Acknowledgement, Not Recognition: A Wish-To-Say

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Abstract

In the following I shall examine disagreement in Rancière's philosophy, drawing on his notion of politics which defuses the debate on the socio-political identities demanding recognition. I shall illustrate my points here by reflecting on the speech of Percennius the slave in Ancient Rome. Percennius helped the organization of a slave rebellion and his address is indicative of the situation of the people where they appear out of place, speaking out of turn signifying a wrong, and demanding a just response which will put an end to the policing.

For Rancière, politics is irreducible to recognition which has been pivotal to the emancipatory project of identity politics. In fact, recognition is a part and parcel of what he describes as the policing which aims to administer and control the uncontrollable: that is, the subaltern, the oppressed, and the uncounted have always already been recognized, and *misrecognized* as the weaker, the mute, powerless mob that cannot take part in politics. Since recognition is a part of the perennial problem that haunts the representative forms of politics, politics can only begin with the acknowledgment of a past (mis-)recognition which reduces aporias to management and control of the uncontainable mob.

I will also further address Rancière's aesthetic writings and argue that although there is "something like a logic of recognition in [the] most important pages"[1] of his oeuvre, politics for Rancière is not reducible to recognition. That is why I prefer the term 'acknowledgment'

[1] J. Deranty, "Between Honneth and Rancière: Problems and Potentials of a Contemporary Critical Theory of Society," in *Recognition or Disagreement: A Critical Encounter on the Politics of Freedom, Equality and Identity*, eds. Katia Genel & Jean-Phillippe Deranty (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 39.

to refer to the disruptive act of speech that poetically investigates the silent figure that comes before the law. In other words, it is not simply registration of emergent identities; the act of speech at stake also reveals the construction of the people as the 'we.' As such, it requires new norms and forms of thinking, acting, speaking, making sense and living. The constitution of our identities by disagreement reveals that the 'we' is a fiction only stabilized and immobilized by power.

Disagreement is an assertion of equality between the undecidable figure that demands response and of its addressee; successful response would culminate in the acknowledgment of undecidability (of norms and identities) and a movement toward the re-constitution of society toward greater equality. In other words, once the speech act is successful, the community of sense will have been re-constituted in such a way that not only others outside the community will disrupt the representative regime of policing, but also the those who don't count as subjects within the society will be in a lived situation of greater equality. To engage on a deeper level with politics is to take it as an act of speech that is irresponsive to the present norms of interpretation, of acting and speaking; an act of speech, I will argue, that is performed in the name of a justice that goes beyond the normative understanding of recognition because recognition is also bound with the politics of power, which has always been bound with the prevalent criteria[2] of seeing and hearing which preclude the other from having a viable subjectivity to contest the Police.

Although I take Rancière's thematization of equality as a part of his more ambitious project of problematizing justice, his is not an ethics of response to the Other. One of his keen readers, Deranty, assumes that the defining gesture that sets Rancière's thinking apart is the rejection of alterity: "Rancière's 'heteronomic' logic of politics is not premised, as these latter accounts [that of Levinas and his followers] are, on an ethics of alterity, itself underpinned by a radical critique of Western Metaphysics."[3] In fact Rancière charges his mentor, Lyotard, with passive servitude to the unrepresentable, mute, victimized other before the Big Other, criticising

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[2] Judith, Butler, "Giving an Account of Myself," in *Diacritics* 31.4 (Winter. 2001), 23.

[3] J. Deranty, "Afterword," in *Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts*, ed. Jean-Phillippe Deranty, (Durham: Acumen, 2010), 10.

"the way in which Lyotard [among others] ontologises otherness,"[4] and refusing "to reduce *le compte des incomptés* to the marginalized or excluded."[5] Deranty draws the inference that Rancière's is a politics of recognition where the universal subject demands recognition.[6]

If Rancière indeed "opens a path toward a progressive post-identity politics"[7] does he aim to do so by releasing us from "the inescapable enslavement to the Other"[8] in the scene of what political theorists so far has considered as recognition? One can suggest that the main theme that chimes through Rancière's understanding of ontology finds its articulation in "each party's difference from itself"[9] that structures political community of sense as one in which recognition and identity seem like a matter of mere normative force of policing[10] by *partage du sensible*. Yet, otherness could also be understood as one's difference from oneself one should acknowledge, a notion which Rancière subscribed to in framing democracy as a relation to oneself as other. That implies either that Rancière's framework does not provide an alternative to the other-oriented ethico-politics of response and recognition or that the pull between his ontology and politics leaves a remnant that has a fair resemblance to otherness. Panagia tends toward this interpretation: "It is this unrepresentable, sublime element that is, for Rancière, the *sine qua non* of democracy. Politics, then, is distinguishable from the police by a con-

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4 Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield, "Nowhere is aesthetics contra ethics:Rancière the other side of Lyotard," in *Art & Research* 2.1 (2008), 2.

5 Samuel Chambers, "A Queer Politics of the Democratic Miscount," in *Borderlands* 8.2 (2009), 1.

6 J. Deranty, "Jacques Rancière's Contribution to the Ethics of Recognition," in *Political Theory* 31.1 (Feb., 2003), 136.

7 T. May, "There are no Queers: Jacques Rancière and Post-Identity Politics," in *borderland* 8.2 (2009), 3.

8 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. by Gabriel Rockhill, (London: Continuum, 2004), 15.

9 Jacques Rancière, *La Parole Muette: Essai Sur les Contradictions de la Littérature* (Paris: Hachette, 1998) 18.

10 For the definition of Police as opposed to Politics, see G. Rockhill, & P. Watts, "Introduction/Jacques Rancière: Thinker of Dissensus," in Jacques Rancière: *History, Politics, Aesthetics*, eds. Gabriel Rockhill & Philip Watts, (New York: Duke University Press. 2004), xiii.

stitutive unrepresentability that interrupts the order of mimesis."[11] This occurs when one ceases to recognize oneself in an identity.

I shall argue that, although both Panagia's and Deranty's accounts have some diagnostic value, they both miss the point of controversial anonymity of a self relating to oneself as an other; 'the self' and 'the other' are not fixed positions in an address but anonymous place-holders as subjects.

I argue that recognition always entails policing: i.e. ossification of identities and the closing of the space in which politics can be conducted. What should rather be acknowledged, I will argue by drawing on Rancière, is a wish-to-say in the situation of disagreement; as an act of speech, a wish-to-say is the act of being present before others to demand equality. It disregards limitations of the present which represents us as identities, and enacts a scene of acknowledgment, as opposed to recognition. I shall first discuss the tenability of positioning Rancière as a theorist of recognition of identities, and offer an exposition whereby the speech-act of a subaltern, the address of Percennius the slave, indeed dis-identifies everyone addressed by his imagination that interrupts the relations between meaning and truth. Rancière re-narrates the story of the people's movement to arrive at his notion of politics "in terms of the staging of a dissensus in which those who are deemed to lack speech make themselves heard as political animals."[12]

Percennius was one of the slaves who engaged in rebellion when the Roman emperor died. They withdrew to the Aventine Hill and negotiated with the councils. In Rancière's account they thus enact a disagreement as rational members of society who can be reasoned with because they changed what counts as rational. In my account, Percennius the slave delivers *a speech that goes unheard and performs an act of speech that speaks in silence*. In truth the slaves were the mute addressee of the law that constituted them, not as parts of *demos authorized to rule*, but as insensible bodies ordered to labour, fight and die outside the community. Yet Percennius ignores that, envisioning another distribution of the sensible where they would be subject. His speech-act was a wish-to-say that mobilizes the undecidability of the

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[11] David, Panagia, *The Poetics of Political Thinking* (New York: Duke University Press, 2006), 93.

[12] A. Schaap, "Enacting the Right to Have Rights: Jacques Rancière's Critique of Hannah Arendt," in *European Journal of Political Theory* 10.1 (2011), 23.

sensible that moves between the matter and the ideal. The next section will break down the elements of his *poesis*: a making by words. Percennius first unmakes his (collective) identity of a slave incapable of political speech and action, and makes a novel identity of one commanding language and people. He indeed assumed an identity from the archive of representations, the most troubling one for democracy: that of the subject, but only to reveal the undecidability at the heart of it and disrupt the project of representative policing.[13] The act of speech Percennius performed is possible as the silent visibility, Rancière will point out, is indifferent to identities.[14] Percennius ignores the address of the present law of the sensible, becomes unrecognizable in the eye of the 'we,' but whether that characterizes him as an excluded subject will be a question I shall raise in the next section.

1.1. Recognizing the People

One can interpret Rancière's aesthetico-political philosophy as a subtle post-Althusserian theory of tension between domination and liberation that take place within the contested space of equal recognition. Yet this interpretation would risk placing him in identity politics, half way between Habermas as a theorist of solidaristic emancipation[15] and Lyotard as a theorist of irresolvable conflict and agonistic politics. I for one, read him as a thinker of agonistic politics, aesthetics of displacement, and free literarity. Deranty, reading Rancière as a "thinker of recognition who rejects the notion of understanding," suggests that "Rancière's fundamental political concern is the denial of recognition experienced by the dominated."[16] Newman subscribes to this account: "For Rancière, politics emerges when an excluded subjectivity—that part

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[13] Cf. Agamben's politics of exception with regard to subjectivity: Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, tr. Kevin Attell, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), esp. 36.

[14] The visible in Rancière's theory is dependent on the sayable that identifies and interprets it. A mute body can be anybody socio-politically, depending on the interplay between the sensible and the sayable.

[15] Jürgen Habermas, "The Rule of Law and Democracy," in *The Political*, ed. David Ingram, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 161-162.

[16] J. Deranty, "Jacques Rancière's Contribution to the Ethics of Recognition," in *Political Theory* 31.1 (Feb., 2003), 137.

which remains uncounted, excluded from political life (the poor, the demos)—claims for itself the universality of a whole community."[17] In this reading, the hegemonic political forces, legitimized by consensus, function like the canonical representations of society that only make certain social phenomenon recognisable, i.e., visible within the confines of the canvas and/or audible within the range of hearing. Here I shall critique Deranty's view that the ever-widening horizon of democratization grants recognition to the subjectivities.

1.1.1. Recognition: The Subject as the Stranger

In his interpretation of Rancière, Deranty highlights the way Rancière supports his theory of domination with an account of equality demanded by the dominated subjects that, in dissent, make their ways into the political picture through authorization of new sensibilities that disrupt the prevailing representations and precipitate their recognition. According to Deranty, the second ambition informing Rancière's project is to hear the unheard voice of the dominated to disagree with the hegemony that had denied them recognition as equal subjects endowed with reason. Deranty adds, Rancière's thoughts on democracy rises above "a theory of representation"[18] in its two senses, viz., representation of the extra-conceptual (the matter, the given, the sensible) by the conceptual (the ideal, linguistic, the discursive), and representation of the masses by their political proxies. By contrast, Rancière may be seen as deepening the dilemmas of state-centred politics "unable to represent the interests of those who are denied social and political recognition."[19]

Accordingly, Rancière's aesthetico-political theory from Deranty's pen starts to sound like a revolutionary Marxist politics. Transformed from "a political imperative into a methodological rule, that is, the rule that all individuals have the equal ability to express and defend their

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[17] Saul Newman, "Rancière, Anarchism, Poststructuralism and the Future of Radical Politics," in *SubStance* 36.2, Issue 113: The Future of Anarchism, (2007), 12.

[18] J. Deranty, "Jacques Rancière's Contribution to the Ethics of Recognition," in *Political Theory* 31.1 (Feb., 2003), 139.

[19] Ibid.

own rights,"[20] the axiom of equality presumes that the dominated subjects can nevertheless represent themselves and express their desire for recognition. The dominated groups demand, and fight for recognition, maintains Deranty, within the parameters of the logic of the wrong, "the dialectical articulation of universality and particularity within the polis."[21] The *universal* subject position ("the subject of speech"), equally available to *others of the society*, i.e., any singular wronged party to articulate their *particular* demand of justice, becomes ground zero for the contestation of hierarchies engendered by "socioeconomic" differences. The gist of Deranty's reading portrays Rancière as a thinker "who puts the notion of the subject at the centre of his political thought,"[22] attributing to him "a strong rejection of the death of the subject."[23] In other words Deranty brings home by his reading of Rancière a disputable message that, after the demise of Marxist sociology and the revolutionary proletarian class, the subject of speech far from being deconstructed and dethroned, re-emerges universalized and embraced by all dominated identities unequivocally. According to Deranty, the vocation of the political theorist is thus to help them "pull down the barriers that exclude their speech from the authorized forms of speech"[24] in order to include the perspective of the unrecognized subject.

However, these barriers are paradoxically those of the sensibility that constitute the subject of speech through discourses. Deranty argues that the term 'aporoi' denotes a collective subject, or a social group unrecognized as an actor by the socio-political order, but against him I argue here that the subject is constructed by those who don't count as a political subject. While a conflict amongst the members of the sensible community can be resolved by justifications by the prevalent norms of recognition, a contestation over the criteria of membership initiates a debate on the founding norms of a political community of sense.[25] The latter challenges the dominant principles of justification by the present

[20] Ibid., 140.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., 136.
[23] Ibid., 141.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 4.

norms of recognition, which coincide with the present representative principles of *partage du sensible* which constitutes subjects of politics. Those who demand justice, however, risk the illegitimacy of a subjective-position that displaces itself from the community of sense, being insensible and unrecognizable until they create a new form of sensibility. However, they are not heard as if they make sense when they challenge the norms of making sense. In other words, the political conflict that the aporoi epitomized calls into question, paradoxically, the very standpoint from which it is represented—the limit to authority and identity of what is sensed and recognized to be the subject of speech and politics. In contrast to Deranty's account, the subject of speech is deconstructed by literarity, as well as universalized.

I need to emphasize that this challenge is not done from outside the community, but from the border, by muted parts included as those who have no part and wish-to-say the unsayable: that *the people is a fiction*. Thus, it is a challenge to the archive of subjects, the self of the community, and the norms of recognizability: its own deconstruction. It thus reveals the subject as a groundless *fiction* in the making, not identifiable with those present.[26] The poetics of justice over immobilizing normativity in this respect does not presume a given identity to be recognized, but calls into question "being together to the extent that we are in between—between names, identities, cultures, and so on."[27] It dissolves the subject in an unrecognizable force of speech, emptying the identity recognized as the addressor In fact authority is interrupted in this address, but this disagreement, Rancière argues, is not the subject's intervention into the norms of recognition, i.e., those of sensibility, but its dissolution in the symbolic gap of disagreeing literarity: between the body and speech, the visible and the audible, the matter and the ideal, *and the self and the other of the community of sense*. This vertiginous effect of literarity is created by *the mobility* amongst the elements of the sensible, and the gap can be filled by any identity. Its principle is analogous to the formula: a body who is nobody can be heard and seen as anybody by anybody. Since any identity is a fiction, poetical work of politics, the gap between meaning and truth about the addressee within

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[26] Bonnie Honig, *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 19.

[27] Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*, 63.

the similar polemical, controversial configurations of political agency that resides within "the gap that separates subject and predicate"[28] shapes the critical contours of what Rancière calls "literarity." Its universality is *characterized* by contestation and its *undecidable character* ignores limitations, exclusions, and hierarchies that identify and 'recognize' others through distribution of the sensible.

What follows from this presupposition is the attempt to "evacuate the foundation upon which every deconstructive ethics is built: the (ethical) category of alterity,"[29] not to resurrect the subject in universal disguise or dismiss *ethos as the self*. The *aporoi*, Rancière's other, is thus an anonymous third party, i.e., a stranger materialized by the distribution of the sensible, by the fictive constitution of the people: it appears as an empty signifier that, being indifferent to identities, "haunts the dialogue [between the self and other], [as] the confrontation with the Unknown…"[30] That confrontation, I shall argue, is configured as mutual exposure between the body that has a meaningless sense and literarity that makes sense of it by poetic imagination that ignores the sensible.[31] Therefore the debate about otherness comes down to the confusion about the self reduced to the subject and reduction of the sensible to fixed identities otherized by the police, not a sublimity that forever eludes effective political disagreement, or the subject-oriented framework.

1.1.2. Recognition: Misrecognition of The Self as the Other

On the account I am developing here, the other is a fictive subject-position in the address. It also justifies only *ad hoc* reference to it as a subject of speech since it embodies but a "quarrel over the issue of speech"[32] that threatens its own subjectivity over the words, putting its authority at risk, and giving itself over to words that seek their addressee. The speech of the addressor overthrows its image, its represen-

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[28] Ibid., 113.

[29] Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward, (New York: Verso, 2002), xxxv.

[30] Jacques Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 39.

[31] The visible always needs interpretation, Rancière argues. And the body is encountered as the visible that is subject to interpretation.

[32] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 23.

tation that cannot do it justice, and the constraints of the pnrevalent regime of the sensible. It disagrees with its own body as somebody else, and the self as other. It thus disidentifies and acknowledges a body to the extent that disagreement is a poetic investigation that *futurally* salutes a presence to come. Its speech also becomes available for reappropriation by others, fatherless, anonymous, and hybrid. Defying the spatial distribution of the sensible that matches visibilities and sayable words in identities, it challenges the bodily arrangement of the sensible, and hence its own identity: "It is the age of hazardous subjectification, engendered by the pure opening of the unlimited, constituted from places of speech that are not designatable places but rather singular articulations between the order of speech and that of classifications."[33] In other words, the so-called universality revealed by disagreement is a *singular* articulation of the visible that (dis)identifies the addressor.[34] It reveals itself just as a disagreement with the Police. In this sense it deploys the "the power to put into circulation more words, 'useless' and unnecessary words, words that exceed the function of rigid designation."[35] Unstable as it may, however, it performs an act, a speech act that litigates, represents wrong, and demands justice against domination as Rancière tells us in his account of *aporoi*: "The order that structures...domination recognizes no logos capable of being articulated by beings deprived of logos, no *speech* capable of being proffered by nameless beings, beings of no *ac/count*."[36]

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[33] Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, trans. H. Mellehy, (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1994), xviii-xix.

[34] Singularity belongs to the visible articulated by the sayable; it is an effect of the act of speech. Cf. Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 2001, 25, where she notes that "singularity has no defining content other than the irreducibility of exposure, of being this body exposed to a publicity that is variably and alternately intimate and anonymous."

[35] Jacques Rancière, "Dissenting Words: A Conversation with Jacques Rancière," co-author David Panagia, in *Diacritics* 30.2 (Summer 2000), 115.

[36] Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*, 24. Emphases original. Acts of disagreement for Habermas, for instance, are to be overcome. Similarly, say, the Palestinians in Israel do not count as political subjects of the state. And in Nazi Germany "the jews," although citizens, were not equal to others before the law. In many countries, the demands of the LBGTQA are not heard as rational and justified claims

The constitution of the community[37] illustrates that Deranty was right to point out the material effect of a fiction, for the speech-act of disagreement aims to materialize a new community of sense where authority is undecidably both taken away from and re-invested into the people unrecognizable to themselves.

1.2. Recognizing the Subject: Mute Poet of the People

Against Deranty's thesis that reduces disagreement to a demand for recognition with a claim of the subject defending its interests, I am arguing that disagreement is a poetic acknowledgement that disidentifies the subject that sets the norms of politics. These norms are constantly challenged by subjectless speech that destabilizes identities: literarity thus does not authorize anyone as the subject in the constitutive address that is assumed to recognize the addressee. Rancière in fact suggests that literarity voices the silent parts that have no part in the community of sense, but this is not the voice of a stable identity coming before the law to demand recognition: it is a "mute" speech in a sense that I explain below.

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to the future law as if they do not count as a part of the greater society. May makes the same point when he notes that "[t]he refusal to allow gays and lesbians to marry is presented as grounded in a natural fact: that marriage is between a man and a woman. This supposed natural fact generates the inequality of two sets of people before the law. If, by contrast, we suppose the equality of homosexuals and heterosexuals as speaking beings, this directly challenges their unequal treatment before the law." T. May, "There are no Queers: Jacques Rancière and Post-Identity Politics," in *borderland* 8.2 (2009), 3.

[37] Here a discussion of aggregative models of democracy may be relevant; in Rousseau's theory a general will is formed by the sum of private wills. Likewise Habermas argued that every opinion and argument should count toward the formation of public opinion that is translated into a policy and the law. The shift from interests of individuals to their singular opinions is achieved through speech where rationality and persuasiveness of an argument, according to Habermas, should prevail over the numerary advantage (of a majority forming an interest group). When the "best" argument wins, it forms the general will and sways the majority vote of the society. Yet if some of us do not count as members of the society, or are not recognized as rational subjects equal to the majority, or their forms of expressions are not seen as speech, rational argument and persuasion, the aggregation turns into a wrong that points to a situation of unjustified power; i.e., hegemony of the 'we' over the people.

1.2.1. Recognition as Misrecognition: The Subject

For Rancière speaking had been wrongly considered to be the act of the sovereign *subject*, an orator, a master of rhetoric addressing the assembly, and the act follows it thanks to the *social force of the speech*, the authority of the speaker, instead of its illocutionary force. "The power of making art with words was linked to the power of a hierarchy of speech, of a relationship of address regulated between speech acts and defined audiences on whom these speech acts were supposed to produce the effects of mobilizing thoughts, emotions and energies."[38] He does not hold the principle of policed sensibility of representative regime of politics: "Kings had to act and speak as kings do, and common people as common people do."[39] If the normative link between audibility and the archive of identities recognized and authorized is severed off, he reasons, the *aporoi*, the subject-positions that are seen as the mute nameless mob whose speech is "by definition without depth"[40] can be understood as having an authority to stage their own aporia.

They were assumed to be mute as their dissent was not authorized; not because they were unrecognized but because they were recognized *not to be political subjects of speech* who can distinguish between the just and the unjust: "For instance, Aristotle says, the slaves have the *aisthesis* of language (the passive capacity of understanding words), but they don't have the *hexis* of language (the active power of stating and discussing what is just or unjust). More generally, it is always debatable whether a sequence of sounds produced by a mouth is articulated speech or the animalistic expression of pleasure or pain."[41] Given that they are recognized as brutes lacking intelligence, their speech is silenced by the authority of the norms of recognition that demarcate the sensible, identify them as the slave and dismiss them as not making sense.

The aporoi act like the subject in dissent. Rancière gives Percennius' address as an example of successful poetic speech acts that disidentifies him with a dominated subject-position that *is (mis-)recognized*

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[38] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 14.
[39] Ibid., 13.
[40] Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History*, 25.
[41] Rancière, Jacques, "The Aesthetic Dimension: Aesthetics, Politics, Knowledge," *Critical Inquiry* 36.1 (Autumn, 2009), 4.

as our unequal. Their subordination is not predicated on exclusion from the system of sensibilities *that denies them any recognition*, *but on recognition itself* and their coming into the sensible actually makes poetic use of the system that recognizes them as the insensible part of the community. Rancière explicitly refutes two premises of this gloomy vision of the vicious circle of exclusion, radical otherness and passivity.[42]

The point here is that the aporoi were and still are the limit to subjectivity, the borderline between what makes sense and nonsense, the line between politics of policed recognition and the aporetic disagreement of the insensible. That is why the forms of speaking related to "the deceitful event of excessive speaking"[43] of Percennius in Tacitus' *Annals* that lead to the legionaries' revolution take place on the borderline of the sensible.[44] Percennius aims to talk like a subject who calls into question who can be the subject.

Parker renames the speech acts Rancière takes as exemplifications of disagreement: "For Rancière, then Tacitus records in his discourse a speech event impossible to imagine phenomenally as a historical utterance."[45] These speech events form subject positions impossible for those who utter them to embody, but those bodies who "suffered enough...worn out with infirmities...[and] covered with wounds"[46] cannot contain themselves, cannot contain the insensible demand for justice that breaks out. Their acts were not sensible as they were merely slaves, and their speech did not make sense because they were acting out of

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[42] "1. Working class youth are excluded from the University because they are unaware of the true reasons for which they are excluded (*Les Heritiers*). 2. Their ignorance of the true reasons for which they are excluded is a structural effect produced by the very existence of the system that excludes them." Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (California: Stanford University Press), 1991, 61.

[43] Jacques Rancière, The Names of History, 23.

[44] They happen outside the public sphere, out of place and out of turn, but nevertheless *inside the community of sense,* during "an interval for the expression of grief or joy" because the subject (their emperor) died. Tacitus, in W. J. Hort, *The English Book in Prose* (London: A. R. Spottiswoode, 1882), 212.

[45] A. Parker, "Impossible Speech Acts: Jacques Rancière's Erich Auerbach," in Jacques Rancière: *History, Politics, Aesthetics*, eds. Gabriel Rockhill & Philip Watts, (New York: Duke University Press, 2009), 253.

[46] Tacitus, in W. J. Hort, *The English Book in Prose*, 212.

their character recognized as the slaves.[47]

That is why I believe those acts of speech are not impossible, but poetic, i.e. their felicity conditions do not refer to an authority, conventional norms of iteration and recognition, or the mere presence or absence of the unrecognized groups. What makes them possible is not so much the voice of Percennius that nevertheless, hopelessly speaks (because their revolution failed), as what Tacitus the historian does with his voice: "Percennius had no place to speak. Nevertheless, Tacitus makes him speak."[48] Percennius acts and speaks as if he was the law-giver that Tacitus subjectifies; in Tacitus' poetic representation, Percennius the subaltern gains the problematic identity of the sovereign subject whose demand still reverberates as a claim to the future law. It is the effect of literarity that disrupts the identities of the subject and the subaltern.

Tacitus' voice supplements, substitutes for and brings into visibility Percennius' silent presence in re-iteration of his speech in a context open to further signification.[49] This operation that doubles voices is of the same order of historiology in the sense that the historian can find a point of entry to the secret history of the oppressed through it. Spivak defines the task as thematization of silences that nevertheless speak and I argue that this is exactly what Tacitus does with Percennius' silent address that mimics legislation.

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[47] "By remonstrances or by sword, we may now obtain *relief*," (*Ibid*., emphasis added) cries Percennius whose body had too much of injustice, excitation and fervour, "let everyone receive the arrears that may be due to him," referring to an anonymous soldier.

[48] Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History*, 24.

[49] In Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, her conception of re-iteration should be noted in the double senses of representation (as signification and as speaking for) in the liminal zone between speech and silence, through the opening of the context to further re-interpretations which bring down the representative regime of politics. Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson & Lawrence Grossberg, first ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). Derrida conceives representation as an act of substitution: "Representation regularly supplements presence. But this operation of supplementation … is not exhibited as a break in presence, but rather as a reparation and a continuous, homogenous modification of presence in representation." Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, tr. Alan Bass, (New York: The University of Chicago Press, 1982). 313.

The notion of law, especially colonial law, figures in Subaltern Studies more often than not as a discursive site of subjectification.[50] And Percennius the subaltern is subjectified as the voice of the law by Tacitus: when the historian's operation of substitution negates his singular identity, he is elevated to the status of the Generalized Other in the Habermasian sense.[51] Percennius' act of speech is resumed by Tacitus as an authority that intervenes to make his address heard in the legal, rational discourse of subjectivity which relies on the misplaced idea that people have stable ideas which can be represented and recognized by the police.

1.3. Disagreement as a Poetic Act of Speech

The subaltern therefore do not speak their own language, but borrow the language of authority that condemns them, pervert it through the indirect and impersonal use (anonymous 'they," instead of 'you,' or 'we), and let the speech act speak itself outside the confines of truth, identity and recognition by the mastery of Tacitus that lends rhetorical force to the arguments of Percennius:

> The indirect style, in practice disjoining meaning truth and meaning, in effect cancels the opposition between legitimate and illegitimate speakers. The latter are just as much validated as suspected. The homogeneity of the narrative discourse thereby constituted comes to contradict *the heterogeneity of the subjects it represents*, the unequal quality of the speakers to guarantee, by their status, the reference of their speech. Although [the aporoi] may well be the radical other, the one excluded from legitimate speech, his discourse is included, in a specific suspension of the relations between meaning and truth.[52]

How can we understand the "specific suspension of the relations between meaning and truth" where discursive norms are interrupted? In

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[50] See Ranajit Guha,, 1987; 135-66, 166-202 and 277-89 in *Subaltern Studies V*; David Hardiman,, 1985, 165-228, in *Subaltern Studies IV* and Upendra Baxi,, 1992, 245-264, in in *Subaltern Studies VII*.

[51] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol. 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, tr. T. McCarthy. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

[52] Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History*, 23. Emphasis added.

this context, what the aporoi achieve by paradoxical use of language is to bring down the distinctions of identity and norms of recognition that do not do justice to them in their image, and rules of language that stabilize reference to the sensible. The second step is to identify themselves as the owner of the voice of the authorities (Tacitus here), and imitate a citizen that has a right to speak and dissent exploiting the crisis of subjectivity that does the job of recognition: "If we ever mean to redress our grievances," as Percennius emphasizes, "what time so fit as the present, when the new emperor is not yet settled on the throne?"[53] In doing so, they claim subjective authority over words to paradoxically interrupt mastery over language, point out what is common to them and the authorities as anonymous parts unrecognizable from another, and offer the speech act that reveals the linguistic abyss of identity. With the identities and distinctions blurred and destabilized through the anonymity of the subject of speech in interregnum (—Who sits on the throne? No one), indignation at political injustice is represented through the injustice of being recognized: not only being recognized as mute brutes different to rational citizens that make sense in their speech, but also *being recognized at all, as a fixed identity*. Percennius' act of speech disrupts both the discourse and subjectivity embedded in the representative politics of recognition.

Thus the subaltern expose themselves to the addressee as the unrecognizable uncountable to themselves, being (in)different to the identity that silenced them through recognition; they also move from their position in the insensible by dis-identification that also re-identifies them poetically. The identity of the addressor thus shifts in time and space, over to other bodies three times: in the speech of the aporoi unheard by its audience that would legitimize and authorize their act, through its (mis-)representation by the historian that situates the subject of speech legitimately within its rights to speak against itself for the purposes of justice, and in the account of Rancière who speaks for them. Their voices overlap, making it impossible to identify and recognize who it is that speaks and addresses us. This is a poetic act of subjectivity that still seeks its addressor as well addressee, wishing-to-say something about our present democracies and politics of recognition that ignore the

[53] Tacitus, in W. J. Hort, *The English Book in Prose*, 212.

mobility of identities and the mobilizing force of an address.

In other words, Percennius' act of speech is made discursive by Tacitus' non-discursive signification that poetically disrupts the relations between truth and meaning in the ensuing paradoxes of futurity. Percennius speaks like the subject to address his situation that has already deprived him of subjectivity. If he is the subject his claim is not justified and if he is not the subject his claim is unjustifiable and that is why his politics has nothing to do with recognition. And on the discursive level, his speech refers to nothing present: he is in truth not the Emperor who can address others in the terms he does. In truth his address is unheard, but paradoxically, in Tacitus' re-iteration we still hear it. His speech does not make sense to others at his present, and he was to invent the conditions under which it would have; if his act was successful (i.e. if his uprising succeeded) he would already have been the emperor who had intervened in order to speak for other slaves and authorize rebellion. In other words, in the disagreeing act he identified himself with his future self that he would have been had his act of speech been successful. He therefore differed from himself in the act and placed his identification within a gap between truth and meaning, between slavery and sovereignty, and between his past and future. The act of disagreement here is a futural disruption of the (temporal, discursive, representative) order.

What is of utmost importance here is not to recognize the addressor *truthfully,* but to invent conditions of meaning under which it can be heard as an address of the anonymous subject that questions preconditions of subjectivity in his/her silence. And Percennius' address was silent: he does not speak but *re-iterates* the address of the subject he never was. Percennius' actual speech was not documented, and it is safe to assume, went unheard of. He is just envisioned to embody a silence filled by others' words: the dead emperor's, Tacitus', and Rancière's. He was a mute poet of the people. And "to restate Percennius' reasons is by no means to repeat them,"[54] Rancière emphasizes, since no one can possibly know them, or voice them faithfully.[55] Here Tacitus himself narrates

[54] Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History*, 26.

[55] Tacitus' representation does not document but *invents* those reasons in a manner analogous to "Principle of Actuality" in *La Parole Muette.* Jacques Rancière, *La Parole Muette: Essai Sur les Contradictions de la Littérature*, (Paris: Hachette, 1998).

a story free of concerns with truth, identity and knowledge, enacting the disagreement of a subordinated legionnaire, the allegedly unheard speech made by such a personage through speech acts. [56] As a poetic subjectivity designed to the necessities of the speech situation, Percennius (as Tacitus), speaks for him briefly and paradoxically embodies the anonymous subject-position that wishes to say the unsayable: *that we, the insensible, are a part of the senseless 'we' that cannot recognize itself.* What other political theorists conceptualized as a 'demand for recognition' thus questions and interrupts the legitimacy of the criteria of being a recognized subject of speech, and recognition itself. Therefore, with the singularity of Percennius elevated to the collective status of class (a classless class, i.e., the subaltern), one finds the mobile, poetic element of speech in the anonymity of a newly designated subject-position of speech that can be taken up by countless subjects in the same situation as Percennius. Bereft of singularity, it is universal, i.e. unrecognizable in any identity or subjectivity.

Rancière thus formulates those speech acts that mimic and undermine discursive subjectivity only to make sense the "place [discourse] gives, through its own agency, to what it declares to have no place."[57] It is *the community of sense that realizes it misrecognized itself through a miscount of the bodies, some of which have no ac/count.* The silent other is indifferent to identities, or recognition.

1.4 Acknowledgement not Recognition

Therefore, the democratic struggle for equality is not simply assertion of a demand by a group of people who embrace their pre-given identity. It rather concerns with constructing a new subject position through disagreement of those who don't count as the subject. Actually the subject is nothing but an invention and alteration which traditional theories of recognition does not take into account: "The struggle for recognition is based on a polemical concept of recognition," he maintains, "that entails both a structure of identification and conflict over this identification."[58] And this conflict provides the exact opening for the poetic

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[56] Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History*, 26.
[57] Ibid., 28.
[58] Katia Genel, "Jacques Rancière and Axel Honneth: Two Critical Approaches

constitution of a new subject and a new political world which acknowledges him or her as a subject of speech and reason. "But the presence of a different concept of recognition, which presupposes pre-existing identities, could vitiate the polemical dimension of this critique."[59] In fact the subject of disagreement must break away with given identities, i.e., disidentify and the process of subjectivization entails an identity in the making. In his later work Deranty again insists that operative in Rancière's oeuvre is "something like a logic of recognition in its most important pages."[60]

Although the logic of equality resembles recognition in that "demands for justice first emerges as denunciations of injustice [and] Rancière agrees that recognition has "operative" and "antagonistic" dimensions that are important to retain."[61] In other words both recognition and the method of equality address a wrong and demand redress. However, recognition traditionally presumes given identities of the subject although in Rancière's theory "[s]ubjecthood is defined in a way that recalls the earlier structuralist emphasis on the Marxist concept of "support," as a mere function or ontological placeholder in a structural field, defined independently of any essential traits."[62] For Rancière, on the other hand, acknowledgment has a world-disclosing function: it reconfigures the world in such a way that new identities, new ways of being, new possibilities of acting and speaking become visible. Recognition for Rancière means two things: first, a cognitive activity of matching knowledge with a perception (such as the memory of a person with the face of the person when we recognize a friend in the crowd) or respond-

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to the Political," in *Recognition or Disagreement: A Critical Encounter on the Politics of Freedom, Equality and Identity*, eds. Katia Genel & Jean-Phillippe Deranty, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 25.

[59] Ibid.

[60] J. Deranty, "Between Honneth and Rancière: Problems and Potentials of a Contemporary Critical Theory of Society," in *Recognition or Disagreement: A Critical Encounter on the Politics of Freedom, Equality and Identity*, eds. Katia Genel & Jean-Phillippe Deranty (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 39.

[61] Ibid., 40.

[62] Ibid., 41.

ing to the claim of a person to treat them as autonomous subjects.[63] Therefore recognition is an act of confirmation which relies on a pregiven identity of the recognized. However, disagreement takes issue with and criticizes pregiven identities because they involve inequality: such as the identity of "women" in the 1800s which is defined as those incapable of voting, reasoning, and speech and dependent on their father or husband. That is why Rancière offers the example of women who argued that they too are men and should have the universal rights of men. "Because if recognition is not merely a response to something already existing, if it is an original configuration of the common world, this means that individuals and groups are always, in some way, recognized with a place and competence so that the struggle is not 'for recognition,' but for *another form* of recognition: a redistribution of the places, the identities, and the parts."[64] In other words theories of recognition overlooks misrecognition and undecidability of identities.

That is why Honneth suggests that Rancière's is a theory of external struggle for recognition[65] because the claim, outside the present political universe, subverts it and creates a new form of sensibility. However, as I pointed out, the struggle is also very internal and takes as central the main-stream forms of sensibility. Therefore, it is neither external, nor internal, but liminal: the struggle takes place on the border of the Police. And I suggest another name for the verification of equality: it is not recognition but acknowledgement. It relies on a dynamic model of identities, because it is poetic and it poetically invents new subject-positions which hitherto have been not acknowledged. I prefer the term 'acknowledgment' because it basically means saluting a person you have met for the first time and it is devoid of the negative connation of assuming a given identity. But what matters is not identity, as Rancière suggested, but "the enrichment or enlargement of identity: adding new capabilities, new competences."[66]

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[63] Jacques Rancière, "Critical Questions on the Theory of Recognition," in *Recognition or Disagreement*, 85.

[64] Ibid., 90.

[65] Axel Honneth, "Remarks on the Philosophical Approach of Jacques Rancière," in *Recognition or Disagreement*, 106.

[66] Jacques Rancière, "Critical Questions on the Theory of Recognition," in *Recognition or Disagreement*, 92

That is why Rancière puts forward his model of subjectivization based on disidentification: first, a collective identity is created by disavowal of a former identity: a gay person should say, I am not a man but a gay. And secondly, creation of a new subject-position is not creation of a substance: the "'we' is not the expression of an identity; it is an act of enunciation which creates the subject that it names."[67] In other words it is a speech act which performs the very thing it names: the speech act that "we, the workers are equal with the rich" verifies equality. Thirdly, acknowledgment reveals a new political universe peopled with new subjects and it is created by a speech act that does not define, but name a collective identity as strangers: "So they [workers] affirm the *common* capacity, the *universal* capacity as the capacity of those to whom it is denied in general, or the capacity of *anybody*."[68] Hence it reveals us as strangers who must be saluted and acknowledged.

Conclusion: Acknowledgment as a Poetic Investigation

I argued that Rancière's framework of disagreement is not to be conceived, as Deranty does, simply as a recognition claim of the subject to individual liberties, rights and state protection. Although Deranty rightly approaches the issue via the oppressed subjects voicing a demand that at present goes unheard, I suggested that his interpretation of Rancière risks situating him as a theorist of identity politics. In my reading, Rancière's account of acknowledgment conceives dissent as a silent act of speech that disrupts norms of recognition, displaces its subject and places it in others' discourse, demands acknowledgment of a wrong (i.e., acknowledgment of the silent addressor), and makes both the addressee and the addressor *otherwise*.

Percennius' address disrupts relations of truth, identity, and meaning: the conditions under which the subaltern's assertion, disidentification and signification make sense refer not to what is present, or to the present, but to a possible future. Percennius' situation illustrates the aporias of the political; the subject cannot take parts in the constitution of the political situation and need acknowledgment of their situation where they cannot exercise their subjectivity to undermine subjectivity. Per-

[67] Ibid., 92-93.
[68] Ibid., 93.

cennius' speech rather addresses us to his silent image substituted for, and supplemented by others' speech that subjectify, identify and 'acknowledge' him.

More importantly, acknowledgement is an act of speech that reveals the self as an other to itself; Percennius' singularity is both exposed and displaced by the literarity of his address that, through others' re-iteration, universalizes his subjectivity as an anonymous, silent presence. His address occasions the acknowledgment of himself as a subject in the dialectic of disagreement: it mainly signifies his self as a subjugated other who paradoxically refers to his possible future self as the subject. Tacitus, in narrating Percennius' situation, acknowledges and substitutes his own subjectivity, words and speech for the silent image and unheard address of Percennius. Tacitus *poetically invents* an other who is substituted for his self in the act of re-presentation. In a metonymic move, his historical representation of Percennius undecidably becomes the undoing of representation; Tacitus' makes Percennius speak, lending him his own subjectivity, words, and acts. He *identifies with him*, and acknowledges himself in him—in an other substituted for his self.

Yet the series of identification, and acknowledgments are, for Rancière, merely poetic and political: i.e., aiming to interrupt the policing through disagreement. Rancière aims to dissociate politics from ethics, and from the relentless "imperative dictated by the sudden encounter with the Other"[69] in his/her/its singularity, passivity, and recognizability. Whether it is the unrepresentable Other of ethics of response, The State, The Police, The Father or the Law, for Rancière, "the imperative" to respond to the stronger implies inequality between the addressee 'recognized' in its singularity and the addressor that sets the norms of recognizability. Rancière emphasizes (with Lyotard)[70] the necessity of disagreement and invention of a new norm/language game in order to dis-

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[69] Jacques Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 87.

[70] If it is the singularity of the addressee that should be addressed, Lyotard implied, one needs to invent a new norm ethically and new phrases to respond to the situation. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (London: Manchester University Press, 1988), 13.Habermas, on the other hand, seems to privilege the "following the rule" as the only acceptable response of the addressee whose singularity should be a "private" matter.

agree, but singularity for him is a discursive effect of literary (dis-) identifications and not a substance subjects of discourse always already have.

To summarize, Rancière implies that the Police justifies its norms with the present distribution of the senses in agreement with our singular identity captured and recognized.[71] Since identity, *any identity*, is constituted by an address that seeks its addressee, singularity too is a poetic effect of the address that identifies the anonymous body by suspending the relation between our presence and its meaning. The body is again an exposure which addresses us to others, but speech here points to its anonymity. And disagreement does not only identify, but investigates possibilities of identification always mired in material conditions of misidentification and disidentification where the distribution of sensible both limits and reveals what is it that we see. Poetics, here, bring together incongruous elements of the sensible together in an image, in hitherto unimagined ways to investigate and find words in its silence. Singularity is thus not that of the body, but of the poetic speech-act of disagreement that seeks and envisions a new way of being under the shared conditions of sensibility deformed and reformed by it.

As I stressed above, the *aporoi* do not appear out of turn and place only to have their *singular image* 'recognized,' but also to mark the limit to our present, hierarchically-structured sensibility that cannot make sense of and recognize their silent presence among us as a sign of us being others to ourselves, not absolute subjects that control the itinerary of the address that make us what 'we' are.[72] This is a movement of the people poetically addressed to themselves as unrecognizable others to themselves and it is the policing force of the norms of recognizability that keep them immobilized.

Their mobility is the literarity of subjectless speech that disidentifies in identifying its addressee, but unlike Habermas' ideal

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[71] Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 12-13.

[72] This is the primary sociability, understood as the senseless forces of a shared life that circulate without a final address or addressee. Its material effect is not predictable, or controllable by the present norms of recognition. Our present sensibility is characterized not by subjectivity over these forces, but by mobility between the subject addressor and the submissive addressee, identification and dis-identification, the insensible and the meaningful, the matter and the imaginary, the body and speech, the present and the future.

speech, it moves people from the position of a lawful selfhood to anonymous otherness constitutive of the self; from a policed sensibility to an imagined ethos and a new shared life. Although it is not ethical, it paradoxically aims to constitute an ethical community of sense where speech reveals we are strangers to our self unattached to and indifferent to identities. Disagreement is the act of speech that exposes us to others constitutive of us and to ourselves as others. What comes before 'us,' before the law and before others is an anonymous body that still seeks its possibility conditions, on the aporetic line between what is present and what is to come. It embodies a wish-to-say that can be materialized if heard and responded to with an act that re-constitutes the community of sense. It is futural in the sense that once we respond to it, it will have already been one of us in an "otherwise" society.