrophysicists *as well as* brain surgeons), if only we applied ourselves properly. For the notion of the equality of intelligences to retain its political usefulness we need only make the more limited assertion that everyone has the capacity to understand that they are being dominated, or exploited and the intelligence to be able to fight back (to rally arguments, organise, strike, protest etc) against this subjection.

To presuppose that people are equally intelligent is not to presuppose that they are capable of the same SAT scores or that anyone could have formulated the theory of relativity... It is to presuppose that we are equally capable of putting together meaningful lives in interaction with one another, and to rise to the tasks that life puts before us (May 2008 p. 57).

Part Two

The following section should be read in relation to page 24 of the original document:

Before I continue in my effort to elaborate the connection between the philosophies' of Derrida and Rancière I need to flag an issue, one that causes me to precede with caution in the intention of comparing equality with certain pseudo-ontological figures such as absence, dissemination, detour, *différance*, writing... In important respects the work of Derrida and Rancière would seem incompatible, even opposed. And one area where this difference would appear to manifest particularly starkly is in Rancière's theorisation of equality.

We have seen that Rancière unconditionally affirms that everyone is in possession of an equal intelligence. Consequently he views political action or indeed emancipatory education as dependant on a decisive performance of equality. This agental action which utilises words and gestures turns the police order 'upside-down'. Therefore Rancière's emphasis on unconditionality and 'punctual action' (we are simply equal, here and now!) would seem very different from the accepted image of Derridean thought; is he not known for an emphasis on the relational, provisional quality of meaning? His philosophy of '*Différance*' militates against, indeed deconstructs, notions of decisiveness or punctuality. As I outline later in this chapter Derrida views 'determined concepts', which would seem to be tied up with any instance of 'unconditional affirmation' as a fallacy, corrupted by a contradictory *différance*. In these terms then Derrida's theoretical emphasis would seem to be very different from Rancière's. Consequently my attempt to tease out the philosophical status of Rancièrian equality precisely by reading it alongside Derridean *différance* would appear wrongheaded.

However although they *are* very different thinkers I believe we should not be blind to the suppositions that they share. Several commentators have noted their commonalities. For instance Michael Dillon has written that:

Like many contemporary continental thinkers the starting point for Rancière is that, 'the initial logos is tainted with a primary contradiction' (*Disagreement*). That primary contradiction, as he says in *Ten Thesis on Politics*, establishes a fundamental incommensurability that is in turn a supplementarity or remainder (2003 p.2).

It is not contentious to suggest that Derrida is being evoked as one of these contemporary continental thinkers, Dillon's use of the word 'supplement' suggests as much. And even more explicitly Andrew Parker in his introduction to *The Philosopher and His Poor* states that Rancière's later work "clearly owes something to deconstruction" (Parker 2003 p. pxvii). How then do we square this circle? How can there be both an apparent oppositionality *and* similarity within the thought of these two thinkers? And in what way does this problematic centre on the issue of equality?

We can begin to clarify this situation if we both focus on a specific text and interrogate those parameters within which their oppositionality would seem to emerge. I want to use Rancière's essay *Does Democracy Mean Something* (2010), often described as an ode to Derrida so as to reveal that their dissimilarity is not reducible to a dichotomy between a philosophy of deferral (Derrida) and one of affirmation (Rancière). Affirmation in the hands of Rancière is also at the same time a type of deferral.

In *Does Democracy Mean Something* Rancière shows himself *not* to be fundamentally opposed to Derridean deferral. In fact he expresses solidarity with Derrida's reading of 'democracy to come' (Derrida 1994) precisely as that which thwarts the notion of any particular democracy as fully present and as such operates as a virtual synonym of *différance*, supplement, trace etc. Rancière and Derrida are here both set against the self satisfied triumphalism of Francis Fukuyama's thesis about contemporary liberal democracy as having achieved the 'end of history'. Fukuyama posits "a liberal democracy that has finally realised itself as the ideal of human history" (Rancière 2010 p. 58 citing Derrida 1994 p. 85)

Rancière says:

A democracy to come, as Derrida sees it, is not a democracy that will come in the future, but a democracy emploted within a different time, a different temporal plot. The time of 'democracy to come' is the time of a promise that has to be kept even though – and precisely because – it can never be fulfilled. It is a democracy that can never reach itself, because it involves an infinite openness to that which comes – which also means an openness to the Other or the newcomer. I cannot but agree with this principle. (2010 p. 58-59)

Rancière 'cannot but agree' with the conceptualisation of an infinitely deferred democracy, one which can 'never reach itself' and this is so because it is a conception of the existing

institution of democracy that he shares. Unlike Fukuyama who views liberal democracy as a realised ideal, the police order can never reach final fruition. And if for Derrida it is the infinitely deferred 'democracy to come' that stands in the way of any finalised democracy, then I would argue that for Rancière the impediment is equality. Why make this claim? Because Rancière does so too, in *Disagreement* he clearly ties the equality of speaking beings to the internal contradiction of the police order. It is through political action – dependent on equality – that this contradiction is revealed, showing the existing order to have been and to be forever 'undone'.

Political activity is always a mode of expression that undoes the police order by a basically heterogenous assumption... the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being (1999 p. 30)

As we have already seen (pages 23 and 24 of this thesis) a further similarity between Rancière's notion of equality and Derridean 'infrastructure' reveals itself when we elaborate the exact logic of the contradiction. It is not that equality is simply heterogeneous to police order but that very order also depends upon it. This point is expressed succinctly in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*: "social inequality is unthinkable, impossible, except on the basis of the primary equality of intelligence" (1991 p. p87).

Equality is the condition of possibility for the police order as well as being the condition of impossibility for its full realisation. Equality, through its demonstration in collective politics renders nonsensical the attempt to finalise any hierarchic police order. Therefore, in this sense, the equal capacity of all with all serves to discredit and continually defer the realisation of an ultimately impossible social totality.

However, there is undeniably a difference in the way that the two philosophers conceptualise how this deferral of democracy as existing social institution, or police order, actually occurs. To put it very schematically we can say that Rancière – as we have seen - positions this 'deferral', better described in his case as an interruption, in the decisive action of a collective political subject.

Whereas for Derrida the modality of deferral is such that actual instances of political dissensus are theoretically devalued considered with suspicion even, so that "in order to avoid any pre-emptive identification of the event, the other or the infinite, he has to perform an endless supplementive process of deconstruction, crossing-out and *apophansis*" (Rancière 2010 p. 60).

This theoretical emphasis serves to close down the space for what Rancière has called democratic practice or subjectivization, that dissensual activity of a subject enacting the egalitarian trait here and now. This speech or action is decisive, and dependent on an unconditional affirmation of the equality of all with all.

It would seem then that it is in the way that these philosophers mobilise the notion of deferral (in aggression to an idea of a fully 'realised' democracy) that their difference becomes apparent. Despite 'appearances' any affirmation of the equality of intelligences made by Rancière in texts or performed by political agents 'on the street' is bound up with a type of deferral.

In this section I have attempted to reveal that the difference between Derrida and Rancière does not lie in a dichotomous distinction between an affirmative, punctual thought and one of deferral but in a dissimilarity in the 'positioning' of deferral. In so doing I have attempted to pre-emptively justify reading these theorists together to draw comparisons between certain pseudo-ontological figures within Derrida's oeuvre and Rancière's highly novel elaboration of equality.

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2. A clarification (and further illustration) of the differences between 'demand' and 'message'

The following section should be read in relation to page 118 of the existing document:

The following section extends my attempt to clarify the difference between demand and message. One aspect of this task will involve characterizing the Zapatista movement - at least its 'emergent period' between 1994 and 97 - as an example of subjectivization. It is my contention that in this well known popular rebellion the critico-political signification of demand was in evidence. I will then compare the political demand made within the Zapatista movement with the critical message manifested in the famous disavowal by the French Communist Party of the May 68 uprising. Finally I will describe how Fred Lonidier's exhibition *N.A.F.T.A (Not a free Trade for All)* (1999) should also be viewed as a partaking in a subjectivization and as issuing demands to a specific police authority as represented by the "industrial community" (Lonidier 1999).

What is the difference between a demand and a message? The first stage of any answer must make clear that demands operate within what Rancière calls subjectivization, democratic action or simply politics. Messages on the other hand partake in the dynamic of mastery.

Subjectivization disrupts the police order through a collective performance of equality thereby introducing a troubling indeterminacy into the count of existing social groups. A basic unit of subjectivization is what I have called 'the demand'; if subjectivization is premised on the demonstration of equality then 'the demand' is the signification – directed primarily at 'power' - through which that display is expressed. This signification can take myriad forms: a speech made at a rally, a written manifesto or letter, a physical action or an image...

In contradistinction the procedure of mastery although ostensibly critical of the existing order presupposes an inequality between constituencies within the social, which ultimately supports police order stultifying the possibility of subjectivization. Or in other words, the consequences of this procedure are not the introduction of a 'troubling indeterminacy' but the shoring-up of the hierarchic categories of police order³¹. One basic unit of mastery is 'the message' being a signification not directed (primarily) at 'power', rather aimed at 'the

³¹ I want to pre-empt any possible misconception that a demand is somehow not a 'straightforward' signification. A demand is not more cryptic than a message nor is it shrouded in a 'poetic language'. This misconception of demands centres on the way in which they introduce indeterminacy into the police order. Just because demands provoke a type of confusion amongst the beneficiaries of hierarchy does not mean that their semantic content is unclear. This is absolutely not the case. As we shall see, and have seen (p. 30-31/104-107), demands are the means by which an absolutely unequivocal expression of equality confronts a police hierarchy: "We women, the aged, minorities, the young etc demand the rights afforded others". (A demand is also made when expressing solidarity with those 'parts without part'). It is only through this unequivocal statement, in the here and now, that the police is confronted by its non-totality and therefore made aware of the pure contingency of its own categories. Therefore a demand does *not* have an indeterminate semantic structure rather the demand reveals the *police order* to be non-determined, a structure without closure.

people' and designed so as to raise their political consciousness. (Again this signification can take many forms). The author of the message presupposes that 'the people' must be led (and led towards an awareness of a positively conceived universal principle of domination)³² and therefore assumes an inequality between himself and others.

The difference between message and demand is decisively dependent on the difference between an empty or pseudo universal and a positive or determined universal. Put bluntly the demand occurs under (and produces) conditions which emphasize that equality is the empty universal around which all political dissensus circulates.

On the other hand the message obfuscates equality as the decentred heart of political struggle by filling the universal with positive determined content and this move at one and the same time instantiates a relation of mastery. Therefore I will now discuss the difference between a political perspective consonant with the empty universal and one consonant with the positive, determined one.

In *Disagreement* Rancière often refers to equality in terms of an "empty freedom" that everyone possesses: "politics begins with a major wrong: the gap created by the empty freedom of the people and the arithmetical and geometrical order" (1999 p. 19).

First, what does it mean to call this Rancièrian notion of equality an empty or pseudo universal? ³³ It means that equality acts as the universal stake within political struggle – every instance of politics (as defined by Rancière) will ultimately be a matter of demonstrating the existing equality of all, thereby proving the hierarchy of the police order to be invalid. (To be precise then, in the register of my discussion here, it is the nexus 'inequality contested by equality' that is the 'empty universal'). Although this nexus operates universally in one respect, that is, by remaining the same under every occasion, unlike other universals it cannot be proscriptive in terms of the content of its

³² This bracketed caveat is introduced because to convey a 'universal principle of domination' to 'the people' does not always result in a message. There is one very important exception; one can convey that inequality is the universal cause of domination (and that consequently the cure for this domination is the performance of equality) *without* communicating via message. (Rancière's own work can be cited as an example here). This is because equality under Rancière's system is not a positively conceived universal, rather it possesses an emptiness. Equality is an empty, or pseudo universal; I realise that there is some resistance to interpreting equality as 'empty', particularly when certain Derridean 'pseudo ontological' figures are used as an alibi for this reading. In my viva of 31st March 2010 Peter Hallward contested my position on this issue. I have modified my stance and implicitly answered his criticisms in a new section on pages 140 to 143. The philosophical statuses of the positive and empty universals are not symmetrical. To preach inequality as the universal cause of domination and the verification of existing equality as its cure does not suppose a difference in capacity between people, rather it supposes the opposite.

³³ For a longer more philosophically detailed discussion see pages 22 to 27.

manifestation. This is because there are many, many ways that people can be treated unequally; they might be paid less, discriminated against because of their colour, gender, age etc. And consequently there are many, many registers in which the subaltern can perform this equality so as to resist their positioning.

Therefore the nexus 'inequality contested by equality' is empty in that it does not proscribe a particular type of exploitation, or resistance. All manner of socially and historically contingent forms of exploitation might come to fill the space of domination. At certain times in certain cultures or geographic regions the issue of race might become the most virulent way in which inequality expresses itself. At other times and places gender might become the dominant frontier for inequality³⁴. But these struggles are *always*, if they are political, versions of inequality and can be contested via – always different – performances of equality. Finally to ascribe to the empty universality of the political nexus inequality/equality means that one cannot denigrate certain political struggles as inauthentic³⁵, rather one must remain open to the possibility of new and surprising frontiers across which equality might be contested.

The demand then is a signification involved in the process of political resistance, which always emphasizes the nexus inequality/equality as the crux of that and every other struggle against domination. This 'emphasizing function' is most obvious when the word equality is explicitly used in a confrontation with beneficiaries of hierarchy. An example that Rancière uses to exemplify the 'political demand' (and appears a number of times in this thesis) involves a Tailors strike of the 1800s. The victimised Tailors contest their treatment in a court of law stating:

If Monsieur Persil or Monsieur Schwartz is right to say what he does and do what he does, the preamble of the charter should be deleted. It should read: the French people are not equal. If by contrast [the preamble] is upheld, then Monsieur Persil or Monsieur Schwartz must speak or act differently. (Rancière 1995, p.47).

³⁴ I am of course simplifying the situation here so as to make my point; these 'times, cultures and regions' can and do overlap; racial and gender domination can and does exist simultaneously.

³⁵ One can of course say that certain struggles are simply not political in that they do not meet the structural criteria for political activity set out by Rancière. For instance war or trade agreements between parties of equal strength or visibility will not be political contestations.

The Tailors straightforwardly demand that their equality, inscribed in law within the French charter of 1830, be recognised in word and deed. I will give two further more detailed examples of 'demand' but now I want to discuss 'messages'.

A positively conceived universal posits a specific content for the universal feature; for instance 'Capitalist exploitation' lies behind *all forms* of domination. And this 'filling out' of the universal feature can only result in a political message. One clear example of this form of signification would be: 'sexism and racism are ultimately reducible to class war'. This statement adheres to the avant-gardist perspective that Capitalist exploitation (as universal) must be responsible for exploitation under *every* circumstance. There is a clear element of proscription here concerning the appropriate frontier across which an 'authentic' exploitation might operate. This is not to say that this perspective views capitalist exploitation as operating in exactly the same way every time. This outlook can be cognisant of the internal complexity and multiplicity of capitalism, which undoubtedly produces all manner of exploitations. However the problem persists because this 'heterogeneous domination' is *always* seen to be the result of capitalism. Therefore under this perspective sexism and racism do not have their own integrity as struggles but are merely consequences of capitalist exploitation: "Racism, for instance, could be accounted for as a way to divide workers against one another, or sexism as a way to keep the reproduction of the working class intact" (May 2010 p. 74). However in the last forty five years or so this avant-gardism has been contested by the appearance of political movements which defy its logic.

The events of the late 1960s in the West revealed that Marxist class analysis could not account for the particularity of different oppressions or the integrity of the resistances against those oppressions. Racism is not simply a matter of working-class politics. It has a history which precedes and, while intersecting with, is irreducible to class. The civil rights movement cannot simply be thought under the categories of class struggle, nor can the woman's suffrage movement, the gay rights movement, or the struggles of various indigenous groups in their various countries (May 2010 p. 74).

Also if placing 'empty' equality in the universal position allows one to be open to the possibility of new and surprising frontiers across which inequality might be contested then replacing it with a positive content introduces a more close-minded attitude.

Again one can cite examples where avant-gardist political attitudes have closed down or undermined the possibility of resistance by discouraging/disparaging the veracity of 'other' political approaches.

In France, the events of May 1968 led to the demise of the Communist Party itself, since it could not recognize the irreducibility of all other struggles to its own; in fact, it proved itself willing to turn against its own striking workers and align itself with the rightist De Gaulle government in order to prevent the emergence of those irreducible struggles (May 2010 p. 74).

In this respect the nomenclature of the PCF issued a number of 'messages'; claiming on the 3rd of May that the student movement represented mere "grouplets", suggesting an inauthentic, meagre political manifestation. Then later they argued for workers to leave picket lines and return to their factories because they were "not yet ready for revolution" (Ross 2002).

In this way the attitude of the French Communist Party is a prime example of mastery: a rigid belief in a 'positivized' descriptive schema which dictates the proper conditions for revolution is communicated to 'the people' so as to discourage them from taking 'alternative' political paths. (For a full discussion of mastery see page 73 of this thesis).

I now want to discuss a political movement which unlike the French Communist Party of the 60s is premised upon the presupposition of equality. Following Todd May I diagnose Zapatismo as an example of subjectivization, a struggle that has emphasized 'empty equality' as the key stake in its attempt to overthrow oppression³⁶. Consequently the Zapatista's have utilized demands.

³⁶ This footnote provides a sketch of the political 'wrongs' that the Zapatistas' contest: In 1988 there was a change in the Mexican government with Carlos Salinas de Gortari elected as president. The new incumbents ushered in a slew of privatizations, trade liberalizations as well as wage and price controls. Over the same period and into the early 90s there was a sharp drop in the price of coffee which had a detrimental impact on the Mexican population and the Chiapas region particularly. Against this background there was an amendment to an important article of Mexican Agrarian law. Article 27 had been inscribed in the Mexican constitution (1917) during the protracted period of revolution (1910-20). It gave poor agricultural workers (campesinos) the right to petition for land redistribution, also stating that Mexican land should stay in Mexican hands. The modification annulled both these features, thereby protecting the increasing privatization of Mexican farming land. Soon after these changes the Zapatistas began preparing for open conflict. The timing of the rebellion was set for January the 1st 1994 to coincide with the commencement of NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement. This agreement provides integration of the US, Canadian and Mexican economies through the removal of national trade barriers. Both the amendments to Article 27 and NAFTA are neoliberal political moves serving to keep land in the hands of big agricultural organisations eager to export their goods within the global economy. The losers here are primarily the campesinos of the Chiapas (overwhelmingly indigenous) unable to

The Zapatistas are a collective resistance movement who grew out of and fight for the indigenous campesinos communities of the southern Mexican state of Chiapas. In 1996 they negotiated an agreement with the Mexican government known as the San Andrés Accords. I quote a section of these accords, as a clear example of 'demand'.

Mutual treatment among the peoples and cultures that form Mexican society is to be based on respect for their differences, on the premise of their fundamental equality. As a consequence, it is to be the policy of the government to conduct itself accordingly and to promote in society a pluralistic orientation which effectively combats every form of discrimination and corrects economic and social inequalities. (Womack 1999 p. 311)

Again this demand explicitly utilises the word equality which is positioned in the paragraph so as to suggest a primacy. Fundamental equality would appear to be the stake against which multiple discriminations and exploitations should be measured. This example then neatly fits my criteria for a demand in that it emphasises the empty equality of all with all and does not 'fill in' that space with a positive feature that is responsible for Chiapian inequality per-se (for instance neoliberal capitalism).

Let me be absolutely clear on this point. I am not saying that Neoliberal capitalism is somehow not responsible for the domination of Mexicans; that we shouldn't point the finger "because it is a complex situation", absolutely not.

Neoliberal capitalism is to blame for much Chiapian misery but in a historically and socially contingent way. Certainly it is tied up with many 'ills' but not all, and not – from our Rancièrian position - as the prime mover. We might say that it is the presupposition of inequality which 'enables' man to exploit one another economically. We shouldn't give into the temptation to elevate neoliberal capitalism to the position of 'universal'. Rather the universal feature of every political wrong (as strictly defined by Rancière) is that it follows from an instance of inequality.

However demands do not always explicitly use the word equality, how then can one be sure to recognise them?

utilise the land in a more collective and locally sensitive manner and unable even to *contest* – as they would have been able to do under the old article 27 – the neoliberal developments

To begin my answer I shall invent a signification which acts as a short hand for many of the statements associated with the Zapatista movement: “Neoliberal capitalism is responsible for the exploitation of the indigenous population of the Chiapas and this is intolerable”.

Is this a demand or message? The answer is that it can be either depending on the conditions of its enunciation. There is not always a clear semantic distinction between demand and message; For example demands are necessarily a collective enunciation, a statement made as part of a broader social movement or in solidarity with that movement. This cannot always be ascertained by looking at words on a page. Certainly in the example above the distinguishing features are to be found in the context in which these words might be spoken or written.

Simply put we must look for evidence in the context of the enunciation to clarify whether the term ‘neoliberal capitalism’ in this statement represents a positivized universal principle of exploitation or whether the sentence operates within a political situation in which equality as a pseudo or empty universal plays the privileged role.

If this statement is spoken as part of or in solidarity with the Zapatista movement then the words do form a demand. If on the other hand the words are part of a discourse which sees neoliberalism as the evil lurking behind *every* instance of political wrong and is therefore resistant to popular movements which do not conform to their theoretical stance then the words form a message.

The Formal conditions of Demand

One way of describing subjectivization is as a collective resistance movement. Demands are therefore *always* issued by those in the process of collectively resisting domination.

Let me first address the issue of ‘the collective’ then I will turn my attention to the issue of ‘resistance’.

Political action – and therefore the demands which flow from it – involves a *collective* presupposition and demonstration of equality. There is no logical reason why a demonstration of equality might not be made individually. In fact this procedure would seem to be described in the *Ignorant Schoolmaster*. Jacotot’s method asks of a student that they verify the equality of their intelligence via scholarly work. This would then seem to be an individual demonstration. However for Rancière political or democratic action of the sort that has the potential to undermine the police order *must* be collective.

A subjectivization is necessarily a collective process. Demands will therefore be issued collectively or made on behalf of a collective.

Subjectivization as 'resistance movement' should be understood as a localised struggle against a specific instance of inequality. For the Zapatista's this might be the unequal treatment of the indigenous population of Chiapas as expressed in the denial of their right to collectively farm the land as manifested within the changes to Article 27, and the inauguration of NAFTA.

Under Rancière's system although what is revealed by democratic action is the unjust nature of inequality as such³⁷, this universal point is made through a *specific, particular or localised* encounter with the police order. Therefore a demand *always* results from, is the contestation of, a specific localised instance of inequality or wrong.

In my book, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, I advocated the thesis of the French theorist of emancipation, Joseph Jacotot, according to whom emancipation can only be the emancipation of individuals. This means that that there is no political stage, only the law of [police] and the law of equality. In order for a political stage to occur, we must change that assumption. Thus... I shall say that [police] *wrongs* equality, and I shall take the political to be the place where the verification of equality is obliged to turn into the handling of a wrong. (Rancière 1992 p. 64)

Thus the local aspect of the Zapatista's struggle is a contextual feature which allows us to recognise their words as demands.

However a subjectivization is not only a collective, localised resistance movement but is a resistance movement which contests an unequal position. The demand must be part of a demonstration of equality which tears subjects away from their existing subaltern position where they are considered invisible or mere victims towards a new equal identity. Purely by making the demand, by speaking "equal to equal" with their oppressors they begin the journey of subjectivization. The demand is only a demand when it institutes this dis-identification from a lowly identity. Therefore the demand always operates within a hierarchic situation. As I have already said under this definition there are no demands in war, or trade disagreements between sides of equal strength or status. Therefore a demand will *always* issue from a subaltern figure to a supposed superior (or from someone

³⁷ It is on this point (as well as others) that Rancièrian politics differs from a politics of identity. However an extended discussion of these issues is beyond the remit of this text.

who sides in solidarity with the subaltern). Under this 'architecture' of hierarchy equality is a key stake - and revealed as such - in the political action.

However more needs to be said on this point. Resistance movements of the dominated are not always tied up with the presupposition of equality. The performance of equality is premised on revealing the equality of *everyone*. Movements which see themselves as being equal to their dominators and superior to everyone else are not egalitarian. This would be the case with the avant-gardist political model which provides a positive universal explanation for domination: "We are equal to our neoliberal oppressors but superior to those deluded others who do not recognise capitalist exploitation as universal; we are superior to those others who insist on claiming there are struggles irreducible to this 'centre' of exploitation". Therefore when attempting to recognise whether the signification of a resistance movement is that of demand or message one must judge the egalitarian credentials of that movement. It is only within a collective movement which judges or presupposes all to be equal that 'the demand' is enunciated.

One of the most compelling pieces of evidence for the presupposition of equality as the primary motivation for Zapatismo would appear to be the movement's attitude towards women. In the traditional culture of the Chiapas women occupy a subservient role denied many of the rights afforded their male counterparts. Now as we have seen the Zapatistas grew out of and fight for this community – often against neoliberalism – but the Zapatista movement is also famous for its rejection of the forceful patriarchy endemic within the traditional communities. This rejection is often described as the "revolution within the revolution". In fact their first public declaration made in January 1994 included the Woman's Revolutionary Law. The timing of this declaration means that the issue of women's rights would seem not to be an addendum to the 'main' struggle but absolutely central to the guiding principle of the movement. The Woman's Revolutionary Law included for the right to take part in revolutionary struggle, the right to work and a fair wage, the right to decide the number of children they bear, the right to chose whom to marry, the right not to be physically abused...

Importantly the demands made under this Law do not follow an avant-gardist logic which supposes the *reason* for gender inequality is reducible to neoliberalism. The two struggles are not causally connected in *this way*; rather it would be logical to suggest that their commonality, that which unites and animates both struggles is simply the presupposition of equality against inequality.

In addition the movement emphasizes its solidarity or equality with other struggles. This is made clear in Zapatista Major Ana Maria's speech of 1995:

Behind us are the we that are you. Behind our balaclavas is the face of all excluded women. Of all the forgotten indigenous people. Of all the persecuted homosexuals. Of all the despised youth. Of all the beaten migrants. Of all those imprisoned for their word and thought. Of all the humiliated workers. Of all those who have died from being forgotten. Of all the simple and ordinary men and women who do not count, who are not seen, who are not named, who have no tomorrow (Holloway and Pelaez 1998 p. 189)

This genuine egalitarianism is not just a feature of Zapatismo but of all subjectivization. Demands function and can be recognised under the conditions of subjectivization. These conditions are: a collective contestation of a localised hierarchic situation (directed at specific beneficiaries of that hierarchy) by a performance of the equality of *every speaking being*. If these conditions are met by any signification then it is necessarily a demand.

On the other hand a message need not be issued as a collective nor does it necessarily focus on a contestation of a localised instance of inequality. Often the author of messages will ignore particular conflicts concentrating instead on generating a generalised theory of power or domination. (However this 'turning away' from specific instances of conflict to theorise power-in-general does not necessarily result in messages. Again Rancière's own work might be characterised in this way). The author of messages also tends to conceive of their signification being directed (primarily) at 'the people' and as possessing a pedagogic function rather than being a direct confrontation with power. However the decisive difference is that messages presuppose inequality; the author of a message identifies domination with a positivized universal feature thus introducing hierarchy into their own discourse. The notion of power as operating across *one* frontier can only denigrate those others (mere grouplets) who insist on resisting in ways irreducible to the schema of message.

I now want to bring my discussion back to art practice and briefly discuss Fred Lonidier's exhibition *N.A.F.T.A (Not a free Trade for All)* at the Theatre Gallery of the Autonomous University of Baja California, Tijuana, Mexico (March 1999). The show consisted of several wall mounted installations of photographs and texts.

Again the 'issue' concerns NAFTA and the removal of trade restrictions between the US and Mexico, which Grant H. Kester points out enables the "corporate sector...[to pit]...workers and local governments in the United States against those in Mexico, in pursuit of the lowest possible wages and tax burdens" (Kester 2004 p. 177-8).

Within this setting Lonidier's work addresses the collusion of the Mexican government and multinational corporations based primarily in the United States to disrupt any attempt by the Mexican 'maquiladora' workers to develop independent unions outside of the government controlled 'official' organisations.

I specifically want to focus on a piece titled *The Mask... of Democracy... Unmasked?* This consists of four portrait photographs of grassroots union organisers, all wearing masks to conceal their identity, alongside texts which recount their experiences. For example one reads: "Well, we have already declared ourselves to the fight for our union... The injustices that worker's suffered have not been resolved by the company, but the company continues to inflict them upon the personnel" (Kester 2004 p. 179)

I believe this artwork, acting as part of the exhibition and within the broader Mexican workers' movement should be seen as a demand.

Firstly, the work does *not* formulate a political strategy that the workers are advised to follow, rather it serves to amplify the discourse through which the group comes together. He sees himself as working "not only on behalf of, but alongside, communities in struggle" and spends substantial periods of time building relationships with union members and organisers (Kester 2004 p. 180). His exhibition operates alongside – in solidarity with – rather than performing a directorial role.

The amplification also deliberately brings the workers' discourse into contact with specific beneficiaries of hierarchy. The exhibition is sited in a gallery located in the midst of an industrial zone; you can see a maquiladora plant from the front door. Also Lonidier extensively advertised the exhibition, leafleting the Maquiladora Association Office and putting up posters in the area. It is clear that certain 'beneficiaries' were hailed by the exhibition as members of what Lonidier calls the 'industrial community' (Lonidier 1999) put pressure on the University resulting in the closure of the exhibition. As Rancière says politics is about obliging the police to hear (Rancière 1995 p.86). The closure suggests that the exhibition made enough noise to get attention but not enough to make the police order listen.

Under these conditions the artwork takes on the precise valence of demand. The photographs amplify the workers calls to be considered as equals, to be spared humiliations and ultimately to be free to unionise without corporate persecution. Also this labour movement would appear to be genuinely egalitarian in that a stated aim is to “encourage class solidarity across boundaries of national and ethnic difference” (Kester 2004 p. 177). This then is not a struggle against an oppressor at the expense of other constituencies, rather there would seem to be a commitment to an ‘expansive’ equality. The demands tear the workers away from their previous identity as lowly pressing towards a new equal one. Interestingly the photographs highlight the workers’ indeterminate identities at the point of subjectivization via demand. They are pictured behind Halloween masks: Frankenstein’s monster, Jason from the Friday The 13th movies, a Witch and Skeleton. These cheap joke-shop masks sit oddly within Lonidier’s mug-shot format. When looking at these types of image – passport photos, facebook profile pictures – we are conditioned to see ‘likenesses’, portraits of individuals, whereas in Lonidier’s versions anonymity prevails.

This work acts as a conduit for the demands of the maquiladora workers through which they are shown to be equal. The proof that *anyone* is equal to *anyone* else is what threatens the police order based as it is on hierarchy. Finally, the masks neatly “double” or comment upon the process of subjectivization via demand in that they convey anonymity and threat.

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3. Revision and clarification of the critique of ‘transcendental’, ‘univocal’ or ‘metaphysical’ categories

This following section should be read in relation to the introduction:

Before I begin the first chapter I want to define several terms which play an important role within this thesis. These are: metaphysical, transcendental and univocal and they have been used as virtual synonyms throughout the text.

The term metaphysical has a tremendously long and complex history, but perhaps one might give a rough definition as that which pertains to “the features of ultimate reality, what really exists and what it is that distinguishes that and makes it possible”(Honderich 1995 p. 556). However I introduce this rather vague definition so as it mark my distance from it. My usage is more specific and drawn from what might be called deconstructive discourse, that is, from the writing of Jacques Derrida and his commentators, specifically Jeffery Bennington and Rudolf Gasché.

For these writers metaphysics names the Western tradition in philosophy, a tradition that “does not begin with Plato and does not end with Austin or Lacan” (Bennington 2000 p. 9). In addition practitioners of deconstruction also use the term, often lengthened to ‘the metaphysics of presence’ to describe a problematic tendency within this very corpus. Whatever the doctrinal inclination of discrete philosophies they all (as metaphysical) seek out some supreme value which is inseparable from a value of presence, whatever particular content it might otherwise be supposed to exhibit. This value or term or concept is *realised* in contradistinction to a denigrated other with which it forms a binary pairing. Put crudely it is this ‘realization’ as opposite that is problematic from a deconstructive perspective. This process of ‘realisation-in-opposition’, or ‘cutting out’ or ‘isolating’ denies the constitutive relationality of all values, terms or concepts. (For a more detailed examination of this terrain see pages 24-29 of this thesis)

And it is this isolated value, term or concept which I have consistently named metaphysical, or transcendental. In this I have followed Derrida.

[Each] time a discourse contra the transcendental is held, a matrix – the (con)striction itself constrains the discourse to place the non-transcendental, the outside of the transcendental field, the excluded in the structuring position. The matrix in question constitutes the excluded as transcendental of the transcendental, as imitation transcendental: transcendental contraband. (1990, 244a).

In this quotation then we have Derrida describing the philosophical procedure which produces transcendental contraband. (For a more detailed discussion see pages 69-71 of this thesis). However the important point here is that that the transcendental term is conceived as inhabiting a separate zone, its own “field”. To restate, the transcendental or metaphysical term – in this narrow Derridean sense – acquires “a reassuring certitude, [because] it is itself beyond the reach of play” (2001, p.352).

I now want to distance my use of ‘transcendental’ from that employed within Kantian philosophy. As I understand it Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) excised the religious connotation associated with the word generating a new sense which ever since has been central to modern philosophy. Previously it had been utilised in a theological context, paired with immanence. Kant stripped this away and employed it in a discussion of the nature and function of the *understanding*. Or in other words he employed ‘transcendental’ to discuss the conditions and parameters of knowledge itself. More precisely transcendental knowledge is that which examines how it is possible for ‘man’ to be predisposed so as to ‘experience’ in the first place: “I call transcendental all cognition that deals not so much with objects as rather with our way of cognizing objects in general insofar as that way of cognizing is to be possible a priori” (Kant 1781/1996 p.64)

There is no attempt within this thesis to bridge the gap between the narrowly deconstructive sense in which I use ‘transcendental’ and the way it is articulated by Kant. This is because it seemed to be beyond the parameters of my research subject.

Univocality is a term I take from Rancière who often applies it to artworks. He criticises those pieces which adopt “a univocal mode of explicating the world” (2007a p258). One way of interpreting Rancière here is that he is criticising a type of image production that obfuscates its own constructed or representational quality so as to present what would appear to be an objective ‘window on the world’. This is what animates his implicit criticism of Bernd and Hilla Becher’s photography in the quotation below:

The problem is to define a way of looking that does not pre-empt the gaze of the spectator... it is true for the photographs of blast furnaces or of warehouses and shipping containers that anticipate a new objective gaze as a product of objective framing against blank backgrounds (Rancière 2007a p. 236)

What the Becher's photographs attempt to annul is that one cannot "escape the slippages of surface and gaze" and therefore the image can never objectively record a referent without distortion or remainder.

Univocality, the presentation of an objective and therefore singular reality would seem to share much with my usage of transcendental and metaphysical. Within the context of this thesis all three connote a term, concept or knowledge-of-the-world which is presented as fallaciously separate from the vagaries of representation and interpretation, thereby securing for itself an illusory status as fixed, unified and unchanging.

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4. A short expansion of the discussion of Lacy's work in the 1970s

The following section should be read in relation to page 114:

However before doing so I want to sketch the backdrop against which *In Mourning and in Rage* emerged focussing on Lacy's early career especially as it intertwines with the genesis of American West Coast feminist art.

Writing in *The trouble between Us* the sociologist Wini Breines described feminism in the mid 1970s as "a tidal wave at its crest, evident locally and nationally in the thousands of activities and projects initiated by feminists" (Breines 2006 p. 151-152) noting that the

number attending the International Woman's Year Conference in Houston in 1977 exceeded twenty thousand.

This period then was a high watermark for feminism and Lacy was actively involved. She had just completed two important projects the first being a performance titled *Cinderella in a Dragster* (1976), which included her driving around the campus of California State College, Dominguez Hills in a borrowed dragster before later in the day acting out the domestic activity of baking a pumpkin pie. A documentation photograph of Lacy in the dragster was included on the cover of the first issue of the art quarterly *High Performance*. Also she had just completed her now famous *Prostitution Notes* (1976), which involved interviewing sex workers and mapping the movements of their daily lives.

Both pieces show Lacy confidently examining the roles assigned to women, whether that of housewife or prostitute and challenging the prejudices which attach themselves to such names. For instance when Lacy began *Prostitution Notes* she believed that the world of 'working-girls, Johns and pimps' would be significantly divorced from her own life and experiences. In actual fact she found that a male friend of hers was a prostitute and that many locations familiar from her daily life were also hotspots for the sex industry. She was surprised by, and the resulting work communicates, the often banal nature of this world, its lack of exoticism and its imbrication with other more apparently 'ordinary' lifestyles.

Lacy had been involved in feminism and activism since her time as a graduate student at Fresno State College. Here she taught a course in feminist psychology for her peers, introducing the then novel pedagogic technique of all-woman group meetings. She also co-ordinated with Faith Wilding a feminist reading group called *The Second Sex* as well as campaigning in support of the United Farm Workers, a union for migrant agricultural labourers.

It was in Fresno that Lacy first encountered Judy Chicago who in 1970 set up an off-campus all-female experiment called the Feminist Art Program (FAP). After some resistance by Chicago Lacy was admitted to the programme; Chicago had been hesitant because she felt that Lacy was primarily an activist and would not become a professional artist (Irish 2010 p. 26).

In autumn 1971 FAP moved to CalArts and although Lacy moved with the programme she switched to the Social Design course. Therefore she was not directly involved with *Womanhouse* perhaps the best known production of that programme. This large-scale

collaborative project involved the Twenty Five FAP students as well as teachers Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro and three invited artists. This team found a deserted mansion on a residential street in Hollywood which they substantially renovated before producing installation artworks for each room. The house was opened for exhibition on the 30th January 1972. Chicago and Shapiro wrote in the catalogue essay: "The age-old female activity of homemaking was taken to fantasy proportions. Womanhouse became the repository of the daydreams women have as they wash, bake, cook, sew, clean and iron their lives away" (Chicago and Shapiro 1972 no pages) And in pursuing these fantasies through manual labour and ingenuity not only were seminal works like Wilding's *Crocheted Environment* created but also the women learnt "to push against their role limitations as women and to test themselves as artists" (Anon no pages).

In the summer after the completion of *Womanhouse* Lacy Collaborated with Chicago, as well as Sandra Orgel and Aviva Rahmani to produce *Ablutions* (1972) another very well known piece and according to Lacy the "first contemporary feminist artwork on rape" (Roth and Lacy 2002 p. 300) The performance took place in a studio in Venice, California which was transformed through the scattering of broken egg-shells, piles of rope and chain and littered animal organs. The central performative element consisted of three metal tubs set in the middle of the room, one containing a thousand eggs, another cows' blood and the final one watery grey clay. Two naked women took turns to bath in the different liquids. They were then wrapped in white sheets and laid on the floor. Meanwhile another woman was led into the space and bound entirely in gauze. Throughout the piece Lacy nailed fifty beef kidneys to the walls and once this task was completed she - along with another performer - tied together all the elements in the room including bathtubs, kidneys and figures into a web of rope and string. Throughout the piece tape recorded accounts of women who had suffered rape were played. As Lacy and the other mobile performer left the space one recorded phrase was left to repeat: "and I felt so helpless all I could do was just lie there" (Roth, M 1983 p 86)

Chicago, Lacy and their collaborators conceived of the project as both a ritualistic healing ceremony and a forceful assertion of an active female identity which might counter the objectivising perspective endemic to mass culture. This tendency was particularly clear in two film releases of the previous year: *A Clockwork Orange* (Kubrick) and *Straw Dogs* (Peckinpah).

Another important work is the 1975 piece *One Woman Shows* because it represents Lacy's shift to a larger scale of work in which organizational process, as well as interpersonal relationships are dramatized as the core content of the artwork. This piece would seem to lead onto *Prostitution Notes* a year later, as well as her subsequent large-scale social events such as *Three Weeks in May*.

One Woman Shows consisted of a month-long piece in which a group of women sequentially performed personal actions. This collective were brought together via a chain-mail logic whereby those that Lacy asked to perform invited others and so on. What started as a single performance soon became a series of simultaneous rituals all taking place in public space, a "community in process" (Irish S 2010 p47).

Finally I want to discuss Lacy's installation *She Who Would Fly* (May 1977) which operated as a node in the larger *Three Weeks in May* project from which *In Mourning and in Rage* emerged. The exhibition consisted of a powerful text describing a rape victims' experience, a flayed lamb's carcass with white feathered wings which was suspended from the ceiling and above the entrance four naked women in red greasepaint watched the visitors. The combination of perched women and winged carcass was an attempt to symbolise the way "consciousness wrests free from the body during rape" (Irish 2010 p. 67)

Meiling Cheng has written that:

The work's most important aspect is the moment when the audience members suddenly discover that they are being watched by these bird-women... This is the moment of theatrical reversal that the artist desires, one that symbolically transforms the performers from traumatized flesh/objects into accusatory subjects. (Cheng cited by Irish 2010 p. 67)

I will make the argument in relation to *In Mourning and in Rage* that performances which manage to capture the movement from one 'state' to another, from "flesh objects" to "accusatory subjects" map very succinctly onto Rancière's concept of subjectivization. The collective verification of equality, which is often tied up with the contestation of an allotted victim status is a process of moving between identities, of dis-identifying with a subaltern social position and thereby inhabiting an anonymous equality. This introduces a shock or disquiet within the police order in much the same way that Lacy's work might be seen to be shocking or disquieting. This is not surprising because as I shall argue in detail Lacy's practice should be seen as partaking within a broader feminist subjectivization and the

performances within *She Who Would Fly* and *Ablutions* would seem to double or exacerbate the key features of every subjectivization whether feminist or otherwise.

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