

The Politics of Intellectual Emancipation: An Introduction to Rancière's Radical Egalitarianism, Aesthetic *dispositif*, and Dissensus Democracy (Second of Two Parts)

Jessie Joshua Z. Lino

University of Santo Tomas, Manila

Abstract: This piece embarks on the principle consistently echoed in Rancière's corpus of text *in toto*: the principle of equality. From this principle, I re-conceptualize his philosophy of radical equality from its generic aesthetico-political reception, focusing more on the ambit of the political and pedagogical experimentations of the egalitarian axiom. This will set a framework for understanding Rancière's notion of political subjectivization—the importance of which serves to address the contemporary problems of political compromise and its consequent pathological culture of passivity. Thus, the discussions warrant a panoramic undertaking of an emancipatory politics drawn from the fundamental lessons and insights of Rancière's philosophy of radical equality. I argue that the totality of Rancière's emancipatory politics, centered on the verification of the principle of equality offers a three-fold solution to combat political decadence and democratic decay. This piece, continuing from a previous article I wrote, explores the second and third of Rancière's three-fold solution, extending

the pedagogical insights of the egalitarian axiom to the practices of dissensus and the theorization of the political subject. In conclusion, I claim that the significance of Rancière's philosophy of radical equality may be located in its contribution in understanding the contemporaneous need to engage politically—an engagement which does not betray the politics of life and is committed to a life of politics, actively verifying the presupposition of the principle of equality as part of our philosophic practice. The whole discussion will be guided by the question: *What is the principle of equality and how does Rancière theorize emancipation using the principle both as groundwork and expression par excellence?*

Keywords: aesthetics, dissensus, principle of equality, political subjectivization

Emancipation occurs when the universe of daily experience becomes translatable into writing, and a material thing becomes the bridge of translations between two minds.

- Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury*¹

*It is not to contradict appearances but, on the contrary, to confirm them. Wherever the part of those who have no part is inscribed, however fragile and fleeting these inscriptions may be, a sphere of appearance of the *dēmos* is created, an element of the *kratos*, the power of the people exists. The problem is to extend the sphere of materialization, to maximize its power.*

- Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*²

DISAGREEMENT

The strength of equality is found even in the small differences that generate radically different sensibilities within the same experience we share in common. The egalitarian presupposition is measured only through its verification, and nothing else. For Jacques Rancière, intellectual emancipation does not simply end at becoming *intellectually emancipated*, or by being aware and conscientious of the current political moments viewed from the common horizon of our learning capacities. With the destruction of the intellectual monopoly of intelligences and perception, intellectual emancipation thus entails the production of new forms of sensibilities that would naturally resist the dominant structural demarcations of hierarchical sensible aggregations, creating new worlds that would undermine the policing of our perception. By emancipation, we intensively mean the freeing of the material sensible from the policing of a hierarchy or an order of domination.

¹ Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (London and New York: Verso, 2015), 48.

² Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. by Julie Rose (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 88.

The second fold of discussing Rancière's solution to address political decadence and the culture of passivity explores the construction of these new forms of sensibilities as the verification of equality in the dissensual activities within both politics and aesthetics. Intellectual emancipation, or the thinking of equality, is verified through the activities that would allow the meeting of two divergent senses in the form of disagreement. This part of Rancière's solution consists of activities of dissensus (i.e., practices marked by utter disagreeability) as made possible through intellectual emancipation. To name a few of these conceptual practices: the "partaking" in the distribution of the sensible, the disagreement between politics and police, the conceptualization of dissensus as the possibility to think of politics, and the dis-aggregation of the sensibilities in the regimes of art.

Rancière attempts to show how intellectual emancipation works in the midst of policing both individual and common sensibilities. Not only does he intertwine politics with aesthetics, Rancière would also intensify the meaning of 'sense' from one field of thought to another. Indeed, his signification of the word *sense* is far from the typical epistemological terminology, rendering it with both aesthetic (artistic and literary) and political implications. Today, practitioners of philosophy could hardly make sense of *sense* as a reductively empiricist concept. In aesthetics, on the one hand, sense could mean the very condition (objective or subjective) by which we are able to understand things we perceive in accordance to a proper taste-function and appreciation (e.g., beautiful as perceived; thus, beauty as sensible). On the other hand, politics utilizes sense to affectively mean the common understanding of the social structures and forces. Engaging socio-politically requires an individual to enter into the common organized symbolic register of the sensible. In other words, our engagement and understanding of the social order requires our agreement of/with its workings. Conformity is legitimized, since we must appropriate our lives to the very system that reproduces the order through social cohesion, even if it means too much negation of our

political freedom, and thus our becoming-passive in politics. Rancière sought to re-define the *sense* of politics (and aesthetics) in order to relinquish it from the mere *policing*, the banal exercise of power. Ethan Stoneman provides a clear description to Rancière's account of the aesthetico-political: the refiguration of the perceptual coordinates that places and present the spaces, times, and subjects of the political community, "a dissensual act instituted within the consensus of the police order by a subject emergent from a presumption of equality."³

In *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, while the term *disagreement* is reflective of Rancière's explicit critique of Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative action and the consensus theory of democracy, such term defines politics *per se*.⁴ Disagreement establishes the commonality of ordinary experience and thought between people, positing them directly against the facts of separation and other unjust social stratification consequential to hierarchical policing. Disagreement, therefore, is the enforcing of equality in the hierarchy, the clashing of two divergent sensibilities. In *The New French Philosophy*, Ian James adds that it

concerns fundamentally divergent ways of understanding or encountering any object of disagreement and the relative possibilities of expression and communication which are available to those who may be party to a disagreement.⁵

While the notion of politics specific to the consensus theory of democracy emphasizes agreement as the unity of a people in the processes

³ Ethan Stoneman, "Appropriate Indecorum: Rhetoric and Aesthetics in the Political Theory of Jacques Rancière," in *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 44:2 (2011), 137-138. Cf. Joshua P. Ewalt, "Rhetoric, Poetics, and Jacques Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*," in *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 49:1 (2016), 29.

⁴ See Rancière, *Disagreement*, xii, 47.

⁵ Ian James, *The New French Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 121.

of will-formation, Rancière's version sought to pinpoint the deficits of accounting subjects in agreement. Habermas's theorization of communicative action methodologically fails the warranted egalitarian axiom since, through agreement, language is conditioned in the terms of discursive assertions that hegemonize the views and demands of the 'lesser' interactor into levels of misunderstanding and thus making them susceptible to consent out of coercion, even if motions of agreement were established from their own initiative. Rancière is convinced that language is malleable and that power plays an important role in the struggle for meaning of words.⁶ He remains skeptical to consensus, specifically due to the exclusionary potential of its practices. If equality is the fundamental structural condition of any unequal social order, it consequently reveals inequality to be contingent, ungrounded, and therefore inherently unstable and always be exposed to possibilities of contestation or challenge.⁷ As a polemical character of Rancière's political commitment, equality renders people the perception of inequalities, enabling them the realization of a wrong that can be rectified. For Rancière, politics is the activity which makes actual real differences work, as opposing contradictories and antagonisms are brought into creative conflicts wherein those who were initially from a disadvantaged position finally decide that things would not be the same as before. For that, disagreement as praxis concerns how people integrate their experiences, their creation of new forms of sensibilities and their sense of equality, to the common horizon of understanding that initially excluded them.

⁶ For Rancière, politics "is less concerned with arguing than with what can be argued, the presence or absence of a common object between X and Y. It concerns the tangible presentation of this common object, the very capacity of the interlocutors to present it. An extreme form of disagreement is where X cannot see the common object Y is presenting because X cannot comprehend that the sounds uttered by Y form words and chains of words similar to X's own." Cf. Rancière, *Disagreement*, xii.

⁷ James, *The New French Philosophy*, 113.

LE PARTAGE DU SENSIBLE

The shift from the tradition of hermeneutics, structuralism, post-structuralism and the whole linguistic paradigm marks Rancière's affirmation of the material, concrete, real informing sensory dimension of experience.⁸ This philosophical orientation would render possible his formulation of the distribution of the sensible, a concept that functions as an aesthetic *dispositif* dissolving the disciplinary demarcations between aesthetics and politics in Rancière's egalitarian philosophy. Moving beyond the influences of Althusser, Rancière criticizes the limitations and rigidity of the structuralist critique of ideology. He concerns himself rather with the concrete situations and material conditions from which individuals are capacitated to speak and be heard—both intelligibility and communicability which recognize the existence of difference and sensible variations. In his work *The Politics of Aesthetics*, subtitled *The Distribution of the Sensible*, the French phrase *le partage du sensible* (transliterally, distribution of the sensible) not only approximates the aesthetic character of his politics, but gives us the idea that the main composition of the communal world is the totality of the sensible experiences divided up and shared out by each of its people. Rancière defines the distribution of the sensible as

the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that defines the respective parts and positions within. A distribution of the sensible therefore establishes ... something in common that is shared and exclusive parts within it. This apportionment of parts and positions is based on a distribution of spaces, times and forms of activity that determines that very manner in which something in common lends itself to

⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

participation in a way that various individuals have a part of the distribution.⁹

The formulation of Rancière's distribution of the sensible articulates the 'transcendental aesthetic' (to use a Kantian terminology) on how the perception of the social realm is structured, divided and shared out to theoretically construct a communal world for everyone. The French verb *partager* consists of two meanings: the act of dividing (division) and the act of jointly participating (sharing). On the one hand, *partager* refers to the act of dividing up a collection of elements which would be distributed to perceivers depending on a variety of factors such as classification and differentiation.¹⁰ It would then be safe to claim that it is this meaning of *partager* that which best describes the 'implementary' function of the police in conditioning (i.e., censoring) our perception, by distributing the powers, spaces, and rights to the citizen. On the other hand, *partager* also meant the act of jointly participating in activity, involvement, or engagement, with having something in common with other perceivers.¹¹ Contrary to the former signification, this second meaning of *partager* best describes the phenomenon whereby people actively engage in any social participation, understanding that they equally share this capacity for participation. Through this second signification, we establish the common sense necessary for understanding the true meaning of politics.

The polysemic characterization of *partager* in *le partage du sensible* implies standard and generalized inclusions, and also specific or localized exclusions. At the fundamental level of reality, our experience of the world can only be experienced as such on the basis of a horizon of perception common to all those who inhabit that world; and within it,

⁹ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, ed. and trans. by Gabriel Rockhill (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), 7.

¹⁰ James, *The New French Philosophy*, 118.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

sensible experiences are differentiated depending where one is positioned.¹² It could then be described as an *a priori* of what we are experiencing in society, the pre-given principle (revealed eventually as contingent) in the sensory dimension of our experience of the world. It delimits spaces and times, which become the *a priori* conditions for the possibility of political events. Rancière claims that “politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.”¹³ This ‘transcendental aesthetic’ is the fundamental order of sensible-intelligible experience which constitutes the space and time of the social reality, articulated on the level of the senses or embodied sense perception before it is formalized into the ideas, concepts, or even ideology.¹⁴

The distribution of the sensible is the totality of experiences of all that is counted—meaning those who are seen and heard in the process of policing. Its totality, however, is questionable. For in the distribution, there are instances of localized exclusions whereby the voice and appearance of an individual or a group are uncounted as rational arguments and ‘proper’ modes of being, and are therefore dismissed and disregarded. The language of the miscount is treated to bear no meaning in the grammar of social participation. They are denied of their political space within the distribution, and assigned to exist playing the “part of those who have no part.”¹⁵ Such politics of perception is about the ways in which subjects become visible and audible. Through the police order, however, political oppression occurs whenever an individual’s or group’s speech and appearance are negated, consequently denying them the rights and privileges for political participation. Fundamentally, they are denied of their political capacity to engage as human beings—subjects who are

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 8.

¹⁴ See *Ibid.*, 13. Cf. James, *The New French Philosophy*, 119.

¹⁵ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 11.

human but not treated with dignifying equality; not treated as though they do in fact possess the very human capacity for language and speech. All miscounted are placed outside the distribution, keeping them to their ‘proper’ place as they are considered incapable of understanding the order and their place in it. It could be inferred from Rancière’s observations that there are practices of policing that ignores the principle of equality, and negligently include the favored and exclude the otherwise. If only those counted and the miscount would actively partake in the common horizon of understanding the order, that the distribution may be rectified in a more egalitarian way. At most times, the rectification requires the practice of disagreement between conflicting senses—when the egalitarian sense of the miscount is introduced to the common sense of those who are counted. For everyone has this capacity for enunciation, which is no less than “the power to create a space where equality can state its own claim: equality exists somewhere; it is spoken of and written about. It must therefore be verifiable.”¹⁶

It is possible to describe Rancière’s political suggestions as leading towards an ‘ontology of spaces’ that are emancipative of individuals and collective agencies through the production of these new spaces.¹⁷ Rancière took account of the fact that people may (or may not) share a common understanding of the world and that it may (or may not) also recognize or organize a place for some (i.e., the miscount). This is where domination and oppression occur: when certain people are unheard, unable to or disabled for speech (i.e., when their political space is negated or unrecognized), or when the spaces were distributed unequally (e.g., the creation of classes, unnecessary bureaucratic relations, and dehumanizing social hierarchies). Contrary to the mechanisms of inequality, equality is generated through politics, “when it is implemented in the specific form of

¹⁶ Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, trans. by Liz Heron (London: Verso, 2007), 47.

¹⁷ James, *The New French Philosophy*, 132.

a particular case of *dissensus*.¹⁸ For Rancière, politics happens in the form of disagreement—the antagonism of senses of those heard and the unheard, specifically when the latter suddenly become audible and rectifies what was supposed to belong to them: their space, their speech—thus correcting the distribution of the sensible. True politics exist when there is popular uprising of the unheard (of a particular) as they assert their right to be equal to others.

POLITICS AND POLICE

From the aesthetic *dispositif* of the distribution of the sensible, scrutinizing both the egalitarian and inegalitarian sensibilities we perceive in the social realm, Rancière then lays down two primary categories of politics: 1) police, which is our traditional definition of politics as the organization of spaces (i.e., the *policing* of the distribution of the sensible); and, 2) politics, which is the dissensual practice of partaking in society. Police concern the way different individuals and groups are assembled and stratified, and simultaneously establishing power, authority, i.e., mastery thereof. This stratification distributes the spaces, positions, and functions to the people, normalizing its symbolic register through a system of legitimation. Within the police order, individuals or groups are assembled in a manner wherein authority, power, positions, functions, i.e., the spaces are distributed. Police is a fitting term to give entity to that which performs *policing* in a sense that it is seen as

the set of procedures whereby aggregation and consent of collectives is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution. [Rancière proposes] to give

¹⁸ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 51.

this system of distribution and legitimization another name. [Rancière proposes] to call it *the police*.¹⁹

Implementation is the main function of the police,²⁰ for it is merely the way in which we are kept in our place in the social realm, regardless of whether (or not) the spaces are fairly distributed. And because it is susceptible to the workings of inequality, domination by an advantaged class or a ruling ideology would be an inevitable predicament within this political category, favoring only those it counts. Rancière adds:

The police is thus first an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise.²¹

The police order assigns with the method of appropriation akin to the Platonic city of justice: a manual laborer, for example, is expected to think and act like one, and not like any other occupation beyond one's assignment in the order.²² However, this kind of social destiny marks a specific bias that foretells the different positions within the order. We are thought to have different capacities under the presumption that we are not equals in reality. The regulatory framework for the distribution functions under the assumption that there are people who possess better qualities and there are those who do not. And yet the very capacity to

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 28. Modifications mine.

²⁰ Rancière writes, "the police is, essentially, the law, generally implicit, that defines a party's share or lack of it." *Ibid.*, 29.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Cf. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 127-161.

understand the order is said to have been inherent to all. Rancière states: “There is order in society because some people command and others obey, but in order to obey an order at least two things are required: you must understand the order and you must understand that you must obey it.”²³ In doing so, you have to be already equal to those who are ordering you (i.e., intellectual emancipation). Equality is an axiom assumed and verified in practice.²⁴ It operates in tensions of political moments, when its logic comes in conflict with the logic of inequality. It is important to note, however, that Rancière does not specify an example of the principle of equality being rigidly institutionalized into systemic political procedures. On the contrary, the existence of equality contaminates the institutions of inequality, showing the gaps and deficits within the hierarchy and the territory of domination, i.e., police. Equality is verified through politics (in the second categorical sense), when the police order is interrupted by the heterogenous logic of equality. It could never be rigidly formalized into a part within the structure of hierarchy, for equality disrupts it. These claims simply explain that no matter how difficult for equality to be institutionalized (which is for Rancière a paradoxical impossible possibility), it can be practiced nonetheless.²⁵ Politics proper, as opposed to the police, occurs as a polemic. It happens when a conflict is informed with a subsisting radical difference between those who have a voice and are already accounted by the police, and those excluded people muted by society and whose participation is neglected. Rancière claims that “politics exists when the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part.”²⁶

In a short treatise titled “Ten Theses on Politics” (later published as the first chapter of his work *Dissensus: Politics and Aesthetics*), Rancière claims that politics is not merely the exercise of power, and that

²³ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 16.

²⁴ Samuel A. Chambers, *The Lesson of Rancière* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 28.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 11.

it should be defined according to its own terms “as a specific mode of action that is caused by a specific subject and that has its own proper rationality.”²⁷ Rancière’s version of politics attempts to address the distortions (i.e., wrong) legitimized by the police in their account of those who possess a part and those who do not in the distribution of the sensible. Wrong is a dispossession,²⁸ the disabling of a human capacity for speech and understanding. It is in this dynamic of unjust policing whereby people are dispossessed of their political space and time, thus excluding them from the perceptual field of the communal world. Politics occurs when real difference is introduced into policing in the given hierarchy, where voices which cannot be heard suddenly makes themselves heard.²⁹ To identify a specific wrong in the social realm, or the attempt to articulate the mute speech of those whom the police (i.e., society) have wronged is necessary, capacitating those people with a voice audible enough to the rest of the community. Again, real political activity is committed to the principle of equality if and only if the identification of

²⁷ Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. by Steven Corcoran (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 27.

²⁸ Rancière writes: “This is the fundamental wrong, the original nexus of blaberon and adikon whose “manifestation” then blocks any deduction of the just from the useful: the people appropriate the common quality as their own. What they bring to the community strictly speaking is contention. This should be understood in a double sense: the qualification that the people bring is a contentious property since it does not belong exclusively to the people, but this contentious property is strictly speaking only the setting-up of a contentious commonality. The mass of men without qualities identify with the community in the name of the wrong that is constantly being done to them by those whose position or qualities have the natural effect of propelling them into the nonexistence of those who have “no part in anything.” It is in the name of the wrong done them by the other parties that the people identify with the whole of the community. Whoever has no part—the poor of ancient times, the third estate, the modern proletariat—cannot in fact have any part other than all or nothing. On top of this, it is through the existence of this part of those who have no part, of this nothing that is all, that the community exists as a political community that is, as divided by a fundamental dispute, by a dispute to do with the counting of the community’s parts even more than of their “rights.” The people are not one class among others. They are the class of the wrong that harms the community and establishes it as a “community” of the just and the unjust.” Rancière, *Disagreement*, 9.

²⁹ James, *The New French Philosophy*, 123.

wrong is thought to declare and verify that principle solely responsible for the creation of societies.

In demonstrating politics in disagreement with police, one reveals the contingent political origin of society—the anarchical origin which any order rests upon.³⁰ Rancière states that “the social order ultimately rests on the equality that is also its ruination.”³¹ Verifying the presumption of the egalitarian axiom would necessarily cause the disruption of the order: if everybody is considered to be equal to one another, then anyone can (in principle) occupy a part beyond one’s original assignment in the sensible distribution. This would signify that the implementary functions of the police such as social stratification and hierarchization are originally grounded in ‘an-archy,’ or the absence of any foundational ordering *logos* for governance: *arkhê*. Oliver Davies agrees with Rancière, describing the political revelation of contingency as an embarrassment: politics “embarrasses the police order by seeing through the imaginary garments of elaborate hierarchy which cover its naked contingency.”³²

Politics, as dissensual activity faithful to the principle of equality, is a demonstration of a possibility amidst the originary contingency: that the state of things could always be otherwise.³³ It is the demonstration of intellectual emancipation, fostering a kind of consciousness aware of the contingent nature of domination present in society, inciting people to disagree against the natural workings of the police order. However, it is also important to note that police is a nonpejorative concept for Rancière. While he criticizes its contradictions, its oppressive tendencies, and pinpoints the police for most of the social injustices it caused, Rancière nevertheless does not generalize that all police orders are unjust in their

³⁰ Oliver Davies, *Jacques Rancière (Key Contemporary Thinkers)* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 79. Cf. Todd May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière: Creating Equality* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 78-101.

³¹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 16.

³² Davies, *Jacques Rancière*, 79.

³³ *Ibid.*

distribution of the sensible.³⁴ On the contrary, he contends that the aim of denigrating police is to change the contours of its entire perceptual coordinates. Politics must transform the police, disrupting it, so as to create the distribution of the sensible anew, allowing the principle of equality to refigure its perceptual coordinates, and constructing new forms of sensibilities that would then count those who were miscounted. This is not to claim that counting the miscount is another way of policing them, since recognition is not enough. Rather, the point is to affirm the miscounts' dis-identification from their original assigned position, ultimately emerging as active political subjects. As we later explore the third fold of Rancière's politics of intellectual emancipation, political subjectivization will be discussed as the occurrence of a political event and the dissensual activity of the subject, rendering the condition for the possibility of her political subjectivity. It is in political subjectivization that we distinguish politics as a dissensual activity from policing and implementation: police is the organization of spaces for your passive engagement (e.g., keeping people to their places), while politics is the real political moment of actively becoming a subject. For now, our discussion must detour to conceptualize the meaning of dissensus, given that politics happen as a particular type of dissensus,³⁵ and how this concept can be used to criticize the deficits of its opposite: consensus.

³⁴ In *Disagreement*, Rancière claims: "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. The police can produce all sorts if good, and one kind of police may be infinitely preferable to another. This does not change the nature of the police, which is what we are exclusively dealing with here. The regime of public opinion as gauged by the unending exhibition of the real is today the normal form of the police in Western societies takes. Whether the police is sweet and kind does not make it any less the opposite of politics." Rancière, *Disagreement*, 31.

³⁵ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 51.

WHAT IS DISSENSUS?

Once again, Rancière overlaps the terrain of aesthetics and politics through the exploration of the generic possibilities on why and how the sensible—consisting of the visible, the audible and the doable—are organized, oriented, and implemented among individuals. The egalitarian grammar of emancipation is used not only in terms of progress in economic wealth, or the freedom from modern slavery and oppression, but also in the aesthetic reconfiguration of appearances against the dictates of mimetic canon. To appear means to make or become visible within the sensory dimension of experience, the affirmative coming-into-presence in our common horizon of understanding. In the essay titled “The Thinking of Dissensus: Politics and Aesthetics,” Rancière claims that what is at stake in his political writings and what overlaps his objective with the aesthetic dimension is the attempt to think of politics as disagreement and to think of aesthetics as a heterogeneity that resists the absolutization of wrong as a fact of the distribution of the sensible.³⁶ In other words, the task is to think of egalitarian politics to counter the police’s monopoly of perception. It is succinctly summed up in the question: “Is it even possible to think of politics amidst the workings of the police?” Let us take note that when we are assigned to our place by the police in the sensible distribution, we tend to conform our thoughts to the occupied space and time. Indeed, the police functions to make things easier for us to adapt, agree with, and submit to its symbolic register, and making it difficult and almost impossible to generating a space for emancipation into our passive political lives.

Rancière analyzes consensus not only as the common understanding through a sense-agreement. The downside of any failed or coerced consensus is reflective of the police’s complementary functions,

³⁶ Jacques Rancière, “Thinking of Dissensus: Politics and Aesthetics,” in *Reading Rancière: Critical Dissensus*, ed. by Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), 1.

forcing us to simply agree with the given terms. The logic of consensus consolidates the explicative order, further strengthening the police. To illustrate an example, we may use explications in debates (academic or sociopolitical) wherein the primary aim of debate is to make the opposing party *understand* and agree with one's terms. Not only do parties think unequally advantageous over the other—thus, failing to presuppose the egalitarian axiom—but it remains impossible not to think that the other party requires further orientation from a 'general' standpoint. Consequently, both groups of proposition and oppositions stultify each other with the loaded question "*Do you understand?*," implying the lack of understanding. Within the police order lies the logic of consensus, which defines the marginal distributions wherein expressions (political, social, cultural, artistic, commercial, etc.) are determined in terms of their appropriation, and activities in terms of function:

consensus is an agreement between sense and sense, in other words between a mode of sensory presentation and a regime of meaning. Consensus, as a mode of government, says: it is perfectly fine for people to have different interests, values and aspirations, nevertheless there is one unique reality to which everything must be related, a reality that is experienceable as a sense datum and which has only *one* possible signification.³⁷

All consensual activities are directed towards eliminating differences by hegemonizing a pseudo-identity which strictly ties fact and interpretation, speech and account, factual status and assignation of rights without consideration of its exclusionary tendencies. In doing so, consensus expels any instance of dissensus within the former's monotonous monopoly of understanding, disabling any form of disagreement since all parties have *consented* to just one meaning in all

³⁷ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 144. Emphasis mine.

matters. Indeed, the claim “only *one* possible signification” is an obvious trace of consensus’ exclusionary potentials, ignoring matters (and senses) of real differences. Through the imposition of sameness when forcing a party to agree with the terms of another, consensus neglects real differences which could be valuable in will-formation. It therefore undermines the possibility that there exist different kinds of sense: some of which are better and could inform the common sense imposed in the distribution of the sensible. A consensus, more than mere settlement of conflict, refers to “that which is censored” from the processes of legitimacy, rendering specific senses invisible, unheard, and disabled. Thinking of consensus creates a post-political character of all singularities, whose perception of social reality will always be “proper and fair,” regardless of how facts of the material social world present the opposite.

In thinking of the possibility of politics amidst the attempts to police thought and perception,³⁸ Rancière’s solution offers to think in terms of dissensus instead of consensus. Dissensus, contrary to consensus, is political *per se*. Dissensus sets up the theoretical stage on which politics and aesthetics are initially thinkable, establishing the kind of relations which unify their objects together. At the most abstract level, dissensus means a difference between sense and sense: a difference within the same, a sameness of the opposite.³⁹ The fundamental concern of dissensus is located not on how people are capable of reaching an

³⁸ Quite different from Michel Foucault’s analysis on the concept of discipline and Althusser’s interpellation of the subject, Rancière’s analysis on the police is much more concerned with the policing of the sensible in general political experiences. Rancière writes: “[P]olice interventions in public spaces consist primarily not in interpellating demonstrators, but in breaking up demonstrations. The police is not the law which interpellates individuals (as in Louis Althusser’s ‘Hey, you there!’), not unless it is confused with religious subjection. It consists, before all else, in recalling the obviousness of what there is, or rather of what there is not, and its slogan is: ‘Move along! There’s nothing to see here!’ The police is that which says that here, on this street, there’s nothing to see and so nothing to do but move along. It asserts that the space for circulating is nothing but the space of circulation.” Rancière, *Dissensus*, 37.

³⁹ Rancière, “Thinking of Dissensus,” 1.

agreement of senses. Rather, it is about the meta-discursive conditions for people to engage with each other using a language they consider to be rational. Dissensus, for Rancière, is precisely

this ‘common’ capacity ... split up from the very beginning. Aristotle tells us that slaves *understand* language but don’t *possess* it. This is what dissensus means. There is politics because speaking is not the same as speaking, because there is not even an agreement on what a sense means. Political dissensus is not a discussion between speaking people who would confront their interests and values. It is a conflict about who speaks and who does not speak, about what has to be heard as the voice of pain and what has to be heard as an argument on justice.⁴⁰

In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Rancière speaks of dissensus as a kind of a principle or mechanism that alters the distribution of the sensible, relinquishing its ties with absolute consensus. Dissensual activities disclose the obviousness of all workings of structural inequality within the regime of the sensible. The logic of dissensus demonstrates the egalitarian axiom, revealing the fracture between the interpretations of the fair and the just with facts of the unfair and the unjust. Thinking of dissensus reframes the world, forcing it “cracked open from the inside, reconfigured in a different regime of perception and signification.”⁴¹ Politics as a dissensual activity overturns the police order, making visible what had been invisible from a perceptual field, and in that makes audible what used to be inaudible.⁴² Again for Rancière, “the essence of politics is *dissensus*. Dissensus is not a confrontation between interests or opinion.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. by Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2011), 48-49.

⁴² Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 88-89.

It is the demonstration (*manifestation*) of a gap in the sensible itself.”⁴³ It is by nature polemical: the disruption of the organization of the sensible by supplementing it with the perceptual horizon of those have no part or who have no space.⁴⁴ By doing so, the common horizon of everyone is altered whereby equality is celebrated. Such a disruption remains a possibility, until equality is realized to be intrinsic to all active political practices. And those who become vigilantly aware of *moments politique* are discontented with the workings of the current police order. Political activities of dissensus are always modes of expression that disentangles the perceptible divisions of the police by implementing a basic heterogeneous assumption, simultaneously demonstrating the sheer contingency of the order and the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being.⁴⁵

The aesthetic character of dissensus renders the free play of aesthetic experience severed from the traditional canonical reference.⁴⁶ It attempts to confront the rigidity of standard art, crafting alternative scenes of the visible and new dramaturgies of the intelligible. However, this must not simply be misrecognized with those of contemporary avant-garde works of art or the rest of art movements after modernity. Dissensual activities of art innovates to reframe the fabric of common experience, wherein “new modes of constructing common object and new possibilities of subjective enunciation may be developed that are characteristic of the ‘aesthetics of politics.’”⁴⁷ To think of dissensus thus blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and politics, setting up the theoretical

⁴³ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 38.

⁴⁴ According to Rancière, politics exists because “speaking is not the same as speaking, because there is not even an agreement on what a sense means. Political dissensus is not a discussion between speaking people who would confront their interests and values. It is a conflict about who speaks and who does not speak, about what has to be heard as the voice of pain and what has to be heard as an argument on justice.” Rancière, “Thinking of Dissensus,” 2.

⁴⁵ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 30.

⁴⁶ Steven Corcoran, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Dissensus*, 1-24.

⁴⁷ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 19.

stage where one sees through what defines the perception and relation of the common, whether in social reality and in art. The thinking of dissensus challenges the very foundations of police standards, questioning the sensible delimitations of what is known and what was censored: “bodily positions and movements, functions of speech, the parceling out of the visible and the invisible.”⁴⁸ Those informed by this thought are capacitated to see through how spaces, powers, opportunities, etc. are posited and policed in the social order—the very organization of exclusions, inequalities, immobilizations. Dissensual activities are emancipatory, foreseeing non-standard political dynamics and other possibilities that disrupt the institutionalized totality of oppression and inequality in our contemporary times. Those who were cultivated with this dissensual thought emerge as political subjects, engaging the very conditions of possibility for politics to occur with its inherent aesthetic dimension.

POLITICS OF AESTHETICS: THE REGIMES OF ART

I have discussed so far some determining activities of dissensus in politics. It is necessary to explore further the aesthetic dimension which informs it. The distribution of the sensible, before the individual’s active engagement with it, is initially provisioned by the police. Everyday, we perceive the censorship, demarcations and stratifications of society, even to the point of describing them rigid, obsolete and oftentimes unnecessary. Davide Panagia echoes Rancière as he claims that lines of division do exist, but not as natural objects of the world.⁴⁹ The thinking of dissensus, in Rancière’s politics of intellectual emancipation, involves the aesthetic rearrangement of these lines, affirming the contingent nature of social grounds. It is from these contentions that a reformulation

⁴⁸ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 14.

⁴⁹ Davide Panagia, *Rancière’s Sentiments* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 3.

of the notion of aesthetics is possible. Much to what we have discussed of the notion of *le partage du sensible*, Rancière defines aesthetics as “a specific regime for identifying and reflecting on the arts: a mode of articulation between ways of doing and making, their corresponding forms of visibility, and possible ways of thinking about their relationships (which presupposes a certain idea of thought's effectively).”⁵⁰ Initially, the relation of art and politics may be seen having common bearing on the very production of artworks insofar as regimes of identification articulate partitioned ways of being, doing, and seeing. Artworks have the power to directly engage and could even transform the existing distribution of the sensible.⁵¹ A regime of art is the partitioning standard or process for the distribution of value in works of art and performances, including the policing of perception in art. Perhaps, it could be said that a regime is a distribution of the sensible in works of art. The processes of value-partitioning are the aesthetic acts that configure our perception of artworks, wherefore we are able to render meaning into an artwork from a specific symbolic or sensible register.

Examining the initial relation of art and politics, Rancière enumerates in *The Politics of Aesthetics* three regimes of art: ethical, representative (or mimetic) and aesthetic. Here, one can make an initial remark that the first two regimes are in some way censored by the police, and the final regime could be described as the regime which is simultaneously egalitarian and emancipatory, for it frees the sensibilities from the over-rationalization of values.

Firstly, the ‘ethical regime of images’ refer to the regime where ‘art’ is subsumed under the question of images. Rancière categorizes Plato’s hatred of the arts⁵² as under such regime for the latter

⁵⁰ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 4.

⁵¹ Rancière contends, “artistic practices are ‘ways of doing and making’ that intervene in the general distribution of the ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility.” Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 8.

⁵² Plato, *The Republic*, 277-301.

distinguishes true art from artistic simulacra that imitate simple appearances. “In this regime, it is a matter of knowing in what way images/mode of being affects the *ethos*, the mode of being of individuals and communities.”⁵³ Examples of such ‘art’ include dance as a therapy, poetry as education, theatre as civic festival activity. All these practices are conditioned ways of being and doing—as such, they raise ethical or customary concerns. In other words, art as the ethical regime of images is essentially identical with how individuals live in images of an *ethos*: in accordance to the social practices.⁵⁴

Secondly, the ‘representative regime of the arts’ is grounded on the mimetic and normative claims that define the conditions of the categorization of ‘art,’ and then produce the standards of judgment with representations of both the world and society. In this regime we find codified sets of conventions that tell whether or not the artwork, or ‘the representation,’ is appropriate and ‘accurate enough’ in terms of verisimilitude (i.e., artworks bridging the gap between appearance and reality).⁵⁵ The guiding principles of the representative regime develop into

forms of normativity that define the conditions according to which imitations can be recognized as good or bad, adequate or inadequate: partitions between genres according to what is represented; principles for adapting forms of expression to genres and thus to the subject matter represented; the distributions of resemblances according to principles of verisimilitude, appropriateness, or correspondence; criteria for distinguishing between and comparing the arts; etc.⁵⁶

⁵³ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 16.

⁵⁴ Davies, *Jacques Rancière*, 134-135.

⁵⁵ James, *The New French Philosophy*, 130.

⁵⁶ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 17.

Indeed, this regime is bound to be hierarchical because the criterion it develops will categorically qualify the arts depending on genre, class, and other qualities that would delimit the artwork's appropriateness. As Davies contends, "it demands the representation to be appropriate for the position in the social hierarchy of the represented subject."⁵⁷

Finally, the 'aesthetic regime of the arts' demands no hierarchies and stratifications of appropriateness among the artworks, in contrast to the representative regime. By aesthetic, it "strictly refers to the specific mode of being of whatever falls within the domain of art, to the mode of the art."⁵⁸ Such regime resists conformity to the normative codifications of the representative regime and tries to examine artworks in accordance with their own historicity and specificity. Rancière's examination of this regime emancipates the artworks from the rigidity of the standards of judgment. Within standards of the representative regime, the artworks' expression would undergo receptive conditioning, deeming them appropriate (or not). The aesthetic regime constantly attempts to disrupt mimetic barriers that conditions the ways of doing, seeing and producing the artworks, and even goes fundamentally political as it disrupts the ways of living (*ethos*) in society's division of labor. Rancière further notes that:

The aesthetic regime of the arts is the regime that strictly identifies art in the singular and frees it from any specific rule, from any hierarchy of the arts, subject matter, and genres ... The aesthetic regime asserts the absolute singularity of art and, at the same time, destroys any pragmatic criterion of isolating this singularity. It simultaneously establishes the autonomy of art and the

⁵⁷ Davies, *Jacques Rancière*, 135.

⁵⁸ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 18.

identity of its forms with the forms that life uses to shape itself.⁵⁹

Throughout his politics of intellectual emancipation, Rancière emphasizes the strong affirmation of the principle of equality in the distribution of the shared materiality of space, time, and matter. Concerning aesthetic practices as dissensual activities, Rancière argues that they “are ‘ways of doing and making’ that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility.”⁶⁰ Rancière utilizes his own theorization of the aesthetic regime to develop fluid parameters in order to historicize artworks in accordance to their specific regimes and examines the development of how the sensible distributed *within* an artwork is dependent on the workings of an art regime. There exists strong political bearing within the production of the sensible insofar as “Politics and art ... construct ‘fictions,’ that is to say *material* rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done.”⁶¹ Both politics and art adhere to the possibility of dis-aggregating value within the prevailing distribution of the sensible, by verifying the egalitarian axiom in order to create new relations and sites of inclusion. The writing (or weaving) of fictions, as an aesthetic practice, could disrupt the circulation of words and discourse, extending to the position of bodies in shared spaces.⁶² Equality destroys the hierarchies of representation and also establishes a community of readers as a community without legitimacy, a community formed spontaneously by texts.⁶³ According to Rancière,

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶² See *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶³ See *Ibid.*, 10.

the arts only ever lend to projects of domination or emancipation what they are able to lend to them, that is to say ... what they have in common with them: bodily positions and movements, functions of speech, the parceling out of the visible and the invisible.⁶⁴

Aesthetic revolution dis-aggregates and rearranges these senses in the distribution of the sensible. It blurs the borders between the logic of facts and the logic of fictions, including a new mode of rationality. Thus, it is possible to consider that both political statements and literary locutions not only produce effects in reality, defining models of speech, action, or motion but also intensifies it.⁶⁵ As a dissensual activity, the writing of fiction maps the coordinates of the distribution of the sensible, making visible the gaps within and beyond. Indeed, a fiction should never be underestimated. Rancière opines that to “pretend is not to put forth illusions but to elaborate intelligible structures.”⁶⁶ The nature of fictions is not to be reduced merely as unreal or utopian. They serve as counternarratives expressing the element of dissensus—a different (and egalitarian) kind of sense, capable of refiguring the material ensemble of society. The workers, for example, invested upon fictions their demands characteristic of being ‘unreal,’ “of being a montage of words and images appropriate for reconfiguring the territory of the visible, the thinkable, and the possible.”⁶⁷ Rancière calls the ‘fictions’ of art and politics not as utopia, but rather as heterotopia, i.e., having different sensible distribution within the same topology to be reconfigured. Fictions construct new forms of sensibilities informed by the imaginary, but not for the purpose of escaping the real in order to reach a utopian ideal, but rather to correct the wrong that was initially given in the distribution of

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁵ See *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

the sensible. These new forms of sensibilities are actively integrated by the subject to the common sensibilities in art and politics simultaneously. And from these dissensual activities emerge the political subjects, calling into question the distribution of roles and spaces. Rancière contends that “a political collective is not ... an organism or a communal body. The channels for political subjectivization are not those of imaginary identification but those of ‘literary’ disincorporation.”⁶⁸ They introduce into the distribution of the sensible new ways of action, speech and thought that challenge the dominant structures of inequality present in our social condition. In this sense, we may claim that aesthetic acts are configurations of experience that inform our becoming political subjects—the significance of which remains at the heart of Rancière’s philosophy of radical equality, and a contribution to the legacy of contemporary political theory after the May 1968 student and worker’s revolution in France. I argue that political subjectivization marks the culminating fold of his solution to the problematic culture of political passivity.

POLITICAL SUBJECTIVIZATION

This is the point where Rancière attempts to elaborate a theory of the subject proper for the perception of new forms of sensibility. Indeed, the creation of a new world should generously inform the people regarding how one learns to inhabit it, or what modes of action should be taken in order to partake in the organization of this truly egalitarian world. From here, Rancière’s idea of political subjectivization differs from previous versions established by the likes of Sartre, Althusser, Lacan, Deleuze, etc.⁶⁹ The complication within which the conception of Rancière’s theory

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶⁹ It is safe to claim, however, that nearest to Rancière’s idea of political subjectivization, in terms of theoretical similarity, would be that of Badiou’s theory of the political subject. See Alain Badiou, *Can Politics Be Thought? Followed by Of An Obscure Disaster: On the End of the Truth of the State*, trans. by Bruno Bosteels (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018).

of the subject differentiates his version among the aforementioned thinkers is that: while it is possible for subjects to stage political moments, Rancière would further claim that it is politics (or a political moment) that creates subjects and not the other way around.⁷⁰ Subjects are not to be treated as free agents causing politics to occur. On the contrary, they are the effects of politics. Rancière would further elaborate the constituents of political subjectivization (activity, politics, and subject) to construct inferences for its univocity with the theory (and praxis) of radical democracy in his other works. But for this piece, my focus is to present the significance of political subjectivization at the heart of Rancière's politics of intellectual emancipation, using it to address the problem of our becoming-passive in politics, resulting into an embodied declaration of an active political life.

Returning our discussion to the aesthetico-political dimension, acts of dissensus (aesthetic and political) renders new forms of sensibilities that disrupt the police through its introduction of a different kind of sense within the generalized aggregation of the sensible—one which expresses the egalitarian principle that was presupposed from the very beginning. Within the same political moment, an act of dissensus is the expression of political subjectivization: a struggle for existence of a political subject. It occurs when those posited by the police to occupy the space outside the distribution—those who play the part of having no part in the political organization of the society—assert the egalitarian axiom, claiming new modes of active existence that are audible and visible to the rest of the distribution of the sensible. Subjectivization is the process through which the voice of the dispossessed can be found to identify a wrong. Moreover, subjectivization verifies the principle of equality by contesting this wrong. It makes visible what had been excluded from a perceptual field, and in that makes audible what used to be inaudible.⁷¹ Again in *Disagreement*, Rancière argues that

⁷⁰ Chambers, *The Lesson of Rancière*, 15-21.

⁷¹ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 36.

Politics is a matter of subjects or, rather, modes of [subjectivization]. By [*subjectivization*] I mean the production through a series of actions of a body and a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose identification is thus part of the reconfiguration of the field of experience.⁷²

Rancière asserts that political subjectivization is the polemic occurrence wherein the subject emerges by her dissensual activities that mark the verification of the egalitarian axiom. It is the transformation of identities defined by the given order into new forms, placing them in political moments of dispute. Thus, Rancière states, “there is politics when there is a part of those who have no part, a part or party of the poor.”⁷³ Political subjectivization produces an opposition that was not given in the police constitution of the community.⁷⁴ It could be inferred from here that political subjectivization relies on what Rancière refers to as a ‘capacity for enunciation,’ “which a body or bodies that are excluded within a specific distribution of the sensible can be said to possess. Of central importance here is the capacity for voice, speech and for the possession of a *logos*,”⁷⁵ realized upon the practice of verifying equality in one’s political life. With reference to intellectual emancipation as expressed into the practice of this capacity for enunciation, Rancière is suggesting that only when human beings assume this mad presupposition that *we all are of equal intelligence*, that we are able to act no differently than those who would assume the opposite. This emancipatory politics,

⁷² Rancière, *Disagreement*, 35. Modifications mine. Amidst discrepancies of different translations, I would be using only the word subjectivization consistently, plurisignifying various translations of the term such as subjectivization, subjection, subjectification, etc.—all of which refers to Rancière’s theorization of the coming-into-existence of the political subject. This applies when even modifying citations from the original source.

⁷³ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 11.

⁷⁴ See *Ibid.*, 36.

⁷⁵ James, *The New French Philosophy*, 126.

through the capacity for enunciation, democratizes to us all the capabilities warranted for engaging in real political activities.

It should be noted, however, that political subjects are more than just a group of [intellectually] emancipated people who suddenly realize they have a voice which they could communicate upon the rest of society. They are not simply social groups of common interests. They exist as manifest egalitarian inscriptions. Subjects are the bearers of a political (egalitarian) decision: a subject emerges to become part of the material embodiment of the equality—the community—once it makes the decision to act in accordance with the imperative of the egalitarian axiom. Even joining a political party or any group of interest is not necessarily tantamount to being a political subject. The concern for political subjectivity transgresses surfacing interests in the political discourse, and should involve the fundamental conditions for our being able to experience and practice politics *per se*. Meaning to say, the subject's attention should be directed towards the matter of dislocating the original policing of spaces, all the while verifying equality as a presupposition. A political subject is the operator of a particular *dispositif* of subjectivization and litigation through politics.⁷⁶ The crucial role of the political subject is to be “an operator that connects and disconnects different areas, regions, identities, functions, and capacities existing in the configuration of a given experience.”⁷⁷ Political subjects verify the egalitarian axiom through actively determining the conditions of perceiving our common sense in the sensible distribution, forcefully integrating the egalitarian senses revelatory of the sheer contingency of our political grounds. Within the process of political subjectivization, the subjects initiate dissensual practices that are deemed egalitarian, instead of equality being created *for* them. It implements the subject's declaration of equality's belongingness to the order. To act as an equal means to deviate from the normality of social inequality by becoming an expressed anomaly. By supplementing

⁷⁶ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 39.

⁷⁷ See *Ibid.*, 40.

the original inclusion, these excluded entities undo their previous imperceptibility and emerge into political subjectivity.⁷⁸ They reveal the social gaps and political excesses, showing that there are those who truly are uncouned and invisible. It should be repeated here that one does not become a subject by merely engaging in the interests of society, or a particular group. It would still depend on the nature, level, and purpose of engagement. Egalitarian politics reveal a society in its difference to itself through subjectivization and dissensual activities. Consensus, on the other hand, does not merely consist of peacebuilding discourses, rationalizations and non-coercive agreement as opposing violence in general. The essence of consensus resides in the

annulment of dissensus as separation of the sensible from itself, in the nullification of surplus subjects, in the reduction of the people to the sum of the parts of the social body and of the political community to the relations between the interests and aspirations of these different parts.⁷⁹

In other words, consensus is what reduces political activity into gestures of the police, thus reducing it as its own. We can relate an example about today's politicians, on how they manage to disable the opposition in agreements, or as to how they would manipulate social movements in order to achieve their own interests. History has shown us that an effective and healthy democracy is one which can accommodate a space for the opposition to do politics—a democracy fueled by dissent. On the contrary, in its neoliberal aspirations, consensus becomes the 'end of politics,' or using the words of Rancière, "the ever-present shore of politics."⁸⁰ Consensus, and other procedural workings of policing, could

⁷⁸ See *Ibid.*, 35.

⁷⁹ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 42.

⁸⁰ See *Ibid.*, 43. Cf. Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 1-4.

never encapsulate all the interest of the people, no matter how it intends to do so. More often it becomes a political compromise when consensus chooses only those who hold power and neglects the interests of those excluded by the police. Thus, inequality is that which is ever-present within (and beyond) the police. To contest this problem of political decadence and democratic decay would mean for the disadvantaged, those dispossessed of their capacity to speak against injustice and oppression, those wronged by the coercion of consensus politics, to rectify the current prevailing police and its inegalitarian workings. Only in contesting a wrong that people emerge as political subjects. Alain Badiou echoes the same stance on the idea of subjectivity in politics. Both Badiou and Rancière argue that an individual only becomes a subject in his or her active fidelity and commitment to the political realm, living vigilantly in moments that are either an intervention (Badiou) or a disruption (Rancière), functioning as a polemic signification—that the wrong needs to be identified and corrected.⁸¹ The imperative of the egalitarian axiom will enable them to engage in active political argumentation and contestation. Political argumentation, reflective of the subject's capacity for enunciation, is a demonstration of possible worlds informing new forms of sensibilities, a construction of a paradoxical world wherein two separate worlds are put together: inequality of the police and equality of politics. Politics has no proper place nor any natural subjects.⁸² Rather, one should consider looking at politics in this novel standpoint of radical egalitarianism: demonstrations and events are considered political moments because a decision to presuppose the principle of equality was made and verified by action, thus transforming not only individuals into subjects, but fundamentally the very conditions of perceiving the common world of the people. Such is the final fold of Rancière's solution, whereby

⁸¹ Cf. Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. by Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2005); Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. by Bruno Bosteels (New York: Continuum, 2009); and Rancière, *Disagreement*.

⁸² Rancière, *Dissensus*, 39.

the idea of political subjectivization affirms the principle of equality in active political engagement. And this could be inspired by a Rancièrian hope located in the community of equals:

We can thus dream of a society of the emancipated...Such a society would repudiate the division between those who know and those who don't, between those who possess or don't possess the property of intelligence. It would only know minds in action: people who do, who speak about what they are doing, and who thus transform all their works into ways of demonstrating the humanity that is in them as in everyone.⁸³

CONCLUSION: THE LESSONS OF EQUALITY

As a rejoinder to this initial discussion on Rancièrè's theory of the political subject, I would like to conclude this piece by laying down three specific propositions as guiding principles for an active political life. In one way or another, these lessons could serve as a theoretical *organon* for discussing the democratic claims of political subjectivization. In articulating a theory of dissensus democracy from the standpoint of radical equality, a discussion of the significance of the policing of perception rectified by the politics of intellectual emancipation is a necessary step in order to redefine our being able to experience and practice politics. Rancièrè's contributions might serve as diagnostic patterns for examining society and its material conditions for the good life, or at least as an emancipatory manifesto for developing our political self-consciousness in a world that is constantly policed. It indicates new directions for doing real political activity, faithful to the demands of the

⁸³ Jacques Rancièrè, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. by Kristin Ross (Stanford and California: Stanford University Press, 1991), 71.

egalitarian axiom. These are directions to paths of political terrain wherein people are not denied of their political capacity to understand and engage in the common world, and everybody actively engages in the organizations of a democratic life. Thus, to work as a countermeasure against the problems of political passivity and democratic decay, I am here proposing thereby the following lessons of equality and their verification in active political life.

First, *equality is the principle for any political activity*. Abandoning the aspirations of previous political systems and philosophies before him (neoliberalism, in particular), Rancière sought to rethink equality as the principle by which we are able to do politics, and not as a status granted by meritocracy from whoever holds power in the social order. It is a presupposition, a point of departure from which all political activities are initiated, not a pragmatic end susceptible to a reduction into a difficult utopian ideal. From this perspective, one can observe that the belief in the idea of equality as a goal yet to be achieved, which neoliberalism has skillfully exploited, tolerates a culture of passivity and hinders the emancipatory potential. Most interest-driven political systems undertook a passive stance of political practices, whenever they continue to highlight real inequalities that undermine the capacity for political engagement and understanding. Particular individuals or groups of people are neglected and denied of their political capacity to speak for justice and fairness. Only those masters and experts or political representatives that are granted the language to understand their field and hold the power to engage and represent the rest, thereby controlling the monopoly of powers and capacities. People would always think that their engagement is not necessary as they are already represented by a specific political figure, they thus become passive citizens. However, if one thinks from the standpoint of equality—that everybody thinks, and that everybody has the capacity to understand the language and necessity of political engagement, then there is no reason to think that our political decisions are inferior to those who proclaim themselves to be experts. If

one assumes that everybody has the same intellectual capacities, that this egalitarian principle democratizes the rest of the capacities, then such presumption motivates us to initiate political actions and establish active political engagements with society. Communication implies the use of the language we understand, not only allowing us to have access to the grammar of social participation, but also implies that we stand on equal position with one another in the distribution of the sensible. There is no need to think of equality as something we have yet to achieve passively in politics, for it is already actively presupposed from the beginning. It is this presupposition of equality that would render politics active. This lesson acquires a sense of contemporaneity: our political systems today should reiterate once again into the social consciousness of people that, like any other modalities of existence and verbal implication, politics is an activity.

Second, *dissensus is the essence of real politics*. Samuel Chambers describes the principle of equality not as an ordering principle but rather as a “mechanism of disordering.”⁸⁴ Egalitarian politics will always be expressed as a disagreement between two different senses. Beyond the exclusionary tendencies and negligent practices of consensus, practices of dissensus are revelatory of the gaps and wrongs, to which they supplicate the supplement: the part of those who have no part. Activities of dissensus render the democratization of the sensible for everyone to participate in the commonality of the world. Specifically, in third-world countries like the Philippines, much of what everybody knows about politics involves the complexities of the ‘rule of the majority,’ prompting some level of marginalizing the minority. The task, however, is not to overturn the hierarchy by creating a rule of the minority. Contrary to this, politics must eliminate the entire hierarchy by restructuring the material social perception. It warrants us to re-discover ways to think differently about how citizens can be given a voice audible in the order. Rancière does not deny the polemical nature of politics. As such, a life of politics should be committed to becoming open to possible ways of improvement and

⁸⁴ Chambers, *The Lesson of Rancière*, 29.

transformation, even if its disruption is the necessary step. However, we must be cautious with this lesson: the politics of disagreement is not synonymous with anarchy, neither is it the total abandonment of consensus. Rather it is the rectification of the distribution in a more egalitarian way, wherein those who do not count suddenly belong to those who do. In other words, emancipation.

Finally, *subjectivity is demonstrated*. Rancière does not adhere to the idea of political agency as ontologically fixed to a specific essence or identity. Subjectivity did not exist before acting or living in the political moment. Like equality which is presupposed, it is not something that is merely pre-given. In order for politics to re-acquire the definition of being an activity, it must be enacted by the subject in the form of a demonstration: the dismantling of the status as passive individuals living in the state and the becoming of one as an active political subject at his or her own initiative to do politics or live in a political moment. Another way of putting it, we only become subjects insofar as we respond with the principle of equality to the call of a politico-historical moment. It does not mean that we must be reactionary (and thus, passive), but rather our being a political subject is effectuated by our dissensual activities. Against the core belief of identity politics, which claims that identity informs the individual on how to do politics (such as in the case of nationalism), Rancière celebrates the opposite: it is politics which [in]forms the political subjectivity of each individual. Contextualizing this lesson in our political history, even if the Filipinos are famed for our solidarity rooted from the idea of *kapwa* as part of our cultural consciousness, our political selfhood has always been differentiated by its historicity: different activities in different revolutions. Though freedom from our colonial past could always be disputed (if not difficult to imagine), the Philippines have long been regarded as a politically-engaging nation. We became Filipinos in our own history not because of some social category granted by a foreign power, but because our revolutionary actions have always shaped our historical situation. While we desired freedom and wanted to be treated as

equals in our colonial history, the revolutions were nevertheless enacted with the presupposition that everyone is free and equal. Indeed, the Filipinos as political subjects have always been famed in the Southeast Asia for events like the Philippine Revolution against Spain and America, Guerilla revolts against Japan, two People Power Revolutions, and even some recent ‘minor’ revolutions and micropolitical activities against the political culture during the Duterte Administration (2016-2022). And probably there are many other ways in which we could actively acquire our political subjectivity. Perhaps this third lesson affirms the previous one: political subjectivity, as our socio-political selfhood, is a subject in dispute—one who resists reductive identification by those who hold power—and thus constantly transforms in the process of dis-identification. Regardless of the factors or cultural signification that categorizes who we are (such as language, local race, gender, religion, family roles, ideals, etc.), we truly become subjects only in our activities of partaking in the organization of a truly egalitarian society—only by demonstration.

In elucidating the principle of equality, Rancière has made a thorough conceptualization of politics which is polemical by nature and emancipatory by direction. From the analyses made, we can conclude in this piece a description of Rancière’s radical egalitarianism as an invitation to think differently the way we engage politically, and to become active subjects initiating politics and at the same time are initiated by politics. A political subject is someone who dignifies equality to all. It was established that only when we learn to presume equality that we do politics actively. Rancière’s three-fold solution, I think, is the philosophical response to the problem of political decay and the tolerance of a culture of passivity. Drawing from the discussions made, Rancière proposes a theory of emancipatory politics revolving around three main elements: the political action causing or informing a change in the status quo, the moment or event from which the action is done, and the subject which exists from the political moment. These elements foretell the

further examination of the question of political subjectivization. Though I have initially made a brief discussion of Rancière's conceptualization of political subjectivization, it is necessary to discuss each individually and extract the democratic implications within each element. It is hoped that such discussions would conceptualize this theoretical univocity between political subjectivization and radical democracy. The above presentation of lessons from Rancière's politics of intellectual emancipation lays down the point of departure further theorizing the elements of political subjectivization: activity (or labor), politics, subjects. To conclude, I would like to invoke Rancière's philosophico-political conviction: "At the heart of this new idea of emancipation is the notion of equality of intelligences as the common prerequisite of both intelligibility and community, as a presupposition which everyone must strive to validate on their own account."⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 51; Cf. Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 1-14.

REFERENCES

- Badiou, Alain, *Being and Event*, trans. by Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2005).
- _____, *Can Politics Be Thought? Followed by Of An Obscure Disaster: On the End of the Truth of the State*, trans. by Bruno Bosteels (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018).
- _____, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. by Bruno Bosteels (New York: Continuum, 2009).
- Chambers, Samuel A., *The Lesson of Rancière* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- Davies, Oliver, *Jacques Rancière (Key Contemporary Thinkers)* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010).
- Ewalt, Joshua P., "Rhetoric, Poetics, and Jacques Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*," in *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 49:1 (2016).
- James, Ian, *The New French Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).
- May, Todd, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière: Creating Equality* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).
- Panagia, Davide, *Rancière's Sentiments* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018).
- Plato, *The Republic*, trans. by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991).
- Rancière, Jacques, "Thinking of Dissensus: Politics and Aesthetics," in *Reading Rancière: Critical Dissensus*, ed. by Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp (London and New York: Continuum, 2011).
- _____, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. by Julie Rose (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
- _____, *Dissensus: Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. by Steven Corcoran (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010).

-
- _____, *On the Shores of Politics*, trans. by Liz Heron (London: Verso, 2007).
- _____, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. by Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2011).
- _____, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. by Kristin Ross (Stanford and California: Stanford University Press, 1991).
- _____, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, ed. and trans. by Gabriel Rockhill (London and New York: Continuum, 2006).
- Ross, Kristin, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune* (London and New York: Verso, 2015).
- Stoneman, Ethan, "Appropriate Indecorum: Rhetoric and Aesthetics in the Political Theory of Jacques Rancière," in *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 44:2 (2011).