

Restaging education

Jacques Rancière's upside-down Bildung

Jon Øgaard Schjelderup



Master's thesis written at the Department of Education,
Faculty of Educational Sciences

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

Autumn 2016

© Jon Øgaard Schjelderup

2016

“Restaging Education: Rancière’s upside-down *Bildung*”

Jon Øgaard Schjelderup

<http://www.duo.uio.no/>

Print: Reprosentralen, Universitetet i Oslo

Restaging education

Jacques Rancière's upside-down Bildung

Jon Øgaard Schjelderup

Master's thesis written at the Department of Education,
Faculty of Educational Sciences,
University of Oslo

Autumn 2016

**SUMMARY OF
MASTER'S THESIS IN EDUCATION (PEDAGOGIKK)**

TITLE:

“Restaging Education: Jacques Rancière’s Upside-Down Bildung”

BY:

Schjelderup, Jon Øgaard

EXAM:

PED4391:
Masteroppgave,
pedagogikk, allmenn studieretning

TERM:

Høst / Autumn 2016

KEY WORDS:

Rancière
education
hermeneutics
philosophy of education
French philosophy
ontology
knowledge
Bildung
equality
foreignness
madness

Summary

This thesis explores profound assumptions that are at work in Jacques Rancière's philosophy, and asks how we may think about education in line with this philosophy. Rancière seems to be established as a "go-to philosopher" for questions concerning politics and aesthetics in relation to education, and his book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987/1991) appears to have been received with a notable interest within the philosophy of education. This thesis explores ideas that seem constitutive of Rancière's thinking. Such ideas would also be constitutive of a notion of education, if we were to think about education along the lines of Rancière's philosophy. This is relevant if we want to refer to his concepts within educational theory and philosophy, as many scholars seem to do. My ambition, thus, is to go beyond a mere "use" of Rancière's ideas, and to grapple with the foundations of his thinking. The question is then how—and whether at all—we may think about education Rancière's framework of thought.

I perform a close hermeneutic reading of two texts by Rancière: Firstly, "A Child Kills Himself" from the book *Short Voyages to the Land of the People* (1998/2003), where Rancière interprets and comments on Roberto Rossellini's film *Europe '51* from 1952. Secondly, "Althusser, Don Quixote and the Stage of the Text" from the book *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing* (1998/2004), where Rancière questions the ideas underpinning the Marxist theoretical endeavour of Louis Althusser. Through a hermeneutic interpretation, I encircle a set of motifs that figure in the texts and show how these seem to draw into play a questioning of the dynamics bet knowledge, community and truth. His use of 'madness' as a compliment seems to invoke a rejection of rationality and scientism. The notions of 'foreignness' and 'solitude' seem to describe the fundamental condition of subjectivity when there are no extra-subjective reference points for meaning. This lack of objective knowledge or shared meaning opens up for what Rancière seems to refer as 'void' and 'nothing.'

This, and the observation that Rancière's reflections about the *method* of his philosophy seems to be profoundly interlinked with the '*content*' of his philosophy, leads me to argue that Rancière's philosophy indeed demonstrates a certain ontological position. Method and topic are interlinked because Rancière's ontology changes the premises for how reflecting and writing—but also education—is understood. This ontology conceives of no reference point for objective knowledge, nothing at all external to the subjective experience of the world. I show how Plato, for instance, operates with an ontology of truth, so that knowledge is what

resembles truth. Althusser, however, seems to operate with an ontology of the community of knowledge. This is a structuralist understanding in which knowledge constitutes community and community constitutes knowledge. Rancière's philosophy amounts to an ontological position because the ultimate ground for knowledge seems to be the individual subject's interpretations of the world. The notion of external reality in Rancière's philosophy is a sensible reality, i.e. the reality as it is sensed and made sense of by a subject. Therefore, the subject-sensible relation becomes the constitutive element in Rancière's ontology. The subjective interpretation of the world becomes the foundation rather than a notion of truth or a community of knowledge. The lack of external reference points shows that subjects are, in a sense, foreigners. However, it also grants an equal validity to all subjects' meaning-making interactions with the sensible, because there is nothing to measure inequality against.

This ontological shift seems to render obsolete the traditional notion of 'knowledge' as something we may have or not have. It also seems to erase the foundations for talking about education in the way we traditionally do. I here make reference to the German-Continental notion of *Bildung*. Rancièrian ontology seems not only to reject *Bildung*'s underlying narrative of acquisition of culture/knowledge. More profoundly, Rancière rejects the idea that education can be seen as education to humanity. The tradition of *Bildung* explicitly expresses that becoming truly human is linked to the acquisition of culture/knowledge. I then show that this fundamental narrative of education to humanity is rife also outside the *Bildung* tradition, with for instance the critical theorist Theodor Adorno, who criticised the concept of *Bildung*, and by R.S. Peters, who worked within an analytical tradition. The common theme seems to be the same that Kant stated in his lectures about education: We are born like animals and become humans through education's de-barbarisation and cultivation of reason. Following Rancière's ontology, however, the intelligence that makes us human is already present from nature's side. The very idea of education to humanity makes no longer sense. There is no humanity to acquire, only a humanity to practice. Education, moreover, cannot be understood in terms of a means or a procedure, since there is no knowledge to transmit. Even meaning that is constructed through social interaction ultimately stems from an individual subject's meaning-making. The educational moment, thus, is not the moment when knowledge is transmitted, but the moment of reflection and meaning-making. What we may call education according to Rancière's philosophy, i.e. meaning-making, is in no way confined to situations that we usually call educational, but is indeed the mark of subjectivity and subjective existence in general.

Foreword

As I finish my thesis, there are a few persons I would like to thank.

Thanks to *Torill Strand*, my supervisor, who, like Rancière, taught me to trust that a sustained attention to the texts will bear fruits and open for insights that I would not have arrived at if I drew conclusions too fast. But also for inspiring conversations, invaluable corrections and an open door.

Thanks to *Hannah*, for helping me with the English, but most of all for the huge support and patience, and for pizza with potatoes.

Thanks to *mum and dad*, for support and conversations through five years of studies.

Thanks to *Lesesalskjøtt*, for finally moving to Telegram, for coffee breaks, mackerel, fårikål and pinnekjøtt.

Content

Restaging education	III
Summary.....	V
Foreword.....	VII
Content.....	IX
1 Introduction.....	11
2 To read Rancière: Background, texts and method.....	15
2.1 The books and background of Rancière.....	15
2.2 The reception of Rancière within education	19
2.2.1 Specific publications and scholars	20
2.3 Selection of texts and choice of focus.....	23
2.3.1 Text selection	25
2.4 Methodology: a reflection.....	28
2.4.1 An ‘empathetic’ hermeneutic reading.....	29
2.4.2 Interlinks between method and content	31
3 “A Child Kills Himself”.....	33
3.1 About the text.....	33
3.2 “To know what was said”	36
3.3 “To go see somewhere else”	37
3.4 “To remember oneself”	46
4 “The Stage of the Text”	53
4.1 About the text.....	53
4.2 The critique of ‘the religious myth of reading’	55
4.3 Althusser’s symptomal reading.....	58
4.4 Literary solitude and madness	64
4.5 The theatre of the text	67
5 Madness – foreignness – void.....	70
5.1 ‘Madness’	70
5.1.1 Madness in Plato’s <i>Phaedrus</i>	72
5.1.2 Crazy about knowledge: Platonic and Rancièrian madness	75
5.2 ‘Foreignness’ and ‘solitude’	76

5.2.1	The unbound subject.....	77
5.2.2	What is a subject? Foreignness, solitude and... intelligence.....	78
5.2.3	A pause before we proceed.....	79
5.3	‘Nothing’ and ‘void’	80
5.3.1	The inside and outside of the discursive community.....	81
5.3.2	Reality as ‘the sensible’	84
6	Writing an ontology of the subject and the sensible	88
6.1	About Rancière’s writing, and how to read it.....	89
6.1.1	Hermeneutics according to Rancière	91
6.2	Rancière’s ontology of equality	93
6.3	When attention leads to a rearrangement of the way we “see”.....	96
7	Restaging education	99
7.1	Revoking the traditional narrative of education.....	100
7.1.1	Rancière’s upside-down <i>Bildung</i>	100
7.1.2	Questioning the idea of education for humanity.....	104
7.2	A new landscape	106
	Literature.....	110
	Attachment: Primary texts by Rancière – additional info	114

1 Introduction

The topic of my master's thesis is the philosophy of Jacques Rancière and what education may look like from the viewpoint of this philosophy. My ambition is, firstly, to explore profound assumptions, notions or ideas that seem constitutive of Rancière's philosophy, and secondly, to ask how these profound ideas allow us to think about education. Do profound assumptions in Rancière's philosophy concur with constitutive elements of our notion about education? If not, how can we think education in line with Rancière's philosophy? It is my view that to ask this question requires that I take time to get acquainted with Rancière's way of thinking and attempt to think along the same lines as he does. While Rancière has gained a certain popularity among some philosophers of education who want to shed light on various aspects of education, I want to maintain a focus on Rancière's texts, without immediately linking what he writes to education, and see if I can acquire an understanding of the texts on their own premises. Only then, I will venture to ask what education may look like in light of my readings. I hope my readings will contribute to a deeper or wider understanding of what it means to think education in line with Rancière. Most of this thesis, thus, is devoted to the reading of two texts by Rancière (see below), and the conclusions about education will be presented in the final chapter. There, I attempt to ask questions about education from 'within' the Rancièrian viewpoint, rather than asking questions about (the relevance of) Rancière's philosophy from 'within' the context of education.

I will do a hermeneutic reading of two texts by Jacques Rancière. These are "A Child Kills Himself" from the book *Short Voyages to the Land of the People* (1990)¹ and "Althusser, Don Quixote and the Stage of the Text" from the book *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing* (1998).² The former text is Jacques Rancière's interpretation of the 1952 film *Europe '51*, directed by Roberto Rossellini. The latter text (which I for the most part will only refer to as "The Stage of the Text") is more polemical, as Rancière here questions the idea of reading that figures in the philosophy of his earlier professor, Louis Althusser. In the texts I have chosen to focus on, Rancière does not positively formulate concepts or ideas that are central to his philosophy, like for instance his conceptions of politics or aesthetics. It seems to me that a focus such concepts is more common in the educational reception of Rancière. I, for my

¹ Jacques Rancière, "A Child Kills Himself," in *Short Voyages to the Land of the People* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 105–34.

² Jacques Rancière, "Althusser, Don Quixote and the Stage of the Text," in *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004), 129–45.

part, have chosen texts where Rancière's philosophy may not seem positively outspoken, and also where the relevance to education is not immediately apparent. Nevertheless, they invoke, in my view, some underpinning narratives, assumptions and conflicts that underpin Rancière's thinking. In "A Child Kills Himself," for instance, Rancière does not immediately argue a point, but proceeds by way of commenting and reflecting on the plot of a film. He thus invites us to follow the movements of his thought. "The Stage of the Text," on the other hand, focuses on Althusser's theory of reading, but more importantly, it seems to display notions that underpin Althusser's thinking in general. Rancière's account of these notions is interesting to me, because the break with underpinning assumptions of Althusserian Marxism marked the starting point and the initial concerns of Rancière's philosophical endeavour. Since my ambition is to say something about the foundations of Rancière's viewpoint, and from 'within' this viewpoint ask what education may look like, I find these texts intriguing and valuable.

As a part of my hermeneutic reading, I will maintain an extra focus on the metaphors that Rancière deploys. Rancière seems to make use of metaphors a lot. It is by looking closer at such metaphors that I will generalise from the particular texts to more profound ideas that seem to be at work in Rancière's thinking.

The notions that are at work in Rancière's texts also seem to invoke questions about how to read and interpret, that is, about methodology. I will therefore frame the presentation of my methodology as a reflection, wherein I draw upon what Rancière writes about method and on 'standard' hermeneutic methodology alike. As I will show, there seems to be one premise behind both Rancière's method and the content of his texts, so that his endeavour is, in a sense, self-constitutive: he achieves to say the things he says because of his method or style, and his method and style are justified on the basis of what his texts convey. Since my ambition is to understand the profound notions that authorise Rancière's philosophy, and indeed to 'step into' his viewpoint in order to ask questions about education, I will therefore sustain my reflection upon both Rancière's and my own method beyond the methodology section (2.4) and return to it also later, especially in chapter 6.

I will now shortly present the content of my thesis, chapter by chapter:

In *chapter 2, To read Rancière: Background, texts and method*, I will present and discuss my approach to reading and writing about Rancière. The chapter starts with some background

information about Rancière, with a brief presentation of his academic career, emphasising a selection of his publications. I then present an overview of the reception of Rancière within educational theory and the philosophy of education. In light of this overview, I then proceed to clarify my own approach to reading Rancière and the basis for choosing the two texts that I will present a reading of. I hope to show how I think my approach in this thesis has a slightly different focus than earlier studies of Rancière within education. In the last section of the chapter, I present my hermeneutic methodology. Because of the relevance Rancière's philosophy has to a methodology of reading, and my intention to try to think along the lines of his philosophy, I will venture to present parts of this section in the form of a reflection upon methodology in light of what Rancière writes about his own method.

In *chapter 3, "A Child Kills Himself"* and *chapter 4, "The Stage of the Text"*, I present in turn my readings of the two texts that I have chosen to focus on. I will start these chapters with a general introduction of the relevant text and the work in which it figures.

In *chapter 5, Madness – foreignness – void*, I extract a few notions or metaphors that seem to me to be central to the texts I read in chapter 3 and 4, and question how they may point towards some foundational ideas in Rancière's thinking. In turn, I will focus on the metaphors of 'madness,' then on 'foreignness' and 'solitude,' and finally on 'nothing' and 'void.' All of the notions are negations of something, and may thus seem to invoke an inherent tension or polemic in Rancière's writing. Perhaps will these tensions point towards something central to Rancière's philosophy in general? In the section about madness, I will invoke the notion of madness that figures in Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus*,³ and therefore perform a reading of parts of this dialogue.

In *chapter 6, Writing an ontology of the subject and the sensible*, I attempt to collect the loose ends from the reading in the previous chapters, arguing that what Rancière writes—both how he writes and what he writes—seem to invoke a certain ontology. I argue that the profound significance of his philosophy rest upon his implicit formulation and demonstration of what I call an 'ontology of equal foreignness.' With this ontological shift, the conception of truth and knowledge also changes, to the extent that a traditional idea of objective knowledge is obsolete.

³ Plato, "Phaedrus," in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Including the Letters*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, trans. R. Hackforth (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 475–525.

Finally, in *chapter 7, Restaging education*, I arrive at the question of education. Proceeding from where chapter 6 ended, I argue that an ontological shift, which commonplace notions of knowledge is altered, radically changes the conditions for thinking about education. Drawing upon what may be seen as an educational narrative in “A Child Kills Himself,” I attempt to show that Rancière’s philosophy indeed revokes fundamental narratives that seem to be at heart of our notion of education. I here especially reference to the notion of education that is prevalent in German-Continental tradition *Bildung*. However, I also show that Rancière seems to revoke what appears to be a more general narrative of education also outside the tradition of *Bildung*: That education is what makes a human *truly* human.

The citations and references in this thesis follow the Chicago Manual of Style, with footnotes. The Chicago style emphasises titles of works rather than year of publication. In the literature list, works by the same author are listed alphabetically rather than by year. In the footnotes, the author(s) and the title of a work is provided, in addition to page number where this is necessary. The exception is when a work is cited for the very first time. The footnote will then provide all the information that is also available in the literature list. There will be no footnote when the author and the title of a work is clearly stated in the text, the source has been cited earlier in the chapter *and* a reference to a specific page is unnecessary. A footnote would in these cases only repeat the information that is provided in the text. This, however, is only relevant for the few core texts of my reading that are mentioned very often without necessarily referring to a specific page. In line with the Chicago Manual of Style, I shorten long titles that have been mentioned earlier in the text. For an additional overview of the core texts of my reading, with short titles and the original French title and publication, see the attachment to this thesis (“Primary texts by Rancière – additional info”).

2 To read Rancière: Background, texts and method

My ambition with this thesis is to explore the profound notions and ideas that are at work in Rancière's texts "A Child Kills Himself,"¹ and "Althusser, Don Quixote and the Stage of the Text,"² and to ask how we might think about education along the lines of these notions. In this chapter I will present the background for my reading of Rancière. In the first section of the chapter, I will provide a brief account of the academic biography and bibliography of Rancière. In the second section, I will proceed to present an overview of the reception of Rancière within educational theory and philosophy. In light of this overview I will, in the third section of the chapter, designate and explain the focus and aims of my own reading of Rancière. In this section I will also present and justify my choice of texts to read for this thesis. In the final section of the chapter, I will present my methodology. This section will largely take form of a reflection upon something Rancière himself has written about method, and how this resonates with the hermeneutic tradition.

2.1 The books and background of Rancière³

I have chosen to focus on two specific texts by Rancière for this thesis. This choice is made on the background of being familiar with the whole of Rancière's authorship. I will now briefly go through Rancière intellectual career, highlighting some points that seem to me to be of extra importance. For this biographical and bibliographical background, I draw upon two introductory texts to Rancière's authorship, by Jean-Philippe Deranty⁴ and Joseph Tanke.⁵ The authorship of Jacques Rancière (born 1940) appears as one continuous endeavour, but is also very diverse in terms of the number of topics his writings touch upon. As a student at the

¹ Rancière, "A Child Kills Himself."

² Rancière, "The Stage of the Text."

³ Whenever I mention a work by Rancière for the first time, I will refer to the original French title, with the English title following in brackets. After the first mentioning of a work, I will stick to the English title. I use short titles when this is appropriate. Any year of publication stated in the text will refer to the initial French publication, although I always refer to the English translation in the footnotes and bibliography. For a list over the primary texts by Rancière, including shortened and French titles, see the attachment ("Primary texts by Rancière – additional info") to this thesis.

⁴ Jean-Philippe Deranty, "Introduction: A Journey in Equality," in *Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts*, ed. Jean-Philippe Deranty (Durham: Acumen, 2010), 1–14.

⁵ Joseph J. Tanke, *Jacques Rancière: An Introduction. Philosophy, Politics, Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2011).

École Normale Supérieure in Paris in the 1960s, Rancière studied under Louis Althusser, the structural Marxist philosopher. During this time, Althusser wrote, in cooperation with Rancière and a few other promising students, the book *Lire le Capital* [*Reading Capital*] (1965).⁶ This was Rancière's first book. While *Reading Capital* is still considered a central work in post-war philosophy and in structural Marxism, Rancière's development as a philosopher would take a very different turn following the revolts of May 1968. Although he produced a number of articles and essays, Rancière's first book, was not published until nine years later. It bore the name *La leçon d'Althusser* [*Althusser's Lesson*] (1974).⁷ Here, he overtly criticised his former professor's interpretation of Marx and his dismissal of the events of May 1968. The core of the critique was directed at Althusser's distinction between science and ideology. According to Althusser, bourgeois society would justify itself by means of ideological constructs, whereas Marx offered a scientifically grounded critique of the structures that create history and society. Following this view, the emancipation of the working class would have to be a matter of education or enlightenment, since the workers would need help from Marxists and the communist parties to see through the ideological smokescreen of the bourgeois. This was a problematic view, Rancière argued, as it undermined the idea of equality that had inspired the young generation of left wing students and radicals in the time around May 1968.⁸

Soon after the break with Althusserian Marxism, Rancière affiliated with the university now known as Paris VIII Saint-Denis, just outside Paris. He stayed there until his retirement in 2000. Paris VIII started up as an experimental institution in the spirit of May 1968 and thus became a central place for many important and controversial thinkers of the time, like Badiou, Deleuze, Foucault and Lyotard.⁹ *Althusser's Lesson* seems to have set the tone for Rancière's further writings. Although the texts I focus on were written sixteen and twenty-four years later, I will show that the critique of Althusser, and Marxists in general who think they need to enlighten the ideologically obfuscated people, reappears in both of them. Equality too, is a central topic in the following production. In the years following his first book, Rancière also wrote *La nuit des prolétaires: Archives du rêve ouvrier* [*Proletarian Nights: The Workers'*

⁶ Louis Althusser et al., *Reading Capital: The Complete Edition*, trans. Ben Brewster and David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2015).

⁷ Jacques Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, trans. Emiliano Battista (London: Continuum, 2011).

⁸ Deranty, "Introduction: A Journey in Equality," 4.

⁹ Ibid.

Dream in Nineteenth-Century France] (1981),¹⁰ giving an account of the worker movement's history under the sign of equality, thus following the line set out in *Althusser's Lesson*. Later followed *Le philosophe et ses pauvres* [*The Philosopher and his Poor*] (1983),¹¹ focusing tracing the notion that leadership of power is justified in intellect, indeed that differences between people justifies a certain organisation of roles in society, from Plato's idea of the 'philosopher-kings' to the ideas of Althusser that Rancière criticised in his first book¹²

Rancière's third book was called *Le maître ignorant: Cinq leçons sur l'émancipation intellectuelle* [*The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*] (1987).¹³ In the book, Rancière picks up on the ideas of the almost forgotten French nineteenth-century educationalist Joseph Jacotot. Exiled from France, Jacotot worked as a lecturer in French literature at the University of Louvain in Flanders. In his lectures, the Jacotot encountered a practical problem that would lead him, as Rancière puts it, on an intellectual adventure: While he did not speak Flemish, his students, on their part, did not understand French. Jacotot solved this problem by putting a French-Flemish bilingual book on the syllabus list. He then asked his students to read it and afterwards write what they thought about it—in French. At the end of his class, several of the students were in fact able to produce understandable texts. In other words, they had learnt a great deal although the teacher never explained anything to them. The conclusion Jacotot, and Rancière, drew from this, was the assertion of a profound equality of intelligence of all humans.¹⁴ The traditional teacher-student relationship of teaching that Rancière here claimed to undermine mirrors the relationship between workers and Marxist scholars described already in the middle of the 1970s. *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* largely moves along the same ideas as the previous books, thus, but it seems to me to be significant for especially two reasons. Firstly, it is significant to the philosophy of education, as it is the only of Rancière's books that is dealing specifically with the question of education. Secondly, it is the first book in which Rancière seems to move on from the focus on the working class and on the dispute over Marxist theory. The ideas have not changes, but the focus has perhaps been moved. Equality is now stated, not primarily

¹⁰ Jacques Rancière, *Proletarian Nights: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, trans. John Drury (London: Verso, 2012).

¹¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, trans. John Drury, Corinne Oster, and Andrew Parker (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004).

¹² Tanke, *Rancière: An Introduction*, 28.

¹³ Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

with reference to a critique of class-divided society, but as matter of the individual student's intelligence. I will return to the idea of an equality of intelligence in chapter 5.

In the years following *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Rancière writes a number of books that reach out to other fields of study. In 1990 he publishes *Courts voyages au pays du peuple* [*Short Voyages to the Land of the People*],¹⁵ where he looked at a number of authors and works of fiction in a series of texts on the intersection between philosophy and literary studies. "A Child Kills Himself," which I will present a reading of in chapter 3, is not about a literary work, but about Roberto Rossellini's film *Europe '51* from 1952. I will not comment on every book written by Rancière, but there are a few highlights that I would like to mention. First, a work on the language of historical knowledge, *Les noms de l'histoire: Essai de poétique du savoir* [*The Names of History: The poetics of knowledge*] (1992),¹⁶ about the role of the poetic in the presentation of historical truths. The next book I want to mention is *La méésentente: Politique et philosophie* [*Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*] (1995),¹⁷ where Rancière formulated his political philosophy around the notion of disagreement rather than a strive for consensus or compromise. Deranty notes that this book marked the beginning of a wider interest in Rancière's philosophy, beyond the relatively small circle that had read his books until then.¹⁸ In 1998 Rancière published nothing less than three books. The books are about literature and poetics, and also their intersection with politics. One example is *La chair des mots: Politiques de l'écriture* [*The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing*] (1998).¹⁹ The second text that I will focus on in my thesis is from this book. The junctions between politics and the poetic that Rancière had explored in these works and earlier ones, was followed up two years later with *Le partage du sensible: Esthétique et politique* [*The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*] (2000).²⁰ In this book, Rancière formulates a relationship between aesthetics and the political. He argues that the disagreement that his notion of politics rest upon concerns the organisation of the sensible reality. He thus verifies the profound links between aesthetics, which for Rancière defines as a specifically

¹⁵ Jacques Rancière, *Short Voyages to the Land of the People*, trans. James B. Swenson (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003).

¹⁶ Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History: On The Poetics of Knowledge*, trans. Hassan Melehy (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

¹⁷ Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

¹⁸ Deranty, "Introduction: A Journey in Equality," 9.

¹⁹ Jacques Rancière, *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, California: Stanford, California, 2004).

²⁰ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004).

modern regime of thinking about art, and politics, since both pertains to the questioning of sensible truths.

The publication of *Politics of Aesthetics* coincides with the year Rancière retired from his position as professor at Paris VIII. The retirement has not made his production stagnate. Since 2000, Rancière has published about the same number of books as he did during the whole career preceding his retirement. However, many of these works do not seem add anything significantly new to Rancière's philosophy, but take the form of studies of particular questions or topics from the viewpoint Rancière has established over the years. His publications since 2000 maintain for the most part a focus on the aesthetics and features studies of literary works, art, cinema and theatre. Among these, I will especially mention *Le spectateur émancipé* [*The Emancipated Spectator*] (2008),²¹ which draws lines from his book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* published twenty-one years earlier, via the more recent conceptualisation of aesthetics, to reflections on the role of the spectator in art and theatre.

2.2 The reception of Rancière within education

Although Rancière is far from unknown within the field of educational theory and philosophy, and his popularity within this field seems to grow, it is relatively easy to get an overview of the literature produced about Rancière and education. Bear in mind that I have here only explored what goes on in the English-speaking world of educational theory and philosophy of education. Bear also in mind that the categories I attempt to describe the reception of Rancière in terms of, are not mutually exclusive, neither with regards to what part of Rancière's authorship they emphasis, nor with regards to the way Rancière is used.

Much of Rancière's impact on the field of education should probably be attributed to *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, as it directly claims educational and pedagogical relevance. It is safe to say, and not very surprising to hear, that *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* is the among the books by Rancière that appear most frequently on reference lists within educational theory and philosophy of education—probably the most frequent one. Aside from all of the instances where Rancière's book is only briefly mentioned, there are a number of publications which questions seem to concern what consequences Rancière's argument in *The Ignorant*

²¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2009).

Schoolmaster seem to have for various sub-areas of teaching and education.²² Others seem to engage more deeply with the position Rancière takes in the book, elaborating on how education and pedagogy can be perceived, practiced and re-thought in line with *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.²³ However, there seem to be especially two other common access point to Rancière's philosophy for education scholars: his political writings and his writings about aesthetics. The first group often engages with questions of political education, such as citizenship education or democratic education.²⁴ The second group seems either to use Rancière's aesthetics to engage in some version of an argument about the inherent close relation between aesthetic and educational practices or experiences.²⁵ This latter approach seems to find in Rancière an invitation to discuss education as a practice *per se*, rather than merely "importing" a notion or a concern from his philosophy into an argument about a sub-field of educational studies. We can find examples of this also among the publications emphasising Rancière's political philosophy, where the question of what a true political education or democratic education is like sometimes seems to go hand in hand with a question of what a true education is *per se*.²⁶ Finally, aside from all those quick references to Rancière, and single articles from scholars, there is a handful of books and a theorist that are particularly noteworthy.

2.2.1 Specific publications and scholars

In 2010, Charles Bingham and Gert Biesta wrote the book *Jacques Rancière: Education, Truth, Emancipation*.²⁷ The first chapter of the is an essay written by Rancière himself, where he comments on and elaborates on *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. Bingham and Biesta then

²² For instance: Peter Appelbaum, "Mathematical Practice as Sculpture of Utopia: Models, Ignorance, and the Emancipated Spectator," *For the Learning of Mathematics*, 32, no. 2 (2016): 14–19; Gert Biesta, "The Ignorant Citizen: Mouffe, Rancière, and the Subject of Democratic Education," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 30, no. 2 (2011): 141–53.

²³ For instance: Jason E. Smith and Annette Weisser, eds., *Everything Is in Everything: Jaques Rancière Between Intellectual Emancipation and Aesthetic Education* (Pasadena: Art Center Graduate Press, 2011); Jorge Larrosa, "Endgame: Reading, Writing, Talking (and Perhaps Thinking) in a Faculty of Education," in *Rancière, Public Education and the Taming of Democracy*, ed. Maarten Simons and Jan Masschelein (Chicester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 166–86.

²⁴ For instance: Maarten Simons and Jan Masschelein, eds., *Rancière, Public Education and the Taming of Democracy* (Chicester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Biesta, "Ignorant Citizen."

²⁵ Tyson E. Lewis, *The Aesthetics of Education: Theatre, Curiosity, and Politics in the Work of Jacques Rancière and Paulo Freire* (London: Continuum, 2012); Smith and Weisser, *Everything Is in Everything*.

²⁶ Charles Bingham and Gert Biesta, *Jacques Rancière: Education, Truth, Emancipation* (London: Continuum, 2010); Gert Biesta, "Learner, Student, Speaker: Why It Matters How We Call Those We Teach," in *Rancière, Public Education and the Taming of Democracy*, ed. Maarten Simons and Jan Masschelein (Chicester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 31–42; Lewis, *Aesthetics of Education*.

²⁷ Bingham and Biesta, *Education, Truth, Emancipation*.

follow up with a handful essays through which they attempt to demonstrate the significance of Rancière's philosophy and the way he links education to both politics and aesthetics. The essays comprise explorations of Rancière's notion of emancipation (see what I write about Biesta's work on this below), his picturing of the child, the question of recognition seen through Rancière's philosophy of education. Finally, they argue that education must be seen as something more than only a practice of learning (something), but a way of seeing.

Beyond this particular publication with Bingham, Biesta has engaged a lot with Rancière's thought in his own writings, and especially with the idea of emancipation. In his works on general philosophy of education and political philosophy of education, Biesta has been occupied with what he himself has described as "key educational questions and issues, particularly questions concerning education, freedom and emancipation."²⁸ In this work, he writes, "I found the work of Jacques Rancière helpful, as it made it possible to (re)turn to the question of emancipation in a way that was significantly different from how it had been engaged with in critical theory and critical pedagogy."²⁹ Biesta cites Rancière in several of his publications. Among the ones that are specifically dealing with Rancière's philosophy there is, for instance, an article describing emancipatory education as starting with the fact that both the teacher and the student can speak, thus drawing upon Rancière's ideas of equality,³⁰ and another article concerning the subject of democratic education in the philosophies of Chantal Mouffe and Rancière.³¹ However, Biesta is also critical of parts of Rancière's project, and an article criticising Rancière's rejection of the necessity of teaching in the process of emancipation is scheduled for publication in 2016.³²

Another noteworthy publication is an anthology edited by Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons. The contributions were first published as articles in a special issue of *Educational Philosophy and Theory* (vol. 42, no. 5–6, 2010) with the same name.³³ Biesta's article about emancipatory education mentioned above was published in this anthology. On the list of contributors are also Bingham and Tyson E. Lewis, whose book I will mention below. According to the editors, the aim was to provide "an introduction to the political and

²⁸ Gert Biesta, "From Experimentalism to Existentialism," in *Leaders in Philosophy of Education: Intellectual Self Portraits*, ed. Leonard J. Waks (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2014), 23.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Biesta, "Learner, Student, Speaker."

³¹ Biesta, "Ignorant Citizen."

³² Gert Biesta, "Don't Be Fooled by Ignorant Schoolmasters. On the Role of the Teacher in Emancipatory Education," Unpublished. In press for *Policy Futures in Education*, 2016.

³³ Simons and Masschelein, *Rancière, Public Education and the Taming of Democracy*.

educational ideas of an author who is not well known in the field of educational theory and philosophy,” and “to explore ‘in line with Rancière’ the current concern for democracy and equality in relation to education.”³⁴ The scope of the articles it comprises range from queer politics in school, via questions of the relationship between the school and the public, to reconstructions of critical education to reformulations of critical pedagogy in line with Rancière. Of Rancière’s texts, the authors of the anthology seem to rely mostly on *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* and various commentaries to this book, along with Rancière’s political writings, like for instance *Politics of Aesthetics*, *On the Shores of Politics*, *Disagreement* and *The Hatred of Democracy*. The editors themselves endeavour to argue the importance of a truly public school as a demonstration of equality and a space beyond the inequality of society at large, and for its importance in building a democratic public space.³⁵

Another anthology was born out of a symposium on at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California. The anthology, *Everything is in Everything: Jaques Rancière Between Intellectual Emancipation and Aesthetic Education* (2011),³⁶ comprises an essay by Jacques Rancière, alongside essays by a number of other scholars and various kinds of artists. The anthology aims to explore what it means to propose an aesthetic education of humanity and how that would affect the current conceptualisations of art, politics and pedagogy. The book explores, in other words, the way Rancière’s philosophy creates an intersection between education, politics and aesthetics, something that seem to be a theme in other education-specific publications about Rancière. What makes the big difference, I think, between this anthology and the one edited by Masschelein & Simons is not only that the latter emphasises politics and education, while this volume emphasises aesthetics and education. It also seems to make for an important difference that none of the contributors to this volume have backgrounds within education studies. It seems more like the question of education, for them, grows out of the study of aesthetics, while the questions in the Masschelein & Simons anthology are to a large extent asked from the position of education as a field of study.

³⁴ Maarten Simons and Jan Masschelein, “Introduction: Hatred of Democracy...and of the Public Role of Education?,” in *Rancière, Public Education and the Taming of Democracy*, ed. Maarten Simons and Jan Masschelein (Chicester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 1.

³⁵ Maarten Simons and Jan Masschelein, “The Hatred of Public Schooling: The School as the Mark of Democracy,” in *Rancière, Public Education and the Taming of Democracy*, ed. Maarten Simons and Jan Masschelein (Chicester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 150–65.

³⁶ Smith and Weisser, *Everything Is in Everything*.

Finally, Tyson E. Lewis has written about the aesthetic education of Rancière in *The Aesthetics of Education: Theatre, Curiosity and Politics in the work of Jacques Rancière and Paulo Freire*, published in 2012.³⁷ Lewis here looks at the way Rancière verifies the profound connections between aesthetics and politics, and converts this into an appreciation of the inherently aesthetic nature of education, arguing that this too is a natural conclusion of Rancière's philosophy that Rancière has not himself fully conceptualised. He thus investigates the convergence of aesthetics and education through discussions of the similarities between artistic practice and teaching, the relationship between aesthetic sensibility and emancipation, and the relevance of aesthetic categories in educational practice.

To summarise, then, it seems that the reception of Rancière within education is to a large extent focused around three entrances to Rancière's authorship: *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, politics and aesthetics. On the whole, the reception also seems to primarily to ask questions about what Rancière can provide to the field of education. In other words, their point of departure is within an established tradition of educational theory, and the question is how Rancière may inform and enrich the perspective of tradition. A notable exception seems to be the anthology edited by Smith and Weisser,³⁸ as I have mentioned. Perhaps is also Lewis' book³⁹ an exception, but the premise seems to be that Rancière's concepts may help us (the educationalists) to define education.

2.3 Selection of texts and choice of focus

In this thesis I present a reading of two texts by Rancière. I will here endeavour to explain my choice of these texts and also the focus of my reading. A reflection upon my methodology will be presented in the next section of this chapter, however, a presentation of the focus of my reading of Rancière is partly also a presentation of *how* I read Rancière, as I will show in the section about methodology. The methodology section thus follows naturally from this section.

In this thesis, I want to avoid "using" Rancière, but instead "listen" to him. By that I mean that I do not wish to start my reading of Rancière with an already formulated question or problem that I hope Rancière can help me answer or shed light on. I do not start out with a

³⁷ Lewis, *Aesthetics of Education*.

³⁸ Smith and Weisser, *Everything Is in Everything*.

³⁹ Lewis, *Aesthetics of Education*.

point that I hope Rancière will help me prove. Masschelein and Simons, for instance, seem to me to fall into this category when they advocate the continued importance of public schooling, using Rancière.⁴⁰ The same goes for most of the other texts in the special issue and anthology they have edited. It is irrelevant whether I agree with Masschelein and Simons' argument or not. The point is that their way of bringing Rancière into the philosophy of education is different from the way I want to do it. Masschelein and Simons' article starts by describing a question formulated from the viewpoint of educational practice and theory, about the relation between schooling and democracy, and then brings Rancière into the discussion. The movement goes from the current educational question to the philosophical discussion. Again, I do not argue that the premise of their endeavour is wrong. One of the tasks of the philosophy of education is to subject questions that arise from the 'actual' problems and questions one encounter in educational theory and practice, to a philosophical scrutiny. Alternatively, one may bring the question of problem into a philosophical context to better understand what the question is about. I value these kinds of investigations and ways of questioning. However, it is not the only way of doing philosophy of education. Paul Standish claims that there are indeed few areas of philosophy, if any at all, that do not also have bearing upon how we think about education.⁴¹ There is, in other words, another way into the philosophy of education: one that does not start with a question from within the field of established educational thought or practice, but that starts in general philosophy or thought, and then arrives at a realisation that in turn say something about education. One may find something that is relevant to specific fields of educational theory or practice, or indeed something that opens up profound questions about what education is. Thus, the question 'how can this philosopher help us understand these educational questions?' is not the only entrance to the philosophy of education. Another entrance takes the form of a realisation: 'This seems to me to say something about education!' It is in this way that I want to read Rancière: I will read a couple of his texts and attempt to get to grips with them without immediately asking a question about education. Confronted with Rancière's texts, my question is 'what is the text saying?' Only as I follow that question through my reading of the texts, I will also start reflecting upon how the texts may also speak about education.

⁴⁰ Simons and Masschelein, "The Hatred of Public Schooling: The School as the Mark of Democracy."

⁴¹ Paul Standish, "The Philosophy of Education, and the Education of Philosophy," *BAJO PALABRA. Revista de Filosofía* 2, no. 6 (2011): 45–46.

2.3.1 Text selection

I will focus on the following two texts: A text called “A Child Kills Himself,”⁴² which is the final text in the book *Short Voyages to the Land of the People* (1990), and a text called “Althusser, Don Quixote and the Stage of the Text,”⁴³ also this an essay, taken from the book *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing* (1998). A short introduction to the text and its context will be given at the beginnings of chapter 3 and 4, which are devoted to my reading of the texts.

Why choose exactly these texts? I have already mentioned that it is not the immediate or superficial signs of ‘relevance to education’ that I am looking for, but the profound notions in his philosophy. Both of the texts seem to me in different ways to say something about where Rancière’s engagement comes from and how he thinks and works as a philosopher. The first text, “A Child Kills Himself,” is an interpretation of and commentary to Roberto Rossellini’s film *Europe ’51* from 1952. The premise of this text is another one than many of the text by Rancière that have been used in philosophy of education. Here, Rancière is not initially constructing an argument or presenting an idea, but is merely commenting on the film that he has watched. Our companion through the text is Rancière’s look: his observations and reflections when watching a film. Having first read this text, it seemed to me that it demonstrates, to some extent, the immediate reflective movement in Rancière’s thinking and writing. Moreover, the action of observation and reflection that Rancière demonstrates also seems to be a topic in the text. Is this Rancière doing what he is writing about, or is it rather Rancière writing about what he does? The text seems to raise a question about the border between his thinking and acting as a philosopher, on the one hand, and the topics of his philosophical writings, on the other. “A Child Kills Himself” therefore seems to me like a good place to start, since my question concerns the profound notions that Rancière’s writings rests upon.

In the second text, “Althusser, Don Quixote and the Stage of the Text” (which I hereafter will refer to simply as “The Stage of the Text”), Rancière focuses on the idea and style of writing of his earlier professor, Luis Althusser. This very specific topic may seem less relevant for a reading within philosophy of education. However, the text appears, firstly, to tell a lot about what divides Rancière from Althusser, and secondly, it seems to touch upon how Rancière

⁴² Rancière, “A Child Kills Himself.”

⁴³ Rancière, “The Stage of the Text.”

thinks about the dynamics between text and meaning, between style of writing and questions of interpretation. The text thus opens up for two valuable peepholes into what may be Rancière's philosophical outlook. On the one hand, it tells us something about the continued struggle against the ideas of Althusser, which originally ignited Rancière's philosophical endeavour. On the other hand, it may inform us about what Rancière thinks about *doing* philosophy, what it is to write, and how we should read if we want to get to know Rancière's philosophical outlook.

I have also a couple of more general points about my text selection and why I am not focusing on some of the more typical or 'obvious' of Rancière's texts for a reading within the philosophy of education. Firstly, I want to start my reading somewhere else than with his notions of politics and aesthetics. As I have shown, many have already elaborated on the relation between these concepts and education—both in how they can inform educational practice and theory with understandings of politics and aesthetics, and how certain understandings of politics and aesthetics changes the premises for education. It seems to me that Rancière to a large extent has resonated with philosophers of education who specifically focus on aesthetics or politics in education. Both politics and aesthetics are of course central concepts in Rancière's philosophy, so an emphasis on these concepts is by no means wrong. I suspect that Rancière may appear to the field of education as a philosopher of political education and *aesthetic education*, with little relevance to other aspects of educational thought. Now, 'politics' and 'aesthetics' are concepts that already have a history within educational theory and philosophy, whereas the particularly Rancièrian notions of politics and aesthetics seem to be embedded in his specific philosophical outlook. I thus want to avoid these already 'familiar' ways of presenting Rancière's relevance to education, in order to take a look at the Rancièrian philosophical outlook that gave rise to the concepts. Since Rancière seems to be as a "go-to philosopher" for political and aesthetic questions in relation to education, I hope my readings will contribute to a deeper or wider understanding of the philosophical outlook that these concepts are embedded in. This will perhaps—and perhaps not—open up for other appreciations of Rancière in connection to philosophy of education.

Secondly, I want to start somewhere else than with *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. This is not to say that there are not good reasons why a much of the reception of Rancière in education revolves around this. For it does present some remarkable and provoking thoughts about teaching in this book. I do not want to, and neither should I, completely avoid *The Ignorant*

Schoolmaster in this thesis. I do think, however, whether I could instead start with some other texts. It happens so that *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* is explicitly about education—about teaching, schoolmasters and students—but does that mean that other books by Rancière are less relevant for education? As I mentioned, I want to get to know Rancière’s philosophical outlook, rather than a couple of concepts that born out of it. In the same way that I want to avoid starting with the texts about politics or aesthetics, I would also like to avoid starting with the text that is specifically about teaching. *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* is explicitly about teaching, but what he argues in this book is embedded, I will assume, in a wider philosophical outlook, and it is this outlook that I want to say something about. Finally, in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Rancière lends his voice to the thoughts and concepts of an early nineteenth-century university teacher, Jacotot. If my focus is to grasp the Rancièrian outlook and *then* say something about how education may look like from that viewpoint, I should perhaps start somewhere else. By basing my reading on other texts, I want to avoid repeating once again the slogans of Jacotot/Rancière. But hopefully, and more importantly, I will also be able to say something about the Rancièrian outlook that underpinned the claims made in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* or that this book contributed to the development of.

Both “A Child Kills Himself” and “The Stage of the Text” are chapters in books, so why not read the whole books? It is a relevant question, for to read one chapter of a book is in a sense to take the text out of its context. It is less so in this case, however. The books seem to comprise related, but individual texts. The texts are not mere book chapters, but standalone essays with a common direction or topic. Ultimately, there is a question of time and space within the boundaries of this thesis. I want to do a close reading, that is, to really grapple with the texts and the words Rancière uses. I therefore find that to focus the two texts that I do provides me with more than enough material to work with.

Since I have set out to explore the fundamental ideas that are at work in the texts, I believe that the question of *how* I read is just as important as the question of *which texts* I read. Whether I will be able to say something more about the profound ideas in Rancière’s texts and really “listen” to what his texts say, is to a large extent a question of how to read and interpret. The choice of focus for this thesis is thus integrated with the question of methodology. And methodology is what I will discuss in the final section of this chapter, before I start my actual readings of Rancière.

2.4 Methodology: a reflection

Following the idea of this thesis that I just have presented, I will start also this section about my methodology by looking at what Rancière writes. In an article from 2009, Rancière writes about his method as a thinker and writer:

A method means a path: not the path that a thinker follows but the path that he/she constructs, that you have to construct to know where you are, to figure out the characteristics of the territory you are going through, the places it allows you to go, the way it obliges you to move, the markers that can help you, the obstacles that get in the way.”⁴⁴

From this, we can gather the following: Firstly, Rancière describes method as something that is not fixed and settled procedure before the process starts, something that one applies to the object of thought, but indeed something that needs to be constructed. Secondly, to construct a method, Rancière seems to write, is something you do through a close engagement with the landscape one moves through as a thinker, the object of thought. In other words, Rancière rejects the idea of the thinker as a neutral observer of the phenomena thought is directed at. Methodology is subjective and not striving for objectivity. Yet the quote says, thirdly, that method is about figuring out where you are, to get an understanding of the characteristics of the landscape. Thus, method is oriented towards the object of the thought, in an attempt to understand it. Fourthly, there is not only a question of understanding, but also of action or interaction. A method is a path, Rancière says, and it is a path that the thinker actively constructs when confronted with the landscape. Rancière writes, moreover, that to figure out the characteristics of a landscape is also about finding out where one can go and where one cannot go. It is about looking for markers—something that stands out from the background—that will help you move. Why is Rancière talking about the object of thought in terms of a landscape? Perhaps it is because he finds the word ‘object’ insufficient. It seems to invoke the idea that one is observing a thing, or a phenomenon, that is contained within certain boundaries. When what you think about is a landscape that you are situated in and must construct a path through, you are, as an observer, the activity goes from observation to interaction. You are not outside the boundaries that contain the object, but inside them. Rancière seems to suggest that method is about figuring out not how to preserve the present by describing it, but how to move on from it. The focus is not on the delimitations of an

⁴⁴ Jacques Rancière, “A Few Remarks on the Method of Jacques Rancière,” *Prallax* 15, no. 3 (2009): 114.

object, but the ways to move within a space of possible paths and possible viewpoints, and beyond it.

2.4.1 An ‘empathetic’ hermeneutic reading

In my engagement with Rancière’s texts, I have attempted to think along these the lines suggested by Rancière above. The reading I perform, thus, is a hermeneutic reading of Rancière’s texts. The task is to work out what these texts by Rancière say, to figure out the characteristics of the Rancièrian landscape.

Hermeneutic interpretation is often presented with reference to the so-called ‘hermeneutic circle.’ It describes how a constant change of focus back and forth between the parts and the whole is necessary to make sense of the text.⁴⁵ This interplay between part and whole is also descriptive of my reading of Rancière. What I do in chapter 5 is one example of this. There I zoom in at some specific metaphors that Rancière use a lot in his texts. To grasp the meanings of these small ‘parts’ of the texts requires, however, that I also look at the whole. I have to see the metaphors in a bigger picture that brings in references to other texts by Rancière and also texts written by other people. The attention to the metaphors in chapter 5 then prepare the ground for saying something more general about Rancière’s philosophy in chapter 6.

In the quote about method at the beginning of this chapter, Rancière seems to transgress the distinction between subject and object of study. This echoes what the understanding of interpretation that is typical for the kind of hermeneutic method that Alvesson & Sköldberg calls ‘alethic hermeneutics.’ This form of hermeneutics stands in contrast to an objective hermeneutics, which is based on the idea of a polarity between the subject and the object of interpretation.⁴⁶ According to Alvesson & Sköldberg, alethic hermeneutics suggests that the endeavour to understand and interpret is not an endeavour that belongs exclusively to studies, but rather “is a basic way of existing for every human being, since we must continually keep orienting ourselves in situations in order to stay alive.”⁴⁷ The study of a text thus, follows the same principles as the attempt to understand live in general: we arrive at any situation with a set of preunderstandings—beliefs and understandings that have built up as a result of prior experiences. Through the encounter with the situation or, we develop new understanding, that

⁴⁵ Mats Alvesson and Kaj Sköldberg, *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research* (London: SAGE, 2010).

⁴⁶ Ibid., 56.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

in turn becomes a preunderstanding when thinking again about the situation; thus we have another hermeneutic circle.⁴⁸ This interplay too is descriptive for my reading. When several times come back to the same quotes or the same points from Rancière's texts throughout my thesis, it is mainly because a growing understanding also makes what I have already interpreted appear in a slightly different, and richer light. Suddenly, I may see something that I did not when I first read the texts.

In my attention to Rancière's use of metaphors I follow classical principles of hermeneutic methodology. Alvesson & Sköldböck note that there is a close affinity between hermeneutic studies and literary studies. Such a 'poetic hermeneutic' reading will proceed to find meaning in the way one would attempt to find meaning in a poem or other work of fiction: by looking out for metaphors and implicit connotations or references. Thus, a wide range of possible meanings may open up.⁴⁹ The view that methods of poetic interpretation are relevant also for texts that are not poetic or works of fiction stems from the idea that language, with its profoundly metaphorical structure, is at the heart of all our understanding and thought, and all our social life. Thus hermeneutic studies will often also look for so-called 'root metaphors,' that is, metaphors that are not used more or less consciously for mere polemical or communicative means, but metaphors that are at the heart of our understanding within certain domains of thought. Root metaphors thus underpin whole discourses.⁵⁰ In my reading, I do not explicitly refer to root metaphors, but in the final chapter of the thesis, I believe that I point to something tantamount to a root metaphor, or at least a root narrative, of educational theory.

However, I am not attempting to disclose root metaphors in Rancière's thinking. Neither is that the point with this thesis. Although the search for root metaphors may be a good way of acquiring an understanding for the basic figures of thought within a domain, it also seems to me to balance on the border towards a suspicious reading. It is not my intention to disclose "the real reasons" why Rancière thinks the way he does. Above all, I wish to steer away from any hermeneutics of suspicion, a tradition of hermeneutics that is often linked to Freud and Marx, who both attempted to explain people's actions or historical events by referring to the real reasons behind, be it the unconscious part of the mind or dialectical materialism.⁵¹ As I

⁴⁸ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 88–89.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 90–92.

⁵¹ Ibid., 94–95.

will show through the course of my thesis, Rancière seems to criticise and avoid exactly this kind of suspiciousness, and instead argue that we should adopt a method of trust. While bearing in mind that my reading of Rancière is subjective—that I enter into it with my own preunderstandings and my own subjective meaning-making process—I could characterise my endeavour as an attempt to achieve what in hermeneutic theory is often referred to as a ‘fusion of horizons.’ The concept, which was first coined by Hans-Georg Gadamer in his *Truth and Method* from 1960, refers to the understanding that one achieves by acquiring and making oneself at home in a different way of thinking. Two persons may thus experience a fusion of horizons, where an initial gap in meaning existed. To strive for a fusion of horizons is also something a reader may do when interpreting a text. The text often has an internal logic, some unuttered assumptions and a network of references, almost like a horizon that sets the stage for whatever is at work in the text.⁵² It is not hard to see the parallels between the metaphor of a fusion of horizons and Rancière’s metaphor of the landscape in the quote about his method. There are good reasons to problematise the idea of a fusion of horizons. As mentioned above, all readings are always subjective readings involving the preunderstandings of the reader. The limits of complete understanding is also something that Rancière writes a lot about, as I will show. Eventually, it is not Rancière I would fuse horizons with, if any, but the texts that I have chosen to study. I will therefore say that my endeavour is an attempt to do an *empathetic reading* of Rancière. Finally, another and obvious reason why my reading of Rancière’s text can not grant a direct access to Rancière’s actual thoughts, stems from the fact that I read Rancière’s text in English translation. I regret that my knowledge of French is not good enough to read Rancière in the original language. However, I am not unaware of the original French versions of Rancière’s concepts and the problems with some of their English translations. When necessary, I will point out and explanation obvious connotations or meanings that are lost in the English translation concepts. Still, the reader must bear in mind that my interpretations are not dealing with the actual words Rancière wrote, in the language he thinks and works with. This creates, of course, a distance between me and Rancière.

2.4.2 Interlinks between method and content

The reader has probably noted that I refer a lot Rancière’s own texts when I describe my method of reading him. This may sound like an academically irresponsible mixing of object

⁵² Ibid., 84–86.

and content. However, as I will argue below, and also later in the thesis, an attempt to understand Rancière's texts and the Rancièrian 'horizon,' will also involve an attention to his method. If what I am trying to do is to move within Rancière's horizon and see how the Rancièrian landscape looks, then a reflective attention to his and my own methodology is also a part of that endeavour.

I have already pointed out some similarities between the landscape metaphor Rancière uses to describe his own method and the principles of hermeneutics. However, where hermeneutics seems to be occupied with understanding, the quote by Rancière also seems to link method to a question of how to move or proceed on the basis of the insight one has acquired. Rancière focuses on method as a path, a path to move on, which is formed through interaction with the landscape. My own method reflects this in two ways. Firstly, my method too is constructed partly in interaction with the material, which for me is Rancière's texts. For this reason, I will return to the question of methodology also later in the thesis, as I present my reading.

Secondly, my attempt to figure out what kind of landscape Rancière's texts constitute, leads also me to move within that landscape: the empathic reading enables me, at the end of the thesis, to say something about how we may conceptualise education, seen from the acquired viewpoint. This is an example of how I gradually come to draw upon the methodological insights acquired from Rancière's texts just as much as on 'ordinary' hermeneutics. This is not because I want to argue that Rancière offers a view of methodology that is opposing hermeneutics. Rather, I appreciate that the object of my study, Rancière's texts, themselves invite to further reflections upon methodology. The double reflectiveness that I thus put into effect is, I would argue, a profoundly hermeneutic approach to the material, because it recognises the dynamics of the hermeneutic circles: between the parts and the whole of a study and between understanding and preunderstanding. My understanding of the close affinity between content and method in Rancière's writing and why this is relevant to my own method, I have only acquired through reading Rancière. If I discussed all of this already here, that would encroach into the conclusions from my reading. In practice, this means that the question of methodology will reappear through the thesis. Some of this is through scattered references about my method or my choices. In chapter 6, I will discuss methodology—both my own and the one of Rancière—more at length.

3 “A Child Kills Himself”

My ambition is to get to grips with the profound and underlying ideas in Rancière’s philosophy, and I will do this through a reading of Rancière’s “A Child Kills Himself”¹ and “The Stage of the Text.”² I start here by taking a look at the first one. First, I will present the text itself, its context and topic. Then I will go through my reading of the text, under three headlines derived from three imperatives that I find to be a structure in the text I am reading: “to know what was said,” “to go see somewhere else” and “to remember oneself.”

3.1 About the text

“A Child Kills Himself” is a commentary to Roberto Rossellini’s film *Europe ‘51* from 1952. The text is the final chapter in Rancière’s book *Short Voyages to the Land of the People* (1990).³ Before I say more about this last chapter and the film it is about, it is worth saying something about the book in general. It comprises a series of texts on various literary works—and one text about a film, *Europe ‘51*. The texts are about works of very different kinds and from different periods. What seems to me to bind the book together, is the way Rancière reads or engages with the material he studies. His texts are not mere analyses, but interactions with the stories told in the works. It seems to me that he sometimes mixes his own voice with that of the stories that are told, the voices of their authors or the voices of the characters in the stories. In this way there is a certain resemblance with the way Rancière also let his voice blend together with that of Joseph Jacotot in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, three years earlier. The texts in *Short Voyages* comprises, among others, an account of how William Wordsworth’s poems show the poet’s growing and fading enthusiasm for the French Revolution, a text about the tension between disillusionment and utopianism in the plays and letters by Georg Büchner, and the recount and political utopianism in the let text about the plays and letters written by Georg Büchner, and a recount of the proletarian Claude Genoux’s tales from his travels around the world. And, of course, the text about *Europe ‘51* that I will present my reading of here. *Short Voyages* is not the first of Rancière’s works where his readings of texts is at the centre. For his second book, *Proletarian Nights*,⁴ Rancière read texts

¹ Rancière, “A Child Kills Himself.”

² Rancière, “The Stage of the Text.”

³ Rancière, *Short Voyages*.

⁴ Rancière, *Proletarian Nights*.

written by workers and working class people, from letters to magazine articles. *Short Voyages*, however, seems to be the first of his books wherein Rancière work with fiction. It thus points forward to Rancière's interest in art, aesthetics and cinema in later years.

It is necessary to mention first of all, that Rancière's interpretation of the *Europe '51* is not necessarily in line with what Rossellini originally intended. I will not debate whether or not I think Rancière "understands" the film the way Rossellini wanted, because that is not the point here. The point is to show how Rancière constructs and conveys his ideas through an active interpretation of the film. Whenever I refer to the film's topic or the like, I intend to refer to Rancière's interpretation of it.

The film *Europe '51*, and thus also Rancière's "A Child Kills Himself," is about an upper class woman in Rome, Irene, who, after her only child's death devotes herself to charity and service of the poor. Her son tried to commit suicide by letting himself fall down the stairway of their apartment block. Having survived the fall, he receives medical treatment. However, he suddenly dies because of an overdose of morphine. The mother blames herself for the boy's suicide attempt and subsequent death. Rossellini here seems to suggest that too immersed in her bourgeois social life that she had not given her son enough love and overlooked his cry for attention. Rancière describes the central theme of the film as thus: "*Europe '51* is a film about events, encounters and reminiscences [...]." ⁵ For what above all seems to herald the significance of this film for Rancière, seems to be his observation that the plot takes place in the wake of an event. He notes that in the art of cinema, the actual film usually brings about nothing that is not already signified by the poster for the film. It is not so, however, in the case of *Europe '51*. In this film something happens; there is a real event, namely the boy's suicide. This is not something that simply passes by as a recognisable characteristic of a genre, not a familiar twist in the narration, not something that is already suggested by the poster for the film. It is an intolerable event: "*a child kills himself*," Rancière repeats in italic. ⁶ And the film is, according to Rancière, placed under the sign of the *event* this suicide constitutes. Rancière is interested in the "apprenticeship of the unique power that goes forth to meet the event," ⁷ that is, an apprenticeship of the way a person actively encounters an event. The person is Irene, and her "gain in power is above all reflected in her face. The film is a story about a face that reflects, a look that observes and distinguishes,

⁵ Rancière, "A Child Kills Himself," 108.

⁶ Ibid., 109.

⁷ Ibid.

accompanied by a camera that follows the work of reflection.”⁸ Rancière emphasise how the camera simply shows us the work of reflection as it actually is visible, physically, in Irene’s movements and facial expressions. In other words, what is at stake is the way the encountering of events indeed put the thoughts and bodies of subjects into motion. The film is not about a plot or a narrative, nor is Rancière’s text. The lens of the camera and the pen of the writer both try to frame something far less representable: the moments and places of encounters, of a real encounter between a subject and the world, and how a subject is prompted to reformulate the meaning of events and its own place in the world, rather than merely repeating itself. Rancière continues:

Europe ‘51 works on representation, on the way subjects change their manner of being one with their representation. The power that this labor makes evident can be named in good old Platonic fashion: it is the power of reminiscence, of recalling a thinking subject to his or her destiny.⁹

What is at stake is the simultaneous process of making sense to the events we encounter and of formulating our own role and our own identity as subjects who encounter these events. For Plato, *reminiscence*, or alternatively *recollection*, is the way someone acquires knowledge through reviving a memory of something that the soul once knew, for instance in an earlier life.¹⁰ I assume that Rancière does not believe in the transmigration of souls. However, by naming the labour of reflection portrayed by the film ‘reminiscence,’ he locates the source of the gained insight to the subject itself, not to something outside it. Indeed, the gain in power that he recognises in Irene’s path through the film is not so much a process of acquiring some strength that one did not have before, but a process of “recalling a thinking subject to his or her own destiny,” that is, through reminiscence.

Rancière identifies this movement of reminiscence as the simultaneous carrying out of “three acts, three imperatives set in action: to know what was said, to go see somewhere else, to remember yourself.” These are the actions by which reminiscence is accomplished. These three actions are at the same time three stages, or topics, that Rancière identifies in the plot of the film, and which he organises his own text around. I will now follow Rancière’s re-enactment of the film by focusing each of these three steps at a time.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Plato, “Meno,” in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Including the Letters*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, trans. W. K. C. Guthrie (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 85d.

3.2 “To know what was said”

First, there is the question of knowing what was said. This is quite literally the question that drives Irene to start the intellectual journey that the film portrays. At the hospital, after the fall, the boy had said something, presumably about his suicide attempt and his feelings, but she does not know what. “What did the boy say?” is the question that leads her to defy the paralysing grief and start her journey.

Irene, goes to Andrea, her cousin and the only communist in an otherwise bourgeoisie family, with her question. He was there when the boy uttered the words. Andrea, however, is not interested in her question. He bids her stop thinking about it. What is important, according to him, is not what the boy said, but why he did what he did, and the reasons for his suicide are not mysterious at all: “because there is war, poverty, and the disturbances of the time and of conscience.”¹¹ Andrea tells Irene that it is not her fault, that the child’s suicide is a consequence of the cruelty of the world: the recent war, the corruption of human relations in the modern society and the capitalist economy. Andrea, the communist, knows that the individual person’s suffering is only a variety of a much greater pain. Irene has come to Andrea to ask specifically about something her child said at the hospital, something he said about his suicide attempt. She wants to know the words he said, but Andrea, Rancière comments, is not interested in words, because whatever words the boy may have used, Andrea already knows what those words mean: “What interests him is what is behind words: behind speech, what explains it; behind the individual pain that seeks its meaning in a child’s sentence, the great social pain.”¹² And this social pain is not something that will be cured except by action, by class struggle and social change. Thus he asks Irene to come with him to the poor suburbs to meet another child that needs help, a boy whose problem is simpler than the ones of her own son. All he needs is money for medical treatment. The boy needs money, and Irene has money. The boy is a poster child of the great social pain, and Irene needs to see the great social pain. Thus, the roles in Andrea’s play are set, and a narrative and an ending are suggested, even before their excursion to the suburb begins. “A guided tour.”¹³

The guided tour by Andrea follows from Irene’s attempt to figure out what the child said before he died, but it does not give her the answer she is looking for. For Andrea is not

¹¹ Rancière, “A Child Kills Himself,” 111.

¹² Ibid., 112.

¹³ Ibid.

interested in what was said. “Irene went to him to find out what was said, but, as we know, this is not what he’s worried about. He is there to unveil. His mastery defines a certain regime of what is represented: there is something to see, something hidden.”¹⁴ Andrea is, Rancière writes, not concerned with seeing, hearing and knowing that which is in plain sight before us. He is interested in the reality and the reasons that are hidden behind it. What he promotes is not attention, but consciousness, the consciousness of someone who has disclosed what is hidden.¹⁵

3.3 “To go see somewhere else”

Irene’s first trip to the other side of the city is a guided tour, where Andrea intends to show her exactly what the great pain of society looks like. However, she will later return to the suburb on her own to revisit the family of the child that she has helped. This time, Rancière describes, the visit to the suburb will bring about an instance of displacement: something leads Irene off her usual path, but also off the path Andrea has prescribed for her with his guided tour. Thus we have arrived at the second imperative of the movement of reminiscence: to go see somewhere else. What she meets in the poor district this time, when the guide is not there to tell her what she is looking at, is not simply the affirmations of Andrea’s diagnosis of society, but the people themselves. Here is misery and poverty, yes, but also song, celebration, intrigues and play, and of course all kinds of other problems, which are personal rather than a variety of the great social pain. In a scene just after she has visited the celebrating family of the child she helped with medical treatment, she is outside again, on her way to the tram. She looks back at the buildings of the poor suburb, as if she can suddenly take it all in with fresh eyes. All of a sudden her attention is caught by an unexpected commotion. Children are running towards the river, where a body has been washed up on the bank. She follows the stream of people; she has completely forgotten that she was on her way to the tram. This is an important moment in Rancière’s re-enactment of the film’s chain of events: important enough for him to begin his text with a description of this very moment in the plot. Already in the first sentence, on the first page, Rancière wants to establish this moment as the real beginning of Irene’s journey and thus also of the story he wants to tell us:

¹⁴ Ibid., 144.

¹⁵ Ibid., 115.

A wintery sky above the landscape of a working-class suburb. A woman seems out of place here. [...] The foreign woman stares intensely at a confused spectacle near the riverside. She does not know, we do not know, that this is the very moment she is losing her way.¹⁶

When Rancière again arrives at this moment, later in his account of the plot, he describes it like this:

All of a sudden she turns around. She leaves the frame, although not in the technical cinematographic sense. [...] What is at stake is] not a play between what is in and out of the shot, between voice-on and voice-off, but a *hors-lieu*, something outside of any place, and the encounter of a character with this *hors-lieu*, which, in subjective terms, is called a conversion. A conversion is not in the first place an illumination of the soul, but the twisting of a body called by the unknown.¹⁷

Quite literally, what Irene is called by is something unknown: she is drawn towards the river by the sudden commotion, but she does not know what caused it. More profoundly, however, what takes place is Irene's encounter with the non-place, the "outside of any place" (literally translated, *hors-lieu* means: *hors*—outside; *lieu*—place), of the poor district and the people living there. What does this mean? At the beginning of the film, Rancière notes, the workers and the poor are already present in the consciousness of Irene. They do occupy a minimal role in her understanding of society, simply as the ones who are on strike, thus causing her late arrival home for a dinner party.¹⁸ Then, on the first trip to the suburb that she did, guided by Andrea, the poor people and the suburb played a very specific role in his story about society. What Irene now encounters, on her solo trip to the suburb, is without such a predefined name or role. It is the unknown that calls her, and it prompts her to leave the frame. If the poor suburb is a specific *place* in Andrea's story about society, that is, a place made up of people and relations we know and can explain, what Irene now encounters is something else: "a *hors-lieu*, something outside of any place," as Rancière puts it in the citation above. At the beginning of Irene's journey, a process of illumination is suggested: at first the inconvenient strikes is a mere source of irritation, later we witness the sense of injustice she feels after having observed the conditions in the suburb for the first time together with Andrea. She can now understand the reasons for the strikes, because she has seen the grim truth behind capitalism. We expect the ideological blindfolding that caused her egocentric ignorance about

¹⁶ Ibid., 107.

¹⁷ Ibid., 116.

¹⁸ Ibid., 114.

the reasons of the strike to slide off. Indeed, it is about to slide off, but not in the way Andrea wants. His project is to educate Irene's consciousness, to make her see the real meaning of what is taking place in front of her eyes, and demonstrate to her the real meaning of words like *worker* and *class struggle*. As we have seen, however, Rancière does not describe the conversion Irene goes through in this crucial moment as an illumination, but the "twisting of a body," an actual physical change of direction—of her gaze and of her steps, her body. It is precisely not an illumination, because there is no intellectual realisation involved. Her mind is not turned towards an answer or a truth, but she is "called by the unknown." Her movement is first of all one that brings her off track. From one moment to the other, she has left the *place* Andrea showed her and entered the non-place. She is distracted from her original purpose and drawn towards the river, for where she will be led further off the track, further into the unknown: In the confused scene around the body at the river bank Irene finds three children and she wants to follow them safely home. Thus she is no longer an observing bystander or a visiting benevolent bourgeois: she is suddenly drawn into an unknown scenery. She is led by hand, as it were, by the children she was supposed to help. Her path is no longer the same, and her business with the people in the suburb has changed character: it has become personal. She is neither the curious bourgeois on a guided tour, nor the self-appointed expert on the sufferings of the people. The lively, but poor mother she meets in the shed where the children live soon becomes a friend. She is someone who is not only depressed and disillusioned, as one would expect from Andrea's descriptions of the conditions in the suburb, but a woman who has dreams, lovers, regrets, joy and hospitality—in addition to financial problems. This woman is, Rancière writes, "as burdened with children as she is unburdened with a husband, [and] cannot be situated in the space of the tour."¹⁹ What she finds in the people she meets is not reducible to the pre-defined categories that she is offered by Andrea. Their lives and situations are not mere examples of the great pain of society, but individual stories. Thus the turning of her gaze and the short walk together with the children becomes her "short voyage to the land of the people"—the true people (cf. the title of Rancière's book). This undefinable unknown that the people is, when it is not explained and placed in categories, is what calls Irene to convert her gaze and change her path. Thus she leaves the frame; the frame that kept her old life in place, but also the frame offered to her by Andrea, the frame that will hold all the bits and pieces of what she observes together in a coherent picture and narrative. In the short voyage to the people has also made her a foreigner.

¹⁹ Ibid., 116–17.

A foreigner? A foreigner, Rancière writes, because she has left behind her home and lost her way. This physical movement—the turnaround to look at what was going on by the river and the walk with the children—is for Rancière much more than just a delay or a detour in her schedule: what happens is of fundamental importance to Irene’s character. Her representations of the society, and of herself as a member of it, is at stake. He writes: “This is how her madness begins: she takes a step to the side, losing her way.”²⁰ About this step aside Rancière writes:

We are no longer *at home* in society, in the sort of social home that allows a visitor who has left her own home and world at the other end of the [tram] line to know where she is, to find a place for herself in another’s home.²¹

What Rancière sees in Irene’s step aside, is the exit of a home, the becoming of a foreigner. The bourgeois woman from the west side of the city was a foreigner in the suburb right from the beginning, but she was still at home in her specific foreigner role when she came to visit. There were the workers, the ones whose lives are spent next to the production lines between the noise and the dust from engines; and there was the bourgeois woman, who has come to visit. Their relations and their roles were already set, so that she was at home in her role even if she was the territory of others. This is not any different from how the striking workers made their presence felt in the city centre, causing Irene’s delay. Leaving the path to the tram after having accomplished her mission, she also leaves the society she was at “home” in and where she had a specific role with a specific business in the suburb. For what this “home” is constructed of, is only a certain set of picturing society. It is possible to leave it and venture out in the unknown:

For there are a finite number of possible statements, of credible ways of putting together a discourse or a set of images about society. And the moment arrives when the border is crossed and one enters into what makes there be sense, which for that very reason does not itself make sense, so that one must continue to walk under the sign of interruption, at the risk of losing the way.²²

What the scene on the way to the tram stop pictures, is exactly the moment when that border is crossed. Rancière does not simply call what is outside it ‘the unknown’ or ‘what makes no sense.’ First of all, what Irene enters is the very territory of not yet defined relations and

²⁰ Ibid., 117.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

actions. Thus she “enters into what makes there be sense,” where something new happens, that is not already signalled and held together in the map of society that she operates with already. The workers on strike, the annoyed and ignorant upper class woman, the intellectual Marxist guide to the suburbs, the benevolent bourgeois woman—they are all images that are familiar to us and which we immediately know how to understand and organise. Just as *Europe '51* brings about a real event, something that is not suggested already at the poster for the film, so does Irene’s step aside bring about something that is not already held together and made sense of by the discursive maps of society she knows, by what she expected from her visit to the suburb. Before that moment—when she walked along already defined paths, through the already defined places and taking on already defined roles—what already made sense was merely repeated and verified. Now, however, as she is wandering off-path, in a landscape out of any place, she is in the realm of “what makes there be sense.” Instead of following a path, she now walks “under the sign of interruption.” Interruption: in the same manner as the event is an interruption that pushes subjects out of their paths and demand them to rework their representations.

Such a way of getting lost will, writes Rancière,

[...] lead one who has left behind the categories of what can be said about society, about the people, about the proletariat, or some other representable thing of this sort, to the point where what comes back to us from what we say is that no one can see where we’re going.²³

This is what constitutes Irene’s “madness”: that what she is saying about the world around her, what she is saying about her choices and where she walks, is not understandable to others, simply because she does not speak with the words they know how to decipher. This mad way of walking under the sign of interruption, is the very same that we saw in Socrates’ way of life: a rejection of the standardised way of representation, in favour of his own habit of always stopping, thus interrupting the sequence of events, and asking again the fundamental questions of the meaning of things. It has been pointed out by others, Rancière adds, that the fates of Socrates and Irene are strikingly similar: both were ‘put away’ by society—sentenced to death or locked up in an asylum—because of their simple sin of not doing what society expected of them. Rancière adds to this, however, that the fundamental similarity with Socrates is not in how the plot ends. Instead the “Socratic presence”

²³ Ibid., 117–18.

[...] is first of all in the relation between the event and reminiscence, in the sign of interruption that sets us walking another way, an interminable walk in the course of which the subject exceeds everything that it intelligibly could be said to be one with.²⁴

In this way the crossing of the borders of ordinary discourse and ordinary methods of operation is simultaneously the exceeding of one's own representation within the context of those ordinary discourses and ordinary methods of operation. In other words, the derailment from the trajectories that are integral to our reality is also a derailment of the trajectories of the self. Rancière equally describes this exceeded subjectivity as madness and sainthood. His use of these words, and the way he combines them, is worth having a closer look at.

One obvious reason why Rancière starts writing about sainthood—and Rancière points this out himself—is that Rossellini's original motivation to make the film was to explore how a modern version of the story of Francis of Assisi would play out. At the very end of the film, Irene is locked up in her cell at the asylum. Standing in the window behind the iron bars, she appears like a saint to the small crowd of people who has gathered beneath to support her. Silently she gestures her love to them, almost like a blessing.²⁵ But there seems to be more to Rancière's use of the word sainthood. At this point Rancière looks back at his first thoughts on *Europe '51* from when he watched the film many years earlier. At that time, he was still a neo-Marxist disciple of Louis Althusser, and his analysis of the film was quite different. The young Rancière criticised the way the film turned Irene towards a saint-like character. In the middle of the film Irene visits a church. In his earlier analysis, Rancière recalls, he described the scene as the turning-point where she goes from rational to irrational. When we see Irene climb the stairs from the street up to the church, she was also ascending from realism into the madness of sainthood. Thus, he argued, she leaves the course of growing consciousness that Andrea had attempted to lead her onto. We can here see one of the links between sainthood and madness: the irrationality of religion, which the young Rancière criticised Rossellini for flirting with, versus the rationality of the Marxist scholar. The saint is the true mad person: a Joan of Arc or a Francis of Assisi, someone who answers to something beyond reason. Although such madness can lead to extraordinary good deeds, like in the case of Francis of Assisi and arguably also in the case of Irene (but may also, we must add, lead to fanatic violence, as in the case of Joan of Arc), the turn towards sainthood was, for the young Rancière, a serious setback because it was a turn away from the correct consciousness. Now

²⁴ Ibid., 118.

²⁵ Ibid., 127.

however, he thinks differently. This does not mean that he embraces the full madness of sainthood on the cost of rationality. Instead he rearranges and redefines the alternatives. First of all, Rancière no longer imagines the conversion to sainthood as a vertical movement; away from the street, up towards what is holy. Instead he thinks of it as a horizontal movement, a step to the side. This step to the side was taken already on her way to the tram stop, as we have seen. Rancière elaborates:

The genesis of sainthood is thus not any revelation in the smoke of incense between the church's pillars, but the chance of the deviation that afterward leads little by little toward someone we must call our neighbor. Little by little we have gone where we should not go, where we no longer know where we are. It is in this way that we become foreign to the system of places, that we become the action of our own reflection.²⁶

The incident at the river bank is quite literally described as the genesis of sainthood; it is “the chance of the deviation” from her path to the tram “that afterward leads little by little toward someone we must call our neighbour,” a burdened mother who becomes a friend. “For she who had been invited to look behind things, the break comes from looking to the side instead. At this precise moment, by her own act, Irene bids farewell to this famous consciousness that she seemed to me to lack.”²⁷ What Irene becomes mad in the sense that she bids farewell to the consciousness one may acquire from listening to scholars and which normally guides the thoughts and actions of rational people. The alternative she chooses, though, is not religious dogmatism, but to become the action of her own reflection. This is quite obviously a critique of the neo-Marxist understanding of history and personal agency that Rancière earlier defended. Now Rancière does not describe the subject as embedded in the collective movement of the great forces in history, like capital and class struggle. He says precisely the opposite: the subject is a being that is capable of letting the powers of its own reflection be the driving force of its actions, thus able to think and act across the trajectories we know as history and culture, not only as parts of their interminable unfolding. Since the Enlightenment personal autonomy is no new thought of course. However, Andrea's and Althusser's social theory is a product of the Enlightenment too. What seems to make Rancière's idea of a subject that ‘becomes the action of its own reflection’ something else than just another way of proclaiming the programme of Enlightenment, is that his subject bids farewell not only to dogmatism, but also to the consciousness that will make us look beyond and explain

²⁶ Ibid., 121–22.

²⁷ Ibid., 121.

everything. Instead of a classical notion of autonomy, Rancière constructs a notion of foreignness—the foreignness of a mad person, someone who is no longer “at home in society”—that is accompanied by trust. “A point of view of mistrust: behind things is where their reasons lie.”²⁸ When Irene, “she who had been invited to look behind things,” continues to walk into the unknown after the initial interruption, it is because she shows trust. What the Rancièrian notion of sainthood has in common with the original religious sainthood, thus, is the madness of trust: the trust that leads a person to condemn the trajectories and identities we know as our reality and walk a quite different path. But it does not therefore lapse into religious dogmatism. Rancière explicitly links this “Christian” (here Rancière too uses quotation marks) way of becoming a foreign to Socrates’ way of being foreign. He refers to an episode in *Phaedrus* where Phaedrus, Socrates’ walking companion, asks if he believes in the religious myths about what took place along the path they are walking. Phaedrus seems to believe what the rational men of science say: that the supernatural events the myth speaks of must have had some natural cause. He asks what Socrates believes, as if to test the great philosopher. Rancière paraphrases and comments on Socrates’ answer:

“If I disbelieved it,” responds Socrates—or rather, if I was an unbeliever like our men of science—I would not be an *atopos*, someone who is displaced, an extravagant. Socrates’ response links displacement with belief or, rather, trust (*pistis*). It is likewise an act of trust that leads Irene out of the frame, displaces her. And her entire itinerary can be placed under these two categories of displacement and trust.²⁹

One may ask how to interpret Socrates answer to Phaedrus. How could the great philosopher be naïf enough to believe things happened the way and for the reasons the myth tells? But perhaps this question is wrong. For it seems to suggest that Socrates should ask for reasons behind the myth, instead of simply asking *what* the myth says. The difference seems to me to be tantamount to the difference between asking ‘why did the child kill himself?’ versus asking ‘what did the boy say?’. What Rancière implicitly suggests, it seems to me, is that Phaedrus should rather ask Socrates ‘what did the myth tell you?’. By focusing merely on whether the myth is true or not, “our men of science” reduces the myth to a question of verifiable truth, of science. Rancière thus draws a parallel between the “men of science” in ancient Greek and the Marxism of Andrea. He was not interested in the boy’s words, only in the Marxist science that would reveal the reasons behind the words. It seems to me that Rancière here also hints to his

²⁸ Ibid., 122.

²⁹ Ibid. (Rancière is here loosely paraphrasing Plato’s *Phaedrus*, 229c.)

own critique of Althusser that I briefly mentioned in chapter 2. Althusser contrasted ideology with science, arguing that whereas ideology are mere ideas and words that prevent one from seeing reality as it is, a Marxist social *science* should aim to see through the obfuscation.³⁰ However, Socrates' answer turns the question that Phaedrus (and Andrea and Althusser) asks about the truth of the myth, upside down. Socrates does not say whether he actually believes the myth, but states that if he *dis*believed it, he would not be an *atopos*, someone *out of any place*, that is, someone that encounters the *hors-lieu* that Rancière wrote about above. Now, to not disbelieve something is not the same as truly believing it. It may perhaps be read as an ironic or hypothetical approach to the question of truth, something like: 'Ok let's *say* it's true... Where does that lead us?' This is a kind of agnosticism that signifies artistic work in general, Rancière adds: for "[...] the artist, as such, is an agnostic: he does not express faith; what he does is to establish a point of view."³¹ Perhaps we could say, then, that when Rancière quotes Socrates' answer to Phaedrus, Socrates' omission to affirm the myth's truth is equally important as his proclaimed trust in what the myth says. It invokes an altogether different relationship to the question of truth. It seems to me that Rancière thus defines a space for thought that is neither this nor that, in which the subject remains a foreigner. What the naïve believers of the myth and the denying scientist have in common, is not only that their minds are fixed on the matter, but more importantly, it seems to me, that the pressing issue for both of the groups is whether the myth is true or not true. Rancière, however, seems to shift the focus over to the myth it says, to what it says and what could mean. To dwell with that question, or to dwell with the words uttered by a child, requires that one trust words. This does not mean to trust that the words are always true, although, the question of verifiability is still not the important question here. Rather, it seems to me, Rancière proclaims a trust in the meaningfulness of words: on the one hand, to trust that the words may appear meaningful to you and, on the other hand, to trust one's own ability to engage with the words and find meaning. By taking on this attitude towards words, one ventures into a space of uncertainty. Thus, one also needs to trust one's own ability to walk alone, without the safe company of a consciousness or some definite criteria for deciding what to believe or not. However, this is not only a question of word. The reference to Socrates and the myth was just an example. More generally, this conversion to become an *atopos* also seems to be what is at stake in

³⁰ Cf. Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*.

³¹ Rancière, "A Child Kills Himself," 123.

Rancière's story about Irene. In her case, it is not an encounter with words that is at stake, but a general encounter with people and society.

3.4 “To remember oneself”

It may seem like Rancière defies the immediate need to seek explanatory models or dogmas to categorise and describe events we encounter. By doing this, we run the risk of, sacrificing our own ability to make sense of events and instead follow the theory or dogma we are thinking in terms of. When something is unclear, there is often the wish to unveil and explain. “But the question is not one of unveiling, but of encircling. Irene's gaze encircles. The halo of sainthood begins as the modesty of this labor of attention. A labor that singularizes self and other.”³² Acting and observing with trust demonstrates a kind of respect for oneself and for others, whose lives, works and words we encounter. This way subjects, self and other, are distinguished from the reign of representations in which we are hidden behind roles. But this is equally a ‘singularisation’: the realisation of self and other as truly singular entities, indeed foreigners, not fully representable with reference to socially constructed categories. This is the practicing of an “egalitarian foreignness,” Rancière points out, which “puts into peril everything that is inscribed in the repertoires of society and politics.”³³ He continues: “The gaze undoes the confusion of the represented—at the cost, of course, of another confusion, that of social identities whose distinction depended precisely upon the first confusion.”³⁴ It seems that what Rancière is trying to do is to isolate the most fundamental component of the self, the subjectivity. By liberating the gaze from all the representations that society fed to it, he encircles the true subjectivity, the part of the self that is not defined by the representations.

At one point in the film, Irene voluntarily works in a factory for one day. However, she does not, Rancière points out, do it as a Marxist apprentice who wants to educate herself about the struggles of the working class, but simply in order to help her friend, the mother from the shed, who need to be off work for a day, but will lose her job if she does. What Irene, the non-worker in a worker's environment, meets in the factory, demonstrates for Rancière the forces that work against any liberation of the gaze:

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

What the foreigner perceives, in the noise and dirt of the factory, as the intolerable itself, is the assault upon the gaze. The factory is in the first place in uninterrupted movement that hurts the eyes, that gives you a headache. It is a constant and unceasing procession of sensory shocks, in which, along with the ability to look, the possibility of thoughtfulness and respect is lost.³⁵

What Rancière sees in the visual and audible noise of a factory, is a constant stream the assembly line, an unstoppable production, the constant movement of heavy metal.

Uninterrupted, he writes, clearly defining the factory as an environment that effectively prevents the interruptions I have mentioned above. The lack of pauses from this “unceasing procession of sensory shocks”—not only by the assembly line, but also by the fact that there is no opportunity to take a day off—prevents the eyes from looking in another direction than in front of the hands, awaiting their next task. It prevents the ears to listen carefully to what someone says, because no one says anything in the too loud noise. And it prevents the mind from wandering off, to think. Such is the effect of shock. Rancière points out that Irene will later recognise the very same method of pacification in the asylum she is locked up in at the end of the film, but there the shocks are actual electroshocks.

In more or less gentle or violent forms, there are two fundamental techniques of society described by the film: shock and interpretation. On the one hand the movement of the assembly line and the burst of electricity; on the other, the Rorschach blots—the nothing that you have to say something about—to be interpreted, and the system of explanatory attributions and inferences that make up the audible discourses of the social, that create society.³⁶

Not only does society force upon the subject an unceasing stream of shocks, but also the immediate exercise of interpretation and the requirement to take part in that exercise. The Rorschach blots are seemingly meaningless figures printed on cards that the patients at the asylum are asked to interpret and say something about. Thus one is forced to say something about that which there is nothing to say about, which is mere shape and mere colour. It is not that the blots on the prints are completely uninteresting to the eye, but the fact that a description and some associations are required, so that the work of the gaze can be immediately tied up, by the psychiatrist’s explanations, to a system of representations and meaningful discourses. In this way the subject, the patient, can be classified and assessed as sane or insane. Rancière is not writing to criticise the methods psychiatry in the 1950’s,

³⁵ Ibid., 125.

³⁶ Ibid., 125–26.

however. It is only an example of the method of pacification that is general to and embedded in the workings of society. The stream of shocks takes the place of interruptions, and the immediate interpretations fills the following silence, the void, where the labour of reflection could have taken place. Effectively there is no room for events. At the beginning of the text Rancière describes an event as what “first of all relates to the nothing, the *niente*, that runs throughout the film [...]”³⁷ For if it has a name that is already at one’s tongue then it is not an event, something new or even intolerable. But in face of the stream of shock and interpretations, there is no room for nothing. When Irene replies to the psychiatrist that she can see nothing in the Rorschach dots, she gives the one answer they cannot accept. To answer ‘nothing’ is to call for something that does not exist and should not exist in the system of shock and interpretation. “*Nothing* has neither place nor reason to exist. It is a pure vertigo, a call for the void.”³⁸ But Irene has sought exactly that; she has willingly, step by step, walked until she was out of any place. She must truly be a madwoman. This struggle is repeated again when the psychiatrists asks Irene about her motivations for the life she had chosen, in service for the poor. They can only understand her choice in two ways, so they ask if she is a communist or a religious. Again Irene can answer nothing. Her actions were not made in accordance with a system of thought that she has adopted, but in accordance with her gaze and her reflection:

What is at stake in the struggle going on under our eyes is precisely the effort to liberate the gaze from the assault that both shock and interpretation lay to it, to restore to it the sovereignty that allows it to act, to determine the proper gesture.³⁹

And there we arrive at something very central to this text: the relationship between intelligible discourse and the actions and movements of people. First of all, it is worth noting that by writing about the proper gesture, Rancière zooms in at the minimal of the meaningful movements of the body, not different from what Rossellini’s camera does according to Rancière. The gesture: a simple movement that can signal the briefest of feelings but may change a whole course of events. The gesture does not, though, carry in it a whole understanding of the narrative it takes part in. It does not suggest a whole line of following gestures and actions. It is not an action that is carried out with an intended purpose, and which is grounded in a specific understanding of past events and points towards a specific

³⁷ Ibid., 110.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 126.

development of future events. Rather, the gesture is a simple reaction of a body-intellect to what happens in its immediate presence; it is the movement of a body that signals meaning. By focusing on the singular gestures, Rancière performs the labour of attention that liberates the gaze and singularises self and other. Instead of looking at Irene as an example of either this or that pattern of behaviour, instead of integrating all her words and actions into a meaningful narrative, he dwells with her movements and her gaze. Thus it is possible to see Irene as a singular, whose gestures are determined by her gaze.

By focusing on the link between these two basic forms of interaction between a subject and the world—gaze (and together with it, all the other senses) and gesture—Rancière restores to the subject the freedom that is necessary for it to act, not merely reproduce. Simultaneously he also restores—and this is important—the subject’s freedom to not complete an action, not to finish the path one has set onto. It is precisely not so that if one has said A, one must also say B. The series of gestures that make up a recognisable type of behaviour may always be diverted or held back because one is not bound to one course of action. Watching one gesture may invoke an expectation of a following series of events, a gesture may seemingly imply point towards a specific end—but this is no necessity. One is always free to determine the proper gesture. This does not mean, though, that one is always able to make good decisions as long as we are not influenced by other people’s will. Rancière does not appear to me to make a distinction between the individual and the social that coincides with a distinction between good and evil. Neither does ‘proper’ in “proper gesture” appear to mean the one and only suited gesture in that specific situation, because it is exactly rules about what the correct ways of thinking and acting that Rancière tries to liberate the mind from. What makes the gesture, it seems to me, proper is simply the fact that it is determined by an observing and reflecting subject. Rancière is not even saying that the decision is not influenced by ‘the social’; he only states that the foundation of the gesture is located in the subject and not in some underlying principle that governs how human relations and the course of history develop. Thus the possibility of diversion is opened. What Rancière does is seemingly part of his settlement with Althusserian neo-Marxism: He restores to the individual the power to change history, whereas his former professor saw the subject and its choices and actions as embedded in a power much stronger any individual. What Rancière seems to do, is to clear a space for the subject’s agency. This puts Rancière at odds with theoreticians who claim that ‘the social’ is the origin of everything that we take to be subjective. The initial freedom of the gaze and the

gesture, thus, is the lock chamber that prevents objectified culture and reason from having immediate control over the human agency.

I mentioned power: There are two different kinds of power at stake here, and they are embedded in the opposing positions of the polemic Rancière brings forward in his restaging of the film. On the one side, there is the pervasive narrative power of history, of ‘the social,’ which figures in the Althusserian view of society. It is not so much a power that forces bodies to act in this or that way, but a power that determined what is proper, what makes sense, and there what any action, any work, must refer to in order to avoid being a non-action or a non-work, that is, something meaningless. On the other side, there is the power of the subject, of reflection (which is not, by the way, to be understood as the rationalistic notion of a pure intellect—after all, Rancière does write about the free *subject*, not the free *mind*, and he does refer a lot to the body when he describes the subject’s diversion from habitual paths: the changing of the gaze, the twisting of the body, the step aside, the gesture, etc.). What Rancière portrays in his re-enactment of the film is the subject’s struggle to liberate the gaze from the assault of shock and interpretation, that is, to reawaken the power of the subject. The freedom of the gaze that we may find is not a freedom that the subject gains, because it was there all the time. The power is that we may recall it and thus re-gain the freedom of our gaze, reflection and actions. As we have seen, Rancière names this power and the way it converts a subject already at the beginning of “A Child Kills Himself”: “it is the power of reminiscence, of recalling a thinking subject to his or her destiny.”⁴⁰ In addition, Rancière mentions it in the very introduction to *Short Voyages*, where this text is printed: by retaining the curiosity of the gaze and undoing the certainty of place, the foreigner “reawakens the power present in each of us to become a foreigner on the map of places and paths generally known as reality.”⁴¹ This the power of reminiscence, the power that is present in all of us, seems to be at the very centre of what Rancière tries to convey.

Thus Rancière’s text about *Europe ‘51* is, at the end of the book, the story about someone, Irene, who regained this power. It is, in a sense, an educational story, for it portrays a whole journey that little by little changes a subject. It also zooms in at the very moments when changes take place: when the gaze converts, when the steps change direction, etc. However, it is not a story that ends on an unambiguously positive note—far from it. At the end of the film,

⁴⁰ Ibid., 109.

⁴¹ Rancière, *Short Voyages*, 3.

it is not the triumph of the free subject that we see, but a saint behind bars. The power of shock and interpretation remains unconquered—at least in society in general. For although the door lock clicks behind her in the cell at the asylum, Irene is left with the assurance that her own subjective power to be a foreigner is separated from the power of shock and interpretation. In this way, she shares the fate of the martyr saints who in the eyes of society has lost, but in her own eyes has already reached her goal. Instead of a final triumph comes peace: “In the asylum, as elsewhere, there is the possibility of peace in the face of the techniques of pacification, the possibility of remembering oneself by becoming a foreigner.”⁴² Peace and pacification is here not the same. Pacification is the way the shock and interpretation brings a subject to silence; either by overwhelming with words and images, thus making it do and say what has been done and said millions of times before, or by sedating it, locking it up, explaining it with a helpful interpretation: ‘She is mad.’⁴³ Yet, under the reign of shock and interpretation, there is still the possibility of peace, Rancière writes. The message here seems almost Christian-contemplative. As if Irene is blessed: The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1–12) proclaims it is possible to be “blessed”, even when one is suppressed, for those who are “poor in spirit,” the madmen and –women, and for “the meek”, the humble and naïve ones, who trust instead of question.

And in the film too, there is a connection of Irene’s fate to a blessing. As mentioned earlier, Irene shows a gesture of blessing at the very end of the film, a sign of peace from the window of her cell in the asylum. Thus, Rancière summarises the film as “the history of a gesture, a gesture that brings peace and salvation, the gesture that failed at the beginning but will succeed at the end.”⁴⁴ Rancière is referring to how the mother Irene, in the beginning of the film, fails to show the right gesture to her child. When the child needed her attention—not any specific answer or reassurance, only attention, a simple sign of love, something that would bring peace to the child’s troubled mind—she was occupied with preparations for the upcoming dinner party. Thence we know the rest: the child killed himself. Irene as we see her in the asylum, however, succeeds with her gesture and saves the life of a suicidal inmate. Rancière point out how Irene three times during the film is pictured bent over a bed, touching heads with someone suffering. The first time, it is the bed of her son, but she fails to be with him when he dies. The next time it is by the bed of the prostitute she met outside the church.

⁴² Rancière, “A Child Kills Himself,” 127–28.

⁴³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Irene cannot save the stranger from her tuberculosis, but she is there with her until she dies, comforting her in her pain. Finally, she succeeds in saving a life with her calming gesture, bent over the bed of the suicidal woman in the asylum. For each of these repetitions, Rancière points out, there is a gain in power.⁴⁵ She becomes more and more able to deal with the traumas of human life for every time. Once again, though it brings peace, this gesture is not the same as the pacification of shock and interpretation. The compassion it signals is no repetition of a single force. “For it is precisely not the same thing, the same trauma, each time.”⁴⁶ That is why Irene’s gain in power that enables her to show compassion is tantamount to the power of her liberated of the gaze. It is all about being able to see, listen and determine the correct gesture—or at least to dare to try. She saves the woman at the end, but she does not remove her pain completely, and she certainly does not rid the world of trauma. The peace and salvation she can signal with her gesture, thus, is not the eternal peace. Her appearance in the window of the asylum in the final scene of the film is not the Parousia that will end all sufferings. All she can do is to blow a kiss, tenderly, from

[...] behind the bars of her window, to the people from the working-class suburb who have come to see her. Quite simply, she gives them her benediction. The correct gesture is the end of the journey, the memory of a wandering astray that has become an act of peace.⁴⁷

A gesture on the verge of madness, it is, the way she gives her blessing to the people like a saint. At the same time, however, there is no saint-like about it at all. She does not signal the one true consolation. Her movement is nothing but a simple human gesture, shown by a subject to another subject. It is precisely not the way Andrea suggested, that every individual’s pain is part of a much greater suffering to which science and ideology can provide the final solution. Instead of addressing a theory, she addresses the suffering subject itself. That is how she makes her voyage to the land of the people—the persons, the subjects, the individuals—instead of the people represented by a certain interpretation of their condition, like ‘the working class.’ And all Irene can offer to these people is, after all, the simple gesture that leaves peace and salvation—for a moment, for a while—to another person; the power of an eye that sees, an ear that listens and a hand that shows a sign of peace, even when the power of shock and interpretation persist.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 109 and 127.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 127.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

4 “The Stage of the Text”

In my attempt to look at the profound notions in Rancière’s philosophy, I have now looked at his text “A Child Kills Himself.”¹ In that text Rancière does not initially set out to argue a point, but through his comments on the film *Europe ’51*, he draws into play questions of the link between knowledge and society, between perception and reflection and also his aspects of his settlement with Althusserian Marxism. In the text I am now going to focus on, Rancière more directly questions the ideas of Althusser: “Althusser, Don Quixote and the Stage of the Text”² questions Althusser’s idea of reading. After having presented the context and premise of Rancière’s text, I will present my reading of the text step by step, going through the different aspects of Rancière’s account of Althusser’s idea of reading and the way he displays the foundations for this view.

4.1 About the text

“The Stage of the Text” is printed in the book *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing* (1998).³ The title refers to the Christian notion of the Word that became flesh. In the Bible, God, the Word, became flesh and entered into the world by as Jesus Christ. What belonged to the divine, not to this world, became part of the world and influenced it. This biblical picture thus becomes a metaphor for what Rancière’s book is about. Rancière writes about the way words seek to enter the world and reach the mind of the readers. In the book, he focuses on how people have tried to make literature interact with the world, how people have doubted or proclaimed its ability to do so, and also on how he thinks words actually do influence. The book comprises a series of related but freestanding essays on various kinds of writings. In this book too, Rancière performs a reading of Wordsworth’s poems, but he also writes about Mandelstam, Balzac, Rimbaud and Proust. However, Rancière does not confine himself to readings of poets and novelists. The book also comprises readings of the “literature of the philosophers”; one text about Deleuze, and the text about Althusser that I will present a reading of: “The Stage of the Text.” Here, Rancière takes a closer look at the idea of reading and writing that figures in Louis Althusser’s writings. Rancière first looks at how Althusser establishes a method of so-called symptomal reading in opposition to what he calls a

¹ Rancière, “A Child Kills Himself.”

² Rancière, “The Stage of the Text.”

³ Rancière, *Flesh of Words*.

‘religious myth of reading.’ Rancière then shows how this undertaking of Althusser rests on a certain notion about text and about knowledge, by contrasting the endeavour of Althusser with that of the literary antihero Don Quixote. I find this text particularly interesting because the ideas that it associates with Althusser are, in a sense, also the ideas associated with the young Rancière himself. Most of the ideas of Althusser that Rancière engages with in this text, were presented in *Reading Capital*,⁴ the book that also Rancière wrote a chapter for in 1965, together with Althusser and a few other promising students. The theoretical project that the book was based on is one that Rancière later distanced himself from in *Althusser’s Lesson*.⁵ “The Stage of the Text,” thus, seems like a return to Rancière’s point of departure from Althusserian theory, that is, to the birth of his theoretical endeavour. Perhaps the text can point towards some of the basic notions or questions that support the Rancièrian undertaking?

Before I proceed, it should be mentioned that I do not intend to provide an exact account of Althusser’s idea of reading, neither to ‘arrest’ Rancière for having interpreted Althusser wrongly. My focus is not whether Rancière accurately describes the intentions behind the works he is interpreting, but rather to explore what he makes of them. Therefore, the Althusser that I mention in this chapter is more rightfully named ‘Rancière’s Althusser.’ The way Rancière represents, criticises and contrasts the ideas of his former professor seems, thus, to be an indirect way for him to voice the underpinning notions in his own theoretical universe.

Regarding the scope of “The Stage of the Text,” Rancière he states right at the beginning of the text:

[...] what interests me here is the way in which an idea of reading is formulated at the border separating the work from the absence of work. I will examine, then the idea of reading that supports the Althusserian undertaking, the status it gives to the book and the theatre of relationships between the text and what’s outside, between writing and the politics it establishes.⁶

What Rancière is after, it seems, is to identify the idea of reading that figures in Althusser’s work. The mentioned border between work and the absence of work suggests that Rancière is interested in how Althusser defines a work and distinguishes it from non-work, or the absence

⁴ Althusser et al., *Reading Capital*.

⁵ Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*.

⁶ Rancière, “The Stage of the Text,” 129.

of work. How can we understand this? Perhaps the following quote may help us. Still in the beginning of the text, Rancière quotes Althusser from *Reading Capital*:

“In the history of human culture, our time is at the risk of appearing one day as being marked by the most dramatic and difficult ordeal there is, the discovery and training in the meaning of the ‘simplest’ actions of existence: seeing, listening, speaking, reading—the deeds that connect men to their works, and those other works that get stuck in their throats, which become their ‘absences of works.’”⁷

Althusser here seems to me to identify reading, together with seeing, listening and speaking, as a simple action of human existence: it is how we connect to our works, to the cultural products that we create and share. However, Althusser also identifies reading, together with the other simple actions of existence, as what links us to the non-works: to what we have failed to create, that were only half-finished or got stuck in our throats. This appears to be how Althusser’s idea of reading is formulated, as Rancière writes in the quote above, on the border that separates work from the absence of work. There will be more about this later in the chapter. I will proceed in the order Rancière does, and start with his description of Althusser’s critique of the religious myth of reading.

4.2 The critique of ‘the religious myth of reading’

Rancière writes:

Althusser’s politics of reading gives itself a privileged adversary: the “religious myth of reading”: the myth of the book in which truth is offered in its flesh in the form of an epiphany or parousia, in which the discourse written is the transparency of meaning in the obviousness of its presence, of meaning that offers itself as a person, and can be read at sight, without obscurity.⁸

What is on Althusser’s mind is perhaps not so much the theories of reading that are connected to the Bible and other religious texts, where the Truth is assumed to be inscribed on the paper, ready to appear evident as a body of truth in front of the reader’s eyes. That is a question of faith. There is also the not necessarily religious belief that meaning is given in and by the text, that the words in the text spell out clear and unclouded meaning. Rancière writes:

⁷ Althusser quoted in Rancière, “Althusser, Don Quixote and the Stage of the Text,” 129.

⁸ Ibid.

This religious/speculative myth of the immediate presence of meaning in the written is, for Althusser, what secretly supports the naïve empiricism that identifies the words of the book with the concepts of science, and the concepts of science with the objects we can hold in our hands.⁹

The idea of reading that Althusser criticises is one that assumes a direct link between the word and its meaning. This idea, Rancière notes, is for Althusser the very same whether the reader sees in a text the inscription of divine truth, or the accurate, scientific description of the world. The naïve empiricist and the idealist are of course two quite different figures, but in this respect, they are similar: the words on the paper seem to coincide with a self-evident truth, which is revealed by the very presence of the words—be it a description of the physical world or an insight about the divine, beauty or something similar. Thus the use of the word ‘parousia’: meaning gives itself to the world in the form of writing, like Christ brought *Logos* to the world in the form of flesh. It is the critique of this idea, that the script is able to say something true that is devoid of any confusion, that Rancière seems to ascribe to Althusser.

The myth of religious reading is a privileged adversary, Rancière writes. The way Althusser (and an entire generation with him, he adds, referring to his own generation of young neo-Marxist thinkers) constructs the rebuttal of religious reading, is almost too convenient, he continues. For who does actually believe in “a truth that forms and yields its meaning at sight”?¹⁰ Rancière writes: “For even the book of the Christian religion can’t so easily be reduced to the parousia of a body of truth.”¹¹ Even within Christianity, which maintains that the one and only truth has been revealed to humans in the Scriptures, there is no proof of the immediate presence of meaning in what is written. For who knows exactly how to read the Bible? You may ask the Catholic, then you may ask the Protestant... Rancière comments that already Saint Augustin, in the Thirteenth Book of his *Confessions*, recognised that the Bible will always cause confusion over its meaning: “[...] this book never shows us anything but its dark side. The legible side is turned away, toward the side of the Father and the angels. So paradoxically it is turned toward the only ones who don’t need to read the Book [...].”¹² The book always lacks presence, Rancière writes. However, the Bible was only an example. What seems to be at stake, is a lack of presence in texts in general, i.e. a general absence. Of course, the pages, the cover and the letters are present, but the book as a body of meaning lacks

⁹ Ibid., 130.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

presence. It is never fully accessible to the reader. Its intended meaning is never completely within view. The book, therefore, is not only made up of words that we know and use every day. It is also something more, something which is not present, not immediately apparent on the script itself.

When Rancière here seems to join in on Althusser's rebuttal of the religious myth of reading, it does not mean, however, that they are on the same mission. Rancière writes that that what Althusser does, compared to what he himself does, is something much more convenient. For

[...] by coupling the religious speculation with naïve empiricism at the beginning, it ensures the entire chain of identifications whereby the economist and the humanist, the opportunist and the leftist, and all the other ill-matched couples symmetrically marked but the same original sin docilely take their places.¹³

Thus, Althusser can use this combined group of the religious speculative and the naïve empiricists as a convenient adversary for his own idea of reading. Althusser's adversaries are all marked by the same "original sin," Rancière puts it. With another biblical metaphor, Rancière here refers to the sin of Adam and Eve, who ate the forbidden fruit and acquired wisdom. If the belief that truth is immediately observable and unclouded is described as an original sin, it is perhaps because it is tantamount to a kind of intellectual over-confidence. By eating the forbidden fruit, the humans acquired wisdom to reflect, but lost, by the same token, their innocence. And they still lacked the ability to see and do the right things with their newly acquired wisdom. It seems to me, then, that Rancière again returns to the point he originally criticised Althusser for, namely his distinction between science and ideology. Ideology, in this picture, would be exactly the kind of intellectual over-confidence that seems 'smart' at first, but indeed obfuscates and prevents people from seeing the truth. Both the religious speculative and the naïve empiricists, thus, are marked by the same original sin: the intellectual over-confidence of thinking that their words and their ideas could speak truth, that what they saw and read was indeed the truth about their reality.

Conversely, Althusser sees through this obfuscation and validates what Rancière calls "the curious figure of a parousia of absence, a way of reading in which absence is shown openly in presence."¹⁴ The text always has some absences: something lacks for it to coincide with truth, there is an emptiness in the meaning of the text, something unfulfilled. The way of reading

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Althusser validates, reveals absence as it is inscribed in the inscribed in the text. This “parousia of absence,” as Rancière names it, is indeed a curious figure. We will have to look closer at how Rancière portrays this way of reading of Althusser in order to get a better grip on what he has in mind.

We recognise now, by the way, what Rancière means when he writes that Althusser’s idea of reading rests upon a certain relationship between, text, reading and absence. This echoes the Althusser quote the beginning of this chapter: reading is one of “the deeds that connect men to their works,” but also to their “absences of works.”¹⁵ This mentioning of “work,” however, requires a last remark before we follow Rancière further on his account of Althusserian reading. For the question remains if there actually is a text, a book, that is a work. Rancière writes this about Althusser: “The fixation on “religious myth” has an immediate effect: it ensures a certain mythification of the Book, it makes falsely obvious the book as a unit, the book as a thing, the book as meaning.”¹⁶ Althusser’s critique of “religious myth” does itself, in Rancière’s view, involve a mythification of the book, the text, or the work. I could add: The poststructuralist way of denouncing the myth of religious reading would simply be to denounce the continuity of the relation between words and meanings, thus denying that there are any meanings to a text beyond the mere play with words that language in general is. The book, thus, would not be a body of meaning on its own, but a mere cluster of words. However, without the certainty that the book is more than a cluster of words, but indeed a unit held together by its meaning, it would not make sense to talk about absences in the way Althusser seems to do. For what is absence if not the absence of *something*? In the book imagined as a mere cluster of words no embodied meaning, there can neither be any absence, no *something* that the words fail to properly convey, no continuum of meaning to be interrupted. The question in the next section of this chapter will be how Althusser portrays the meaning of a text. How is the relation between meaning and absence of meaning, in Althusser’s idea of reading?

4.3 Althusser’s symptomal reading

Rancière concentrates on how this game is at work when Althusser reads Marx’s readings of economists. These readings of Marx follow a theory of “oversights,” which, Rancière points

¹⁵ See footnote 7 in this chapter.

¹⁶ Ibid., 131.

out, Althusser places at the very centre of his idea of symptomal reading.¹⁷ These oversights can be characterised as blind spots in the works, instances where the author failed to see an important point or failed to see the real meaning of the work he or she created. Thus the name symptomal reading: it is about spotting, in the text, a symptom of the author's lack of understanding. One example of such a symptomal reading in Marx's text is his reading of Adam Smith. Here Marx analyses what Smith understood and not understood, what he saw and what he did not see. In short, Marx is naming the oversights of Adam Smith, a task made possible for Marx because he himself has understood and seen more than Smith, Rancière notes. Another example of symptomal reading in Marx is the one where he more generally identifies "[...] an oversight immanent in the texts of economists: no longer a failure to see what is in the field of visible objects, but a failure to see the concepts they themselves produced."¹⁸ Rancière here points out that Marx's readings are not, like in the case of his reading of Adam Smith mentioned above, restricted to identifying in the earlier economists an inability to construct a plausible theory because they failed to describe important aspects of society. What Althusser finds especially interesting, and which forms the core in the idea of reading that Rancière wants to describe, is how the oversight may also be a failure to see the concepts, the insights, the one's own theory has produced. What Marx found in the earlier economist were premature versions of the concepts that later would play important roles in Marx's theories. The earlier economist, which he mainly disagreed with, did nevertheless touch upon something very central to Marx's own analysis, but they could not see for themselves what they had stumbled upon. One example of this is when he spots in the economists a latent validation of the value of labour power. By discussing the price of labour, the economist had, according to Marx, immanently already produced the concepts he was looking for. The reason why they were unable to see it for themselves was that the questions they had asked were not the correct ones. Rancière notes how Althusser locates the problem to the very structure of seeing: the oversights Marx had discovered were the

[...] impossibility or prohibition of seeing that are internal to the structure of its *seeing*. What it can see is an answer to its question, the "value of labor." What it in fact produces is the answer to another question, that of the value of labor power. It cannot see this answer since it

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

answers a question that it did not ask, that the very structure of the field forbids it from posing to itself”¹⁹

The lacking question and the following failure to see the concept they had produced, was not a sign of a poor analysis, but a as a symptom of the inability to see. Within their structures of seeing, the full meaning of what they had produced was simply not possible to recognise.

At the heart of symptomal reading, Rancière notes, is the idea of knowledge as production. Note that the quote above mentions the *production* of the correct answer. Rancière adds that Althusser here understands *production* in line with its etymology: It means to “lead forward, to make obvious what is latent.”²⁰ Althusser here means something else than ‘production’ understood as the transformation of raw materials in factories, Rancière clarifies. I want to add that we must also not confuse ‘knowledge as production’ with the constructivist idea of knowledge as a construction that finds its ultimate ground in the meaning-making mind of the individual. In that case the idea of knowledge as being lead forward would not be possible. What Rancière finds in Althusser is the idea that knowledge is lead forward from somewhere, since it may present itself in the works of authors who are incapable of seeing it. In other words, Althusser maintains that knowledge is separate from the individual mind.

Let us return now, to the oversights that Marx and Althusser find in these confused and incomplete works. What Althusser sees in Marx’s reading of the economists is “the way in which the “right” answer figures already in the text [...] by pointing to the question that it lacks,” and “[b]y making us see these blanks, Marx would have us see that the classical text itself tells us that it is keeping silent.”²¹ This is what Althusser saw in Marx’s reading of the economists: the way Marx verifies that the answer is already there, in a way that can be illustrated by marking the oversights by with empty parentheses, like this: ().²² These parentheses demonstrate the presence of something that is mute and invisible, yet there; they mark the place of the missing concept, the hidden insight, the link to the correct question. The spotted oversights, thus, are the presence of absence in the text. We can now see the relation between Marx’s theory of oversights, Althusser’s symptomal reading and what Rancière identifies in Althusser as a “parousia of absence.” Rancière documents an understanding of text—and with it, reading and writing; the way we connect to our text-works—wherein what

¹⁹ Ibid., 132.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 133.

²² Ibid.

is written is related to what is not yet written, but will be said. of present absence places, more generally, everything that is said in a direct relation to what is not yet said, but will be said.²³

Ranci re draws our attention to the fact that Althusser calls the empty parentheses ‘suppressed dotted lines,’ and asks: why ‘dotted lines’ when there are no dotted lines, only parentheses? He suggests that perhaps the reason why the dotted lines are not there, is that they are not presentable. Dotted lines, he continues, is something we all know very well from elementary textbooks, wherein they perform a very simple task:

[...] the dotted lines are there for the missing words, words that the student must restore in a sentence left incomplete. These dotted lines that summon the right answer themselves assume the place of another procedure of knowledge: that of the answer to the teacher’s question.²⁴

Another procedure of knowledge: that is, another procedure than the one Althusser suggests in his description of knowledge as production. In the textbook, the dotted lines are there to test that the student remembers the words that he or she has learnt. The open gap of the dotted line demands a specific word for the sentence to make sense. Thus, the dotted lines of the textbook and the emptiness of the oversights in symptomal reading are very different kinds of gaps. Most strikingly, there is a difference in the two gaps’ relation to time: The word that the dotted line invokes already existed before the sentence was written, and it has knowingly been transformed into a gap. Putting the correct word in the correct place is therefore a mere confirmation of a knowledge, a knowledge that the student must acquire from the teacher, and that the teacher, in turn, once acquired from another teacher. The dotted lines thus correspond to

[...] a pedagogical procedure that is more elegant than asking questions. The teacher puts the finishing touches to his work by disappearing into the dotted lines. If he can disappear into them, of course, it is because he knows all the questions and all the answers.²⁵

The procedure of knowledge that dotted lines assume is a pedagogical procedure, one that seeks to reproduce, transit and affirm knowledge. The dotted lines, with their demanding blank space, evoke all the things the teacher represents: the correct answers, and with it, all the correct answers that together make up the discourse of questions and answers that is our reality and which the sentence in the textbook is embedded in.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 134.

²⁵ Ibid.

Thus we can understand what Althusser meant by “dotted lines suppressed,” Rancière comments. The gaps of the oversights are not the same as the gaps in the textbook—they are the negation of the negation of the dotted lines.

The parentheses are dotted lines denied, the twice denied figure of the teacher, who transforms the ordinary exercise of the pedagogue into an extraordinary exercise of the scholar. In effect, what the dotted lines ordinarily summon is simply a word [...]. But what the white space between parentheses summons is something else, not any word at all, but a concept: the lacking in a statement to become scientific: in short, its lack or its own invisibility.²⁶

When the scholar identifies an absence in the text it is not a mere word that is missing, but a missing concept, that is, a missing intellectual device that is needed to fully comprehend the sentence as it is written down. The emphasised difference between words and concepts shows what is at stake: namely meaning and the way meaning is organised, structured and clustered as concepts. Identifying the absence of a concept, therefore, is to grapple with the very meaning of the sentence; it is to suggest that the meaning of the sentence is another than what its author was able to see. An example of that is when Marx claims that the true meaning of what the earlier economists wrote is only comprehensible if we read what they wrote about the ‘value of labour’ as really being about the ‘value of labour power.’ The introduction of a concept that was lacking is not like introducing an extra word to the sentence; it is to tie the words on the paper to a specific concept that will grant it its place among scientific statements. That is why the task Althusser, according to Rancière, claims his task to be not an ordinary task, but a scholarly task: because he works with the meaning *behind* words, and with ensuring that the works that are obfuscated finally are matched with the concepts that will grant them a relation to the scientific and therefore also make them meaningful. What is curious about this method of reading, is that it is not about underlying or unexpressed concepts in the text, but about identifying the lack of a concept. The very absence of the correct concept or the correct question that will make us see the concept in the text.

Parentheses include absence as belonging to the statement in which they function, as being its own absence. Parentheses appropriate the absence produced by suppressed dotted lines. They bring about, in other words, the parousia of absence.²⁷

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

Instead of an absence that already that easily can be filled by way of clarification, Althusser's parentheses seem to designate an absence that points to something that the author has not yet thought of. The curious thing is the way Althusser, according to Rancière, describes the absence as being present in the text—even internal to the statements of the text—as an oversight. We can now appreciate why, Rancière describes Althusser's symptomal reading as supported by the idea of a 'parousia of absence'. The word *parousia* is originally Greek and means 'presence' or 'arrival,' but is also used in Christian theology to refer to the second coming of Christ. The absence is present in the text, and heralds the coming of a concept that will reveal the full meaning of the sentence and the work. Rancière depicts the emptiness between the Althusserian parentheses as the white space of virginity. He here seems to point towards the virginity told about in the Bible: the miracle of a child being born without conception, the idea that something completely new simply reveals itself without any natural cause. He also likens the shape of the parentheses with "the chalice of actual absence."²⁸ The 'chalice' seems to refer to the chalice in the Eucharist, the ritual statin the invisible presence of Christ and a Christian community of believers. In this way, Rancière seems to demonstrate that symptomal reading too is underpinned by speculative and almost religious notions. When Althusser assumes that the correct question figures, by virtue of its absence, in the text, although the author did not know it, he also assumes, according to Rancière, a kind of parousia: meaning simply reveals itself to the reader from inside the meaningless sentence itself, just like God revealed himself to the humans from inside wretched world itself. The absence thus heralds a fulfilment. It heralds the coming of a correct concept and a correct question that will make the text appear in the correct context.

All the religious metaphors aside, Rancière also puts it as simple as this: "If the quality of dotted lines is to indicate an absence, the quality of parentheses is to include, to mark a belonging."²⁹ The presence of absence in the text is itself the mark of belonging: The text belongs to a context. What context? What kind of belonging? Rancière shoes that Althusser's idea of symptomal reading rest on a specific notion of knowledge:

What links the theory of reading to the theory of knowledge is a certain vision of the community of knowledge [*savoir*], a certainty that knowledge makes community. And this

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 135.

community is first of all that of the textual continuum, composed of answers and questions that are still not matched, are still waiting to be matched.³⁰

In this community of knowledge, works are linked together as a massive web of questions and answers, like a cloth. This link between writing and a community of knowledge reveals why this is not a chapter only about reading and writing, but also about the understandings of knowledge that supports our ideas of reading and writing. Rancière describes the Althusserian vision of the community of knowledge as a cloth, woven of threads that each represent works by people. It is worth noting that the words ‘text’ and ‘textile’ are derived from the same Latin word, *texere*, which means ‘to weave.’ The mending of the holes in the cloth was an important task both to strengthen the Marxist science and to guard community: “The question of science is first of all that of community. It is this community that must leave no space for a void of any kind [...].”³¹ What recognises a confused or obfuscated work, is that it answers a question that it does not know yet. Questions and answers are supposed to match, and where they do not match, it is the task for symptomatic reading to reveal its lack and reinstall the work in its proper context. Rancière: “Symptomatic reading never encounters anything but inclusion, it always makes community, it always presupposes community.”³² This is exactly what makes it possible to think that a text may lead knowledge forward in the way Althusser does: that the validity of the knowledge that symptomatic reading produces is not rooted in the actual words of the text, but in something else, something behind the words by which we grant the words their legitimacy and meaning: the structure of the cloth.

Ordinary progressive educational vision identifies the wrong with the question that has not yet found its answer. The inverted/denied pedagogical vision of Althusser sees the wrong, on the other hand, in the answer that has not yet found its question.

Thus is the task of symptomatic reading: to put the text in its right place.

4.4 Literary solitude and madness

The symptomatic reading, thus, appears to be a method for patching and mending the gaps and fissures in the text, and more profoundly in the communal cloth, the textual continuum, that the text is part of. Rancière thus describes, as we have seen, Althusser’s symptomatic reading as

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 138.

³² Ibid., 135–36.

resting on an almost speculative idea of a parousia. But what is Rancière, then, thinking about this? He writes: “In the [Althusser’s] over-easy polemics against the parousia of the book, there is, much more deeply, more poignant, the dread of the fate of the Precursor, the one who preaches in the desert.”³³ For Althusser, according to Rancière, it is important that there is always an audience to which the text is speaking, and that audience is the community of knowledge. The relation between this communal cloth and the singular work is at the very centre of his understanding of reading/writing, so as to make sure that one is never writing alone, never crying in the wilderness, like the precursor. When Rancière here talks about crying in the wilderness and writing alone he seems to allude to a dispute Althusser had over the relationship between theory and action in Marxism: In a reply to one of his critics, Althusser claimed that Communists, when they are Marxist, and Marxists, when they are Communists, never preach in the desert.³⁴ ‘Communists,’ are here the ordinary people who act on the knowledge derived from Marxist theory. Their actions are theory that has revealed to them the truth about society. ‘Marxists,’ on the other hand, are the theorists who look behind things and formulate the explanatory theories that the Communists act upon. We can here think of the works of the Marxists and the work of the Communists (their deeds and actions) as standing in a relation similar to that between questions and answers in the communal cloth. Marxist, as long as they make connections between their theories and the real struggles of the people out there, and Communists, as long as they act in accordance with the insights revealed by Marxists, never speak alone. To avoid the fate of preaching to the desert, one must make sure that one’s work does not go astray. Astray from what? Astray from the common movement of a community that will, eventually, explain with theory the actions of the people, and prove with history the theories of Marxist.

The alternative is the fate of “preaching in the desert”—or “crying in the wilderness,” as Althusser originally wrote Rancière quickly adopts this metaphor. He points out that the fate of solitude that Althusser dreaded is exactly the fate of literature. Or to be more precise, he argues that it is the fate of writing that was embraced and came to positively signify literature after romantic era and the theorisation of modern novel.³⁵ In literature, the emphasis is on the power of words to give rise to thoughts and feelings, rather than on rigid concepts, and thus

³³ Ibid., 137.

³⁴ Ibid. – Rancière here paraphrases from: Louis Althusser, *Elements of Self-Criticism*, trans. Grahame Lock (London: NLB, 1976), 38–39: “John Lewis says that I am “crying in the wilderness”. Is that so? No, it is not! For Communists, when they are Marxists and Marxists when they are Communists, never cry in the wilderness. Even when they are alone.”

³⁵ Rancière, “The Stage of the Text,” 137.

the gate is opened for misunderstandings and, ultimately, for the author to cry in the wilderness. To contrast the figure of Althusser, and to illustrate the fate of literature Rancière here refers to the first modern literary hero, Don Quixote. He refers to the episode in *Don Quixote* when he instructs his squire Sancho Panza to bring a book for him to the nearest village. There, Sancho must find someone who is literate to copy a letter Don Quixote has written in the book onto proper letter paper and post it. Sancho points out that he will then not be able to get Don Quixote's signature at the bottom of the letter. That, Don Quixote replies, will not be a problem: Firstly, the addressee, Dulcinea, has no idea how his signature looks; secondly, she cannot read anyway; thirdly, she does not know Don Quixote; and fourthly, Dulcinea is not really Dulcinea, but a peasant named Aldonza Lorenzo, and she does not know that it is the one Don Quixote refers to as 'Dulcinea,' the addressee of the letter. Eventually, the letter was never sent, because Don Quixote accidentally put the book in his pocket.³⁶ "Thence, the solitude and madness of Don Quixote [...] come to signify literature itself, the adventure of writing alone, of the body-less letter, addressed to someone who does not know that she—or he—is its addressee."³⁷ This is exactly the fate that Althusser, according to Rancière, attempts to steer clear of: he wants

not to make "literature," not to address letters without addressee; not to be Don Quixote, the fine soul who fights against windmills; not to be alone, not to be the voice of one crying in the wilderness, an activity by which one loses one's head, literally as well as figuratively.³⁸

One loses one's head literally, he writes. It seems to me that Rancière again is referring to Christian notions here. For according to Christian tradition, beheading was the fate of the person who was originally known for 'crying in the wilderness': John the Baptist, the hermit and a precursor who lived and preached in the desert. This is from the prophecy at the opening of the entire New Testament (Mark 1:3): "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: / 'Prepare the way of the Lord; / Make His paths straight.'" However, one also loses one's head figuratively, Rancière writes. This is because the words of a precursor are pure madness, words without foundations, inspired and legitimised by something otherworldly rather than by the communal cloth of knowledge. It is interesting to note that Rancière makes no attempt to explain or signalise his reference to the Gospel and to John the Baptist, but enigmatically leaves it behind as some sort of riddle that perhaps is lost upon those who are not acquainted

³⁶ Ibid., 136.

³⁷ Ibid., 137.

³⁸ Ibid.

with the Scriptures. It is as if he attempts to silently demonstrate, and not simply argue, that no text is ever devoid of voids, that one never escapes the possibility that one's words will come across as meaningless cries. On the other hand, one might argue that Rancière by referring to the Gospel of Mark does exactly the opposite of what he tries to prove: he demonstrates how the true meaning of a text is only accessible if one looks at it as one part of a vast network of other works. By concealing what he tries to say in a reference to another work, he makes the true intention of his words only accessible to those who are able to analyse them and recognise the link to the other work. This objection, however, seems to me to rest on two misunderstandings: Firstly, the argument presupposes that as long as one recognises the words from the Scriptures, it is evident what Rancière is referring to and what he is trying to say. But it is not; because there is probably no other book which diverging interpretations have caused more wars and disagreement than the Bible. A reference to another work that is just as likely to be misinterpreted is not a key to any correct interpretation. Secondly, interpretation à la symptomal reading is not simply an attempt to understand the author's true intention with a text, but to discover in it where the author's intentions have been misguided or ignorant. A symptomal reading of Rancière's text would seek to find where he is confused and misguided, rather than listening to what Rancière actually says. And what he attempts to convey is partly expressed through his reference to the Gospel of Mark—and also through the imperfection of the reference, that both the reference and the meaning of the work he refers to may be lost on the reader. It seems to me that this is also Rancière's point: The possibility of misinterpretation, of the original intention of the author being lost in the wilderness of writing and reading. It seems Rancière demonstrates his point about the solitude of writing a twofold fashion: on the one hand, with his metaphors of the precursor who cries in the wilderness, and on the other hand, the absence of any attempt to escape the fate of writing alone, risking that his words will appear strange or without. Thus Rancière may himself appear like a Don Quixote.

4.5 The theatre of the text

Althusser, however, does everything in his power to avoid this fate, Rancière claims. In order not to speak to dead ears, and not to be straight away misunderstood, Althusser

produces an extraordinary theatricalization of the text. First of all it's a practice of interlocution, of setting the stage and assignment of roles. [...] Later the Althusserian text will

be invaded by the proliferating horde of subjects with initials, [...]. Not simply useful abbreviations but personified concepts, concepts that speak. That concepts speak instead of subjects, that is the first characteristic of the interlocution specific to the Althusserian text.³⁹

Rancière here seems to me to align Althusser's focus on scientific concepts with a distrust of subjects—the reading subject. Again, the difference between scientific concepts and mere words is emphasised. By letting concepts speak, Althusser makes sure that the arguments in the text are indeed scientific ones, and not mere words that may unwisely slip from the mouth of a person. What a person voices may always be a source of suspicion: a person may be undecided, change her mind, talk in riddles or blur her speech with ambiguous words. The concept, however, will stay pure, will hold its ground and not drift away. Rancière writes that by building the text around various interlocutors, Althusser makes sure that every sentence is replied to and interpreted in the way he wants to.⁴⁰ He attempts to weave a tight cloth in which there is no holes and loose threads. He thus provides a context and a scope for every utterance in the text: The stage of the text is set. The assignment of roles will make sure that there is no confusion about the speakers' positions. There will be left no room for mistakes concerning to whom the text speaks or what it speaks about. Rancière notes that this effort to secure the meaning of the words is utterly enhanced by the frequent use of

quotation marks and parentheses that displace the statements, their modality and the identity of the speakers, that give consistency to or remove it from voices, italics that withdraw words from ordinary usage and couch them in the direction of their meaning. Althusserian typography proliferates to surround nonmeaning and reduce it to its corner of the page. This work on the letter exorcises the Don-Quixotic madness, it saturates the page with relationships of community and conflict.⁴¹

Again we see Rancière emphasising how Althusser was driven by the dread of speaking nonsense, or to deaf ears. By theatricalising his texts, Althusser makes sure that the writing always takes place within a community of knowledge: we are sure that the different utterings of the text, the different voices it contains, are speaking to each other, that they refer to the same concepts when they use the same word, that when they answer each other, they fill each other's gaps and give meaning to each other's statements. Althusser stages the text as a theatre: everything leads forward to the denouement, when loose ends are tied together and

³⁹ Ibid., 141.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 142.

⁴¹ Ibid.

hidden plot details revealed.⁴² In the theatre, it is crucial that no one leaves or enters the stage when they are not supposed to. And the relationship between writing and the world, Rancière writes, takes for Althusser the form of a denouement: It points towards a fulfilment, where the theories of Marxist will bear fruits in form of the people's actions. The crucial thing also here, as in the theatre, is that no one leaves the stage before it is time.⁴³ In other words, that works will be left behind unfinished, theoretically obfuscated. Using this metaphor of the theatre, we could say that the big mistake that the students and the workers of May 1968 did, was to fail to act according to the play.

With the denouement of the play, we also reach the end of Rancière's text. It seems that Rancière, with this account of Althusser's idea of reading, has identified a connection between solitude and madness in Althusser, between community and knowledge, and between meaning and community. And he has identified a struggle: "Althusser has chosen a certain struggle against madness, the struggle against a *certain* idea of madness. [...] He has identified evil as the solitude of the absence of the work."⁴⁴ And: "In order not to be mad, in order not to be alone, he must [...] refuse to produce, by the hastes or delays of the law of the heart, the least void or the least tear."⁴⁵ For Althusser it is important to stick to the rational path, Rancière seems to write, and not let himself be lead to follow the law of the heart. At the same time, Rancière seems to point towards another approach to the imperfection of communication. An approach that is not so afraid of solitude, not so frightened by madness, that is not so obsessed with ensuring that we reach, at the end, a denouement that will clarify all confusions. For is not the subject someone who reads, interprets and finds meaning anyhow, even without someone leaning over their shoulders reassuring that they understand in the correct way? It seems to me, however, that this other approach that Rancière hints about would have to rest on an altogether different notion of the relationship between community and knowledge, and a different vision of madness and solitude.

In the following chapter, I will try to see if I can construct a picture of this alternative approach that Rancière seems to envisage. There, I will look at some of the metaphors and notions that seem to be at work in the two texts that I have read, and see if there are some common themes across the texts that may say something about the Rancièrian picture.

⁴² Ibid., 143.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 145.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

5 Madness – foreignness – void

In the previous chapters, I have examined two texts by Rancière that each is very different in scope and style. The first one, “A Child Kills Himself,”¹ is an analysis of a film. All the topics and notions that Rancière discuss in this text are drawn from what is said or done on the screen, or brought forth by Rancière as a comment to it. The text thus, is a comment to the film as an utterance or a work. In the second text, “The Stage of the Text,”² Rancière’s concern is no single work or event, but literary theory. Perhaps it can be put like this: The second text seems to follow the question “what does it mean to read and write?” rather than “what does the text say?”—or “what does the film say?” which seems to be the question that structures the first text I read. Here Rancière engages in a criticism against certain ideas of reading and writing. He is polemical, not commenting and descriptive. Yet, the two texts seem to have a lot in common. Despite their immediate differences, I have read both of the texts in the same manner: I have searched for the underpinning themes or ideas that are at work in Rancière’s texts—be it a comment to a film or a text on literary theory? How are these ideas reflected by the topics he lingers at and in his figures of speech? What I have found, is that there are certain notions, or motifs, that figure in both the texts. Some of them seem to be the same; others seem to be at least closely related. Based on my readings, I will single out the following three motifs as particularly intriguing: (1) *madness*, (2) *foreignness* and *solitude*, and (3) *nothing* and *void*. These metaphors are not established concepts in Rancière’s philosophy. The premise, however, for looking taking a closer look at them in this chapter, is that they are motifs that seem to play an important role in the two texts that I have read. Moreover, they seem to open the door also to other texts by Rancière. I therefore suggest that the motifs can be seen as signposts that deserve attention when following Rancière’s footsteps through his “intellectual adventure,” to borrow an expression from one of the chapter titles in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.³

5.1 ‘Madness’

One idea Rancière frequently refers to is the idea of madness. In “A Child Kills Himself” Rancière uses the term ‘madwoman’ about Irene, which seems to echo the frequent references

¹ Rancière, “A Child Kills Himself.”

² Rancière, “The Stage of the Text.”

³ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.

to the ‘madman’ in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. Although scholars have commented Rancière’s use of these words in specific texts, the reappearing of the metaphor of madness does not seem to have attracted much attention. In “A Child Kills Himself,” Irene’s path leads to madness, or rather, to what society could only understand as madness. First, as we have seen, Rancière locates the moment when her madness begins to the moment when she takes a step aside from her intended path.⁴ Becoming mad here seems to be a metaphor for losing one’s way or getting lost. Later, her madness becomes more literal as she ends up in an asylum. The final shot of the film, Rancière comments, portrays a final scandalous gesture from the heroine: the gesture marks the culmination of her apprenticeship, her gain in power, but it is at the same time the gesture of a madwoman.⁵ In both these examples, madness is defined as a distance, eccentricity or a movement away from what is commonly accepted as sensible. Madness begins by losing one’s way, by taking a step to the side from the path one is supposed to walk. In the final scene Rancière refers to, where Irene is kept behind bars, we see the ultimate consequence of madness: it is something that need to be kept at a distance from society, a threat. Rancière here seems to describe the same attitude towards madness as the one described by Michelle Foucault in his *Madness and Civilization* (1964), where he portrays the institutionalisation and hospitalisation of madness as a way of keeping madness at a distance.⁶

I get a similar impression of madness from reading “The Stage of the Text.” In chapter 4 I showed how Rancière contrasts Althusser with Don Quixote, so that the former comes to represent a logic of science while the latter represents a logic of irrationality. Don Quixote is even associated with madness, a madness that consists in performing absolute meaningless acts. That he fights against a windmill is the most known of these acts. Rancière, as we have seen, focuses on the knight’s failed attempt to write a letter: how the letter remains an unfinished body of text that never reaches its addressee. Held up against Rancière’s account of the Althusserian idea of reading, Don Quixote’s careless treatment of the text comes to represent madness.⁷ According to Rancière, the whole Althusserian theorisation of reading and writing is marked by an effort to trace in all works the mark of the same rationality, if necessary through the works’ failing to convey it. A figure like Don Quixote, then, who

⁴ Rancière, “A Child Kills Himself,” 117.

⁵ Ibid., 127.

⁶ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Routledge, 2001).

⁷ Rancière, “The Stage of the Text,” 136–37.

overtly choses the irrational way, would represent madness. Don Quixote, thus, represents all the things that Althusser attempts to avoid, Rancière writes:

The presupposition of the Althusserian enterprise can be expressed this way: to tear history away from its madness, the intellectual must first of all guard himself from the risk of his own madness: the Don Quixotic risk, of the law of the heart, of the battle against windmills, of sending letters without addressee.⁸

However, as I showed in my reading of “The Stage of the Text” in chapter 4, madness comes to represent something much more than what Althusser attempted to avoid: Don Quixote’s madness indeed comes to represent the power of literature and a different logic than the one proclaimed by Althusser. Moreover, both the texts I have read, I have shown how Rancière links madness to an almost religious power: In “A Child Kills Himself” Rancière links madness with sainthood, and in “The Stage of the Text” he makes links between madness and prophecy. So what is this power of madness that seems to be at work in Rancière’s texts? The metaphor of madness does not only occur in these two texts. Already in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* Rancière used the metaphor a lot throughout the book. Here, it is Joseph Jacotot, the ‘ignorant schoolmaster,’ who gets the honour of being called a ‘madman.’

I find it interesting that in all these cases, it is the heroine or the heroes of the texts who are described as being mad. Why is he using an otherwise negatively charge word to describe that which he advocates? Another place madness seems to be portrayed in a favourable way, is in Plato’s dialogue *Phaedrus*.⁹ Rancière does not quote Plato’s use of the word madness anywhere that I know of. However, he refers to the *Phaedrus* on several other occasions in both *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, *Short Voyages*¹⁰ and *The Flesh of Words*.¹¹ Perhaps a look at the dialogue can help me get to grips with Rancière’ notion of madness?

5.1.1 Madness in Plato’s *Phaedrus*

In the dialogue, Socrates and Phaedrus discuss a speech written by Lysias,¹² where he claims that young boys, when choosing an older man as a partner, should opt for someone who wants to be with him because it seems sensible, rather than someone who is in love with him. Love

⁸ Ibid., 135.

⁹ Plato, “Phaedrus.”

¹⁰ Rancière, *Short Voyages*.

¹¹ Rancière, *Flesh of Words*.

¹² Lysias’ speech: Plato, “Phaedrus,” 230e–234c.

only weakens the judgement of a person, and often fades with time. Phaedrus is very persuaded by Lysias' arguments. In the following discussion, Socrates performs two speeches. In the first speech,¹³ Socrates sets out to define what kind of desire love is, and starts with distinguishing between two principles of the human mind. One of them is the drive to act wisely, that is, the sense and judgement that we have acquired from others. But we also have an innate desire for pleasure: the desire for food, for drink and to enjoy beauty. When this latter principle is allowed to rule us, we are in a state of *hubris*, which is a Greek word referring to a kind of madness, over-confidence or outrageousness. Socrates admits that is the desire for pleasure that is most prevalent in someone who is in love.¹⁴ He thus confirms, in a sense, Lysias' description of the senselessness of the lover compared to the non-lover.¹⁵ To Phaedrus' disappointment, however, Socrates does not proclaim that he therefore agrees with Lysias claim that a non-lover always is a better partner than a lover. Instead, Socrates begins forward again on his second speech.¹⁶ Here he declares that both Lysias' and his own speech were wrong. Socrates maintains that love is a kind of madness. However, Lysias' conclusion about how to choose a partner would only "be right if it were an invariable truth that madness is an evil, but in reality, the greatest blessings come by way of madness, indeed the madness that is heaven-sent."¹⁷ Madness, Socrates argues, is not a negative thing. Heaven-sent, he points out, is what makes the prophets see visions and tell truths about the future. He thus proclaims "the superiority of heaven-sent madness over man-made sanity."¹⁸

We can already here see a parallel between Plato and Rancière in the way they both convert madness from something negative to something that represents a strength. However, by linking madness to truth-telling and prophecy, Socrates views madness in relation to a certain understanding of the nature of truth. What kind of truth he envisages becomes clearer when Socrates then proceeds to discern the nature of the soul.¹⁹ Our souls, Socrates says, are immortal and have existed long before we were born. He likens the soul with a pair of winged stallions pulling a chariot with a winged charioteer.²⁰ Unlike the infallible and pure souls of the gods, a human's pair of 'soul horses' has one stallion that is noble and one that is wild and

¹³ Socrates' first speech: Ibid., 237b–241d.

¹⁴ Ibid., 237d–238c.

¹⁵ Ibid., 241c.

¹⁶ Socrates' second speech: Ibid., 244a–257c.

¹⁷ Ibid., 244a.

¹⁸ Ibid., 244d.

¹⁹ Ibid., 245c.

²⁰ Ibid., 246a.

difficult to control. Before the soul settles down in a body, it ventures together with the gods up the arches that sustain heaven, Socrates tells. Because of the difficult stallion, the ascension is hard, but eventually they manage to get to the top. There, the souls “come forth and stand upon the back of the world, and straightway the revolving heaven carries them around, and they look upon the regions without.”²¹ Later, as the soul forgets the wonderful view from the back of the world, it descends down to earth and enters into a body, where it lives in a state of blindness and oblivion.²² About those “regions without” that the soul once got to see, Socrates says: “It is there that true being dwells, without colour or shape, that cannot be touched; reason alone, the soul’s pilot, can behold it, and all true knowledge is knowledge thereof.”²³ Socrates mentions at the beginning of his tale about the soul that it is only a metaphor, but the essence appears clear enough: This dialogue seems to describe a notion of an absolute truth and portray a division between the earthly and base on the one hand, and the heavenly, divine and true on the other. In this picture, heaven-sent madness becomes an absolute deviancy, as it aspires towards something that is beyond the human existence, but is at the same time a positive deviancy, because it aspires to knowledge and what is true. We are *here*, while truth is *out there*. However, Socrates points out,

“[...] every human soul has, by reason of her nature, had contemplation of true being; else would she never have entered into this human creature; but to be put in mind thereof by things here is not easy for every soul.”²⁴

Plato here seems to me to refer to the idea of reminiscence that I mentioned in chapter 3, with reference to Plato’s dialogue *Meno*. In *Meno* Socrates suggests that a person may indeed revive the long forgotten knowledge of the soul, and thus acquire knowledge without being directly taught. In his first speech, Socrates described humans as driven by two powers: an acquired rationality and judgement, and a natural beast-like desire for pleasure and beauty. Socrates seemed to portray the latter power as cruder than acquired wisdom; although it is a natural part of every human, it needs to be controlled in order to avoid *hubris*. In Socrates’ second speech however, however, he turns this picture upside down. The innate and natural desire for beauty seems to be linked to an innate and natural desire for truth and knowledge. True being is also true beauty and a pleasure to behold. Love of knowledge is not something we acquire by acquiring man-made sanity, but it is inscribed in the soul from the very

²¹ Ibid., 247c.

²² Ibid., 248c.

²³ Ibid., 247c–247d.

²⁴ Ibid., 248c.

beginning, as a distant memory. Following Socrates' second speech, coming to know truth is something we do, not through exercises in acquired wisdom, but by way of a return to something we had all along: a soul and a keen eye for beauty. Socrates describes the mad person:

Such a one, as soon as he beholds the beauty of this world, is reminded of true beauty, [...] but inasmuch as he gazes upward like a bird, and cares nothing for the world beneath, men charge it upon him that he is demented.²⁵

5.1.2 Crazy about knowledge: Platonic and Rancièrian madness

It seems to me that the change of perspective from the first to the second of Socrates' speeches, parallels a change of perspective that Rancièr traces in the texts that I have read. Socrates' initial distinction between acquired wisdom and madness seems almost like a blue copy of the distinction Rancièr plays with: his portrayal of Althusserian and Marxist attempts to explain and rationalise, versus the (seeming) irrationality that moves Don Quixote and Irene. As seen above, Rancièr seems to make a link between irrationality and love, or passion, that resembles the link between madness and love that Plato envisages in *Phaedrus*: The Don Quixotic risk of madness is also a risk of the "law of the heart."²⁶ and irrationality in the last quote from *Phaedrus*, Socrates describes how seeking knowledge from other sources than the knowledge of society may make one *appear* to be mad. Another thing Plato's and Rancièr's notions of madness have in common, is that madness is described simultaneously as society's condemnation for acting against common sense, and as a power or a strength. I would say that Irene in "A Child Kills Himself" not only *appears* to be mad—she truly *is* mad. Thus the word 'madness,' in both *Phaedrus* and Rancièr's texts, does itself embody the tension between two perspectives, and in the case of Rancièr also the tension between two ways of thinking about rationality, truth and knowledge. It seems to me that this tension is at the centre in both "A Child Kills Himself" and "The Stage of the Text."

However, this is also where the similarities between Platonic and Rancièrian madness seem to end. In *Phaedrus*, madness is described as heaven-sent, and the knowledge the madman desires is knowledge of absolute truth. Rancièr as I hope will become clear over the course of this and the next chapter, Rancièr does not seem to share Plato's idea of an absolute truth.

²⁵ Ibid., 249e.

²⁶ Rancièr, "The Stage of the Text," 135.

It is the notion of an absolute truth that seems to allow Plato to rank “heaven-sent madness” over “man-made sanity.” When Rancière in a similar fashion favours madness over “man-made” sanity, it cannot be in an entirely similar way, it seems to me. However, although Plato describes the human desire for knowledge as aspiring to an absolute truth, the nevertheless describes desire itself as part of the human nature. By likening the love of knowledge with a power that is located in the soul itself, it seems that Plato accomplishes a similar turn towards the subject, or soul, and its innate desire to know and understand, as Rancière does in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, as I will soon show. We can also see this turn towards the subject in “A Child Kills Himself,” where Rancière’s emphasis of Irene’s reflective face as she tries to make sense of what she sees: what *Europe* ‘51 portrays, he writes, is the power of the subject, “the unique power that goes forth to meet the event.”²⁷

But what kind of power is this power behind a subject’s madness, then, if it is not heaven-sent? I will not take the discussion of similarities and differences between Plato and Rancière any further. I believe, however, that the next section of this chapter will touch upon some of the questions that have been raised here.

5.2 ‘Foreignness’ and ‘solitude’

In this section, I will be looking at the metaphors of ‘foreignness,’ or the ‘foreigner,’ and ‘solitude.’ Rancière uses foreignness as a metaphor in both the texts that I have analysed in chapter 3 and 4, but it is especially in “A Child Kills Himself” that he seems to work with foreignness as a theme. Indeed, the whole book in which that text figures, *Short Voyages*, seems to linger with a thematic of foreignness in some way or another: Here are several narratives of travelling, i.e., narratives about foreigners, people who are not at home. In “The Stage of the Text,” however, Rancière uses the metaphor of ‘solitude’ a lot. Here, it is the solitude of writing that he thematises. The metaphors of ‘foreignness’ and ‘solitude’ appear in two texts with a different style and different topics. It is not certain, therefore, that the metaphors point to the same. Nonetheless, I believe they parallel each other in some respects. In the texts that I have read, both ‘foreignness’ and ‘solitude’ refer to the situation of an individual person. Moreover, they point towards a specific relation between the individual subject and community: a lack of relation or a lack of contact. While ‘foreignness’ in everyday speech may refer to something positive, with connotations towards new experiences

²⁷ Rancière, “A Child Kills Himself,” 109.

and expanded horizons, it also refers to, like the word ‘solitude,’ a lack of community. As we have seen, the question of community is at the foreground in both “A Child Kills Himself” and “The Stage of the Text.” In the former, Rancière describes Irene’s story as a journey towards foreignness, away from community. In the latter text, Rancière describes Althusser’s authorship as marked by a dread of solitude, of loss of community. The community that he wants to protect is the one of frictionless understanding, of the shared conceptions that make up our shared reality. This is exactly the community Irene leaves behind on when she gradually discovers her own foreignness. The way Rancière criticises Althusser seems to be tainted with some degree of pity; Rancière describe the solitude and madness that Althusser fights against as a condition we that is not only inescapable, but something we even should embrace, like an Irene or a Don Quixote. Rancière’s critique seems above all to focus on the futility of Althusser’s efforts.

5.2.1 The unbound subject

In both the texts, thus, it seems that Rancière is emphasising that a subject is, most fundamentally, undetermined and free. It is true, he admits, that culture influences the way we think. But our *ability* to think, our most fundamental tendency to construct meaning, is not socially constituted. It belongs to the subject itself. I have shown how Rancière focuses on Irene’s body: It is her gaze he concentrates on, i.e. the work of her eyes; he describes the twist of her body as she turns around and leaves her path; he comments how the work of reflection is shown on her face; finally, he focuses on Irene’s gestures, the minimal bodily movements that are part of a subject’s interaction with her surroundings and other people.²⁸ As Irene unlearns the presumptions and truths of society, it seems to be her *body* that acts and develops a new attention to her surroundings. By focusing on the body, it seems to me that Rancière accentuates that it is the singular person—contained in a body that comprises senses, an intellect and limbs—that is reflecting and acting, as opposed to a purely socially constituted self. It is probably wrong to take this turn to the body too literally, as it may lead us into concluding that Rancière only thinks of the subject only in biological terms, without reference to culture. While this is not so, it still seems that Rancière draws attention to a distinction that perhaps is often overlooked or forgotten: namely that we can think of our world and even our personalities as largely socially constructed, without renouncing a fundamental distinction

²⁸ Rancière, “A Child Kills Himself.”

between the subject and culture itself. We could perhaps say, then, that the subject is, in its most profound state, always foreign to everything that belongs to culture: ideas, words and understandings. That is not to say that the subject is not receptive to, and perhaps even dependent on culture, but whereas all that is cultural can change or be replaced, there is an unchangeable core to the subject: the subject is the entity that is persuaded, put off, sceptical, enthusiastic about culture. Subjects embody and discard culture, but are not themselves constituted by it. A certain form of solitude is thus an inevitable part of human existence: ultimately, we are singular beings.

5.2.2 What is a subject? Foreignness, solitude and... intelligence

‘Solitude’ and ‘foreignness’ as metaphors, thus, seem to be related to what ‘subjectivity’ most fundamentally means for Rancière. In the texts that I have read, Rancière addresses practices and ways of thinking that collide and contradict with his own understanding of the subject. That is perhaps why Rancière chooses to use two negatively charged words, ‘foreignness’ and ‘solitude’ (negative in the sense that they both point towards a negation of community), to describe his subjects. The words are tainted with the sentiments of people like Althusser, who tried to defend and strengthen the community of knowledge that Rancière relativises. The words seem to invoke the kind of anxiety that he ‘criticises’ Althusser for. Thus, he moulds the polemics into the very terminology. ‘Solitude’ and ‘foreignness’ are negating words, and they seem to express a feeling of lack. However, it seems to me that *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* may offer us a more positive way of describing the subject’s foreignness, without referring to what the subject lacks, but what constitutes the Rancièrian notion of the subject. In this book Rancière/Jacotot focuses on the subject’s intelligence. The premise of the book is the assertion that everyone possesses and *equal intelligence*.²⁹ Rancière admits that this assumption is not something he can prove scientifically in any way, but he also argues that there are neither any way to prove that the intelligence is unequal from subject to subject. He states quantity is not applicable to his notion of intelligence.³⁰ Quoting Jacotot, he maintains: “I see that man does things that other animals don’t, I call this fact *mind*, *intelligence*, as I like; I explain nothing, I give a name to what I see.”³¹ Intelligence, thus, is the name of a quality that seems to characterise the human being and which is equal in

²⁹ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 18.

³⁰ Ibid., 48–49.

³¹ Ibid., 50.

everyone. Jacotot's students had proven that they were capable of making sense of the structure in a foreign language simply by paying attention and comparing with the text in a language they knew. What humans do, but other animals do not, is to create meaning. The relation between a human subject's orientation in the world—by way of those “‘simplest’ actions of existence: seeing, listening, speaking, reading,”³² to borrow the line from Althusser quoted at the opening of “The Stage of the Text”—and our active meaning-making seems to be at the core in both the texts I have read: in the way Rancière emphasises that Irene has “a face that reflects, a look that observes and distinguishes”³³ and in the way he states that a reader is always an interpreter.³⁴ It seems to me, therefore, that when Rancière argues that writing always runs at a risk of misunderstanding,³⁵ the underlying reason for this is not the inability of *language* to convey precise meaning. The risk of misunderstanding is ultimately inescapable consequence of how he understands the *subject*. There is, in the end, no external reference point for meaning that we can simply *internalise* or point towards to make others understand, and that makes us foreign to each other. With his notions of ‘foreignness,’ ‘solitude’ and equal intelligence, Rancière seems to suggest that subjects indeed live in and by their own interpretations of the world. Meaning-making is the subject's way of being, and it permeates all those ‘simple’ actions of existence. Rancière's focus on the *equality* of intelligence seems to imply that our intelligence is something that binds us together—we all have the same, equal intelligence. Thus the subject is, *per se*, part of a community of equals, so to say. This contradicts what the metaphors of foreignness and solitude seems to be telling us about the subject. However, as I have shown, Rancière explicitly links the subject's foreignness an “egalitarian foreignness [that] puts into peril everything that is inscribed in the repertoires of society and politics.”³⁶ We are *equally foreign*, an equality far more fundamental than any equality inscribed in society and politics.

5.2.3 A pause before we proceed

At this stage, I think it is fitting to pause and glance back a little. In the first section of this chapter, the section about madness, I showed what appears to be certain similarities between Rancière's notion of madness and the notion of madness that I have showed figures in Plato's

³² Althusser quoted in Rancière, “The Stage of the Text,” 129.

³³ Rancière, “A Child Kills Himself,” 108.

³⁴ Rancière, “The Stage of the Text.”

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Rancière, “A Child Kills Himself,” 123.

Phaedrus. We can now better appreciate what causes a subject's madness with knowledge, if we think in line with Rancière: not a desire to know the only and absolute truth, but the innate tendency, desire and need to construct meaning. This innate tendency is pre-discursive; it is not something the subject has internalised socially. One thing is a bit unclear to me, however: By talking about madness, it seems that Rancière point to how the subject may transgress the boundaries of discourse: to acquire knowledge and find meaning that for society appear as completely meaningless, indeed as utter madness. For Plato, there is an entity outside discourse—divine, true being—where such transgressive knowledge is drawn from. How, then, is this transgression understood in the case of Rancière? Yes, the subject has a pre-discursive capability to construct meaning, but how is it that it may arrive at meaning that is not already inscribed in discourse? How do we encounter a new and unprecedented thought? I hope to shed more light on these questions in the next and final section of this chapter. There I will look closer at two notions that seem to touch upon exactly what is outside discourse: 'nothing' and 'void.'

5.3 'Nothing' and 'void'

The topic in this section of the chapter is what appears to me to be a thematic of nothingness or void in Rancière's texts. Let me summarise some examples from the texts I have read in chapter two and three. First, in chapter two, I showed how a thematic of nothing and void seems to be at the very centre of Rancière's text "A Child Kills Himself." As we have seen, he states that "the event is first of all what relates to the nothing, the *niente*, that runs throughout the film [...]."³⁷ Whether he here refers to just any event or specifically the event mentioned in the title of the text, is not clear. Shortly after follows this: "*Nothing* has neither place nor reason to exist. It is a pure vertigo, a call for the void."³⁸ In the same text, Rancière describes the screenings of Irene's mental health by use of Rorschach blots. He describes them as "the nothing that you have to say something about,"³⁹ and when confronted with them, "she [Irene] sees *nothing*"⁴⁰ (the last quotation I have not quoted before). Irene choses to say "nothing," although *nothing*, as we just saw, has no reason or place to exist and is a call for the void. Then, in chapter 3, I showed how Rancière's text "The Stage of the Text"

³⁷ Ibid., 110.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 125–26.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 110.

describes the Althusserian undertaking as an attempt to secure community and science against the threat of voids. “The question of science is first of all that of community. It is this community that must leave no space for a void of any kind [...].”⁴¹ This is repeated again at the end of the text, where Rancière writes about Althusser himself: “In order not to be mad, in order not to be alone, he must [...] refuse to produce, by the hastes or delays of the law of the heart, the least void or the least tear.”⁴² In this last quotation, Rancière ostensibly verifies the close relations between the notion of void and notions that I have discussed previously in this chapter: madness and solitude. We should also note that Rancière here associates the production of voids and tears in the communal cloth with people following “the law of the heart.” In order to avoid voids, one must stick to a rational discourse and not allow oneself to be lead astray by the law of the heart.

It appears to me that both ‘nothing’ and ‘void’ points to the same conflict: one between the shared and commonly meaningful discourse and its outside. For Althusser, the fear of the void is a fear of losing community—the community of knowledge. For Irene, the “*nothing*” she replies to the psychiatrist has neither time nor place to exist; her denial that there is a meaning to the Rorschach blot is a pure call for the void. In the same text, “A Child Kills Himself,” Rancière refers to the answer Irene’s son gives her when she asks why he is in a bad mood: they boy replies “*nothing*”. The child “has no particular complaint to make,”⁴³ but later that evening he has jumped down the stairwell of the apartment block. “The child has killed himself or rather fallen into the void.”⁴⁴ ‘Void’ and ‘nothing,’ thus, seem to be metaphors for that which is impossible to put into words, what is outside discourse and has no meaning. It is what Althusser fought to avoid, it is what Irene experiences as there is nothing to say about the Rorschach blot, and it is what her son feels, but cannot put to words, cannot make his mother to understand.

5.3.1 The inside and outside of the discursive community

We have, then, a thematic about the inside and outside of discourse, alternatively the inside and outside of the community of knowledge. ‘Discursive community’ seem to me to be more pertinent to Rancière’s philosophy, as it focuses on language. Althusser, however, operates

⁴¹ Rancière, “The Stage of the Text,” 138.

⁴² Ibid., 145.

⁴³ Rancière, “A Child Kills Himself,” 110.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 111.

with the more sociological notion of a community of knowledge. The main point here is, however, is not the theoretical nuances between the concepts, but the way Rancière seems to play with the idea of an inside and outside of this community of shared meaning/knowledge. Earlier in this chapter, I have shown how the idea of madness seems to point towards the trespassing of this border towards the outside of discourse. I have also showed how ‘foreignness’ and ‘solitude’ refer to a kind of lack of community: to how the free and independent mind is also a mind that is foreign to the community of knowledge. Now, how is this link between the inside and outside of discourse conceived of? If we quickly jump back to my reading of Plato’s *Phaedrus* in the section about madness, Plato seems to me to provide a very different account of the relationship between discourse and its outside. To defy manmade wisdom—I will translate it to discourse or the common knowledge—is also here tantamount to madness, to having crossed the border into the outside of discourse. However, the outside of discourse is not a screaming void, but a place where one may find truth. True being resides in the regions beyond our confined, human existence.⁴⁵ The relation between discourse and its outside that is heralded by Rancière’s descriptions of Althusser, however, is a quite different one: The community of knowledge does not seem to be standing in a relation to anything on its outside, its origin and destiny is itself. Plato, as we have seen, describes the arrival of new and unprecedented knowledge in terms of an epiphany or obsession by divine madness, that is, as something that arrives from without the community of knowledge. When Rancière describes Althusser’s idea of symptomal reading, however, it seems that community of knowledge is itself the producer of valid or true knowledge. The community of knowledge is constituted by shared knowledge, but also produces knowledge itself. Rancière: “Symptomal reading never encounters anything but inclusion, it always makes community, it always presupposes community.”⁴⁶ The community of knowledge assumes the status of a structural understanding of ‘the social.’ It is the sum of subjects, but it is also more: it is a force much greater and more profound than any one person, a force that works through the lives and thoughts of subjects. Knowledge is knowledge because it is the knowledge that a community share; meaning is meaningful because it is the meaning that is mutually understood by community and therefore holds the community together. Seen from this perspective, trespassing the boundaries of the community of knowledge really seems to be tantamount to walking into a void: there is no reference point for meaning outside the social.

⁴⁵ Plato, “Phaedrus.”

⁴⁶ Rancière, “The Stage of the Text,” 135–136.

As is the case with the metaphors of ‘madness,’ ‘foreignness’ and ‘solitude,’ also ‘nothing’ and ‘void’ seem to convey something negative, that is, that they negate something: the words negate community, familiarity and sanity. ‘Nothing’ and ‘void’ seems to negate absolutely everything. However, as the case also is with the other metaphors, Rancière seems to ascribe to them a double meaning. As we have seen, solitude, foreignness and madness too are fates that Althusser dreads, according to Rancière. Yet, at the same time, Rancière lets these negative words acquire a new meaning: he links the words to the inherent intelligence of the subject. What takes place is not so much a rebuttal of Althusser’s arguments, but a change of perspective. Thus, a word may change its meaning, and Althusser’s “dread” of solitude⁴⁷ and his “fight against madness”⁴⁸ suddenly seem irrelevant or even comic. This is also the case with the metaphors of ‘nothing’ and ‘void,’ it appears to me. When Rancière refers to ‘void’ or ‘nothing,’ it seems to me that it refers to encounters with actual object or actual events. In other words, *void*, and *nothing*, does not necessarily mean the absolute void, the ontological vacuum that the metaphors first may seem to signify. For instance, the episode where Irene looks at the Rorschach blots and sees *nothing*. There *is* a blot on the card that she is shown, of course. The way Rancière describes the episode, it seems to me that Irene answers *nothing*, is because she has *nothing* to say about what she sees. She cannot produce an interpretation or nail what she sees to a certain description. This is also so with the *nothing* that Irene’s son replies: something *did* bother the child, but he had no particular complaint, nothing to point at that would explain his feelings. Moreover, Rancière links nothingness to events when he writes: “the event is first of all what relates to the nothing, the *niente*, that runs throughout the film [...]”⁴⁹ Nothingness and void may represent what is outside discourse, that which does not make sense to the community of knowledge. Nevertheless, Rancière’s focus seems to be that there is an event, an experience, that gives rise to the nothing or the void. The event is related to the *nothing*. Whereas Althusser (according to Rancière’s presentation of him) appears to focus solely on the relation between a subject and the community of knowledge, Rancière adopts, it seems to me, a wider perspective that also includes a relation between the subject and reality that is foreign to the community of knowledge. We can see this relation at work in the story Rancière tells about Irene: it seems to be experiences of concrete events and interactions with real people, like the event where Irene is on her way to the tram stop in the suburb, that lead her astray, into thoughts and missions that society seems unable to

⁴⁷ Ibid., 137.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 145.

⁴⁹ Rancière, “A Child Kills Himself,” 110.

understand. In other words, where the Althusser appears to present a mutually excluding dichotomy of meaningless void and social reality, Rancière seems to me to retain the idea that the subject has some access to reality that is not social: I could perhaps say: experienced reality devoid of the imprints of the social. The subject may have experiences that displaces it from the community of knowledge.

5.3.2 Reality as ‘the sensible’

What I am here arguing will need some more explanation and scrutiny. So far in this chapter much attention has been on Rancière’s conception of the subject. When reading “A Child Kills Himself,” however, it appears to me that Rancière emphasises the importance of events and experiences on the subject’s thoughts. His emphasis of the subject’s gaze and attention to its surroundings also seems to support the observation that Rancière is not only interested in the subject and its intelligence, but the subject in relation its reality. However, it is only by jumping a few years ahead in Rancière’s authorship that I found something tantamount to a positive conceptualisation of the reality external to the subject—as opposed to examples and narratives where the experienced reality seems to play an important role. In his 2004 book *Politics of Aesthetics*,⁵⁰ Rancière seems to have developed a terminology for this experienced reality: he refers to it as *the sensible*. More specifically, he seems to be interested in the dynamics related to what he calls *the distribution of the sensible*, that is, the way the sensible fits with or is foreign to common conceptions of it. Rancière:

I call the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it. A distribution of the sensible therefore establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared and exclusive parts.⁵¹

It appears to me that we are here dealing with a conceptualisation of the sensible reality—the reality that can be experienced. Rancière, moreover, uses the concept *distribution of the sensible* to point towards how the sensible tends to appear to us as self-evident facts that assure us that we perceive and share the same sensible reality, and thus create a kind of

⁵⁰ Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*.

⁵¹ Ibid., 12. ‘The distribution of the sensible’ is a common translation of Rancière’s original French concept: *le partage du sensible*. The French verb *partager* means both sharing and dividing, a double meaning which is reflected by two English expressions derived from the same root: to ‘take part’ and ‘partition.’ For an elaborate account of the meanings of *partager*, see: Davide Penagia, “‘Partage Du Sensible’: The Distribution of the Sensible,” in *Jacques Rancière. Key Concepts*, ed. Jean-Philippe Deranty (Durham: Acumen, 2010), 95–103.

sensible community. The word ‘sensible’ refers to that which can be sensed with our senses, but also to what makes sense or is rational. The distribution of the sensible, thus, is the way the sensible appears as comprising both meanings of that word: it is self-evident facts that link the sensory to sense, it is the facts that govern how we see the world. The distribution of the sensible, thus, amounts to a conception of what a community of knowledge, or the social world, is. Shared sensibility makes community. However, inherent to the notion of the distribution of the sensible is also that it splits up and divides into parts. The distribution of the sensible allocates roles and positions “based on a distribution of space, time and forms of activity”.⁵² Rancière exemplifies with how Plato saw it as evident that artisans could not participate in politics: “They cannot be *somewhere else* because *work will not wait*. The way this was a self-evident fact for Plato proves, according to Rancière, the workings a distribution of the sensible that did not allow the activities of work and politics in in one and the same space, time and identities. We can see something similar in an episode I have commented upon from “A Child Kills Himself”: Irene’s experiences in the suburb contest the reduction of the subjects living there to the stereotypes of ‘workers.’ The certainty of the suburb as a place, moreover, was undone, and Irene did no longer feel at home. We could perhaps say, now, that it was the certainty of a distribution of the sensible—in which the suburb was a place—that had started to unravel. It follows from this that a distribution of the sensible is not set in stone. The *void* or *nothing* outside it, thus, seems to be a potential residing in the sensible itself, as a possible negation of or displacement from the distribution of the sensible.

There is another parallel to “A Child Kills Himself” that I would like to point out. I have shown that Rancière there characterises the fundamental techniques of society as ‘shock’ and ‘interpretation’: on the one hand, “a constant and unceasing procession of sensory shocks, in which, along with the ability to look, the possibility of thoughtfulness and respect is lost”⁵³; on the other hand, “the system of explanatory attributions and inferences that make up the audible discourses of the social, that create society.”⁵⁴ The relatively stark words about the technique of society should be seen in relation to the fact that Rancière here describes an incident where society does not allow any space for Irene’s subjectivity. That the fundamental techniques of society is always a deprivation of the subjects respect is perhaps to over-

⁵² Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*, 12.

⁵³ Rancière, “A Child Kills Himself,” 125.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 125–26.

dramatise. Nevertheless, the main components of what Rancière later comes to call a distribution of the sensible are already present in “A Child Kills Himself”: there is the sensible, or the sensory, and there is the “explanatory attributions” that assures the self-evidence of sensory. These explanatory attributions are also what creates “audible discourse” the discourse that can be heard—again a reference to what can be sensed—and thus creates society. There is also the acknowledgement that the self-evidence of sensible facts somehow excludes other ways of experiencing the sensible. The series of sensory shocks denied Irene the ability to look and the possibility of thoughtfulness—that is, to look twice, to independently pay attention and think about what one has seen. This not only heralds everything about the subject’s ability to observe and reflect independently that I have discussed in the previous sections of this chapter. It also seems to suggest what Rancière expresses directly with his concept of the distribution of the sensible: the sensible is not reducible the shared sensibility. This openness of the sensible thus seems to me to match the active nature of the subject’s intelligence, “the unique power that goes forth to meet the event.”⁵⁵ Provided, of course, that one is granted space to be a subject.

This reading of Rancière seems to be supported by Ian James in his *The New French Philosophy* (2012)⁵⁶ James analyses the philosophy of seven present-day French philosophers, among them Rancière (the others are Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Luc Nancy, Bernard Stiegler, Catherine Malabou, Alain Badiou and François Laruelle). He argues that if there is, as the title of his book suggests, a ‘new French philosophy,’ it is because the philosophers he has analysed all “seek in various ways to move beyond the anti-foundationalist or deconstructive moment and do so in the name of what might be called the groundless or non-foundational ground of the real.”⁵⁷ James argues that the philosophers in different ways seem to formulate and demonstrate alternative techniques of philosophical thought and alternative ways of thinking about the real—a double change of perspectives which go hand in hand.⁵⁸ This reinvention of the real, he argues, we could see as a reaction to the deconstruction of the generation of French philosophers before them. This enterprise, to loosen up the rigid structuralism, seems to go well together with Rancière’s theoretical project. However, James points out that Rancière’s turn to the sensible could be seen, alongside other philosophers’ turns to various notions of the real, as a need to find back to a foundation outside the subject,

⁵⁵ Ibid., 109.

⁵⁶ Ian James, *The New French Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

⁵⁷ Ibid., 187.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 182.

an anchor for thought. The reinvention of the real thus comes along with alternative techniques of philosophy, which undeniably is a discipline of thinking. Now, in the case of Rancière, James observes this double change of perspective in his “reconception of the real as the ordering of a heterogeneous dimension of the sensible [...]” and that he “realigns thought with a sustained attempt to re-articulate the register of the sensible, and to place the tangible and sensory at the very centre of his thinking.”⁵⁹

Whereas I so far have cantered my presentation Rancière’s philosophy around the subject, James seems to choose another entrance: the sensible. I started ‘in the subject’ by discussing thought and intelligence, and then arrived at the sensible as the object of the intelligence. Ian James seems to situate notion of the sensible at the centre of Rancière’s philosophy, and with the notion of thought following as its consequence. Our different approaches may stem from having focused on different texts by Rancière.

Equipped with this specific notion of the sensible reality, we have an ontological context for the subject’s intelligence. The subject is not simply an active intelligence in a frictionless void, constructing meaning from scratch, as it were. The subject’s intelligence, it appears to me, stands in a direct relation to a sensible reality that gives the subject something to think about but also is open to be re-thought. Just before I introduced the idea of the sensible above, I may have given the impression that Rancière believes the subject can experience “untouched” reality, pure empirical reality that is free from any preconceptions and unfiltered by our faculties. That is not the case. I hope it is clear by now that what I meant, is that Rancière operates with an idea of a sensible reality that is at the same time socially shared, but also foreign to the social—since it is, after all, subjects that sense and make sense of it. The word ‘sensible reality’ does itself make it clear that we are not dealing with *das Ding and Sich*, to borrow Kant’s expression. The field of the sensible is limited to the contact surface between reality and a sensing and thinking subject. Retrospectively, all of what I have discussed in this chapter—*madness, foreignness, intelligence, solitude, nothing and void*—seem to concern dynamics within this field. The sensible may equally give rise community and to subjects’ displacement from it; it is meaningful, but also comprises nothingness and void.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 184.

6 Writing an ontology of the subject and the sensible

In the article “A few remarks on the method of Jacques Rancière,” which I mentioned in section 2.4 about methodology, Rancière comments on his own methods. Writing about himself in third-person perspective, Rancière states that:

[...] his books are always forms of intervention in specific contexts. He never intended to produce a theory [...]. He thinks that there is already a good deal of them and he loves trees enough to avoid destroying them to add one more theory to all those available on the market.¹

The texts I have read are interventions in contexts: the plot and meaning of a film by Roberto Rossellini, and Althusser’s idea of reading. Thus, they do not express Rancière’s theories as such, or absolute truths about Rancière’s views. In light of this, it is important to be cautious with conclusions stating what Rancière’s overarching message or theory is. I will still attempt to say something general about what Rancière *does* in the texts I have read, that is, to go beyond the contexts that are specific to them. For, as we have seen in the previous chapter, some topics seem to be at work in both of these texts. Looking closer at them, I have also showed how they reach out to other texts by Rancière. Thus, I will now attempt to say something more general about what Rancière wants to tell his readers, and how.

That is what I will attempt to do in this chapter. When I ask both about what Rancière does and what he says, it is because these seem inextricably linked. I will start therefore, with what Rancière does regarding his style of writing. The previous chapter in this thesis demonstrates well, I think, how grappling with what Rancière says is also to grapple with how he writes. It is the intricacies of his metaphors that have enabled me to devote an entire chapter to them and gain some valuable insight from it. I will start, then, with a reflection upon Rancière’s style of writing, and why I think *what* and *how* Rancière writes are related matters for consideration. This also opens up for a consideration of the relationship between Rancière’s method and hermeneutics, thus shedding some more light on my own methodology. Continuing from this, I will attempt to describe Rancière’s endeavour as marked by an implicit assumption, exploration and development of a certain ontological position. The last section of this chapter will shortly collect the threads from the previous sections by returning,

¹ Rancière, “A Few Remarks,” 114.

once again, to the question of Rancière's method (of writing). However, this time I will look at how Rancière describes his own method as one that leads from contextual to profound questions, much like what I have observed and will present in this chapter. This last section will also bridge my reading of Rancière to the questions about education that I will pose in the next and last chapter of the thesis.

6.1 About Rancière's writing, and how to read it

I have shown how Rancière often, at least in the texts I have read, deploys metaphors that open up his message for interpretation instead of expressing directly what he wants to say in a straightforward way. Perhaps this is not something he does in order to be difficult or to distinguish himself, but because this style of writing is intertwined with what he attempts to tell us. Perhaps is it his wish that the text should be engaged with in a more open way. He deploys metaphors that invoke feelings and confusion, words that stand in meaningful relations to other words in the text, but these meaningful relations are far from always expressed. The reader, thus, is sometimes compelled to engage with the text as if it was a literary work of fiction, here referring to "literary" in the sense that I explained in section 4.4. Perhaps is it Rancière's wish that the reader should treat the text as something *sensible*, rather than something that can be dealt with in a purely "rational" way. Reading Rancière's texts requires interpretation, even for someone who "knows" a lot and therefore would immediately understand what Rancière is writing about if he had only expressed himself more concisely and straightforwardly. I would question, however, if what Rancière is writing about could at all be expressed more concisely and straightforwardly? If Rancière's message is bound to his style of writing, the need for interpretation is perhaps a central point to his message. Above I have argued how the texts can be seen as something sensible, but I would also say that the texts by the same token lifts up the *subjectivity* or intelligence of the reader. One of Rancière's points in "The Stage of the Text" seems to be that the reading of a text always is an act of interpretation. Thus, there is nothing special about Rancière's texts in this respect. However, Rancière makes it into a point that the specific words he uses require interpretation. One expects a scholarly text on literary theory, and is faced with a cluster of unscholarly words like *foreignness*, *solitude* and *madness*. Moreover, these metaphors seem to appeal to general human feelings, rather than referring to an array of other scholarly terms that the

reader must know about in order to understand. It is as if Rancière, thus, is saying that everyone stands on equal terms when confronted with the topics and problems he discusses.

This is of course only one way of putting it. Arguably, Rancière's texts may appear far from accessible, with his many references to theorist, literature and art. It may sometimes seem like the texts he writes are impenetrable to anyone who does not know at least some history of philosophy or art history. My prior knowledge of Plato's *Phaedrus*,² for instance, was necessary in order for me to grasp what I think is a parallel between Rancière's and Plato's use of the word *madness*. One could say that the way Rancière requires the reader to interpret, the way he denies his readers a clear message about what his concepts mean, threatens to make his texts very difficult and leaves the readers in a state of disappointing confusion. Perhaps is Rancière himself, in this respect, acting like master that stultifies his readers, to borrow his own terminology from *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.³ It is as if Rancière signals this: the reader may or may not be capable of understanding this text, but that is not the author's problem.

Seen from another perspective, however, we could say that exactly because Rancière's texts rely so much on the reader's prior knowledge and experiences, they demonstrate that it is the *text* that may or may not be meaningful to the reader, not the reader that may or not understand the text. That makes for an important difference, because it presupposes a different view of the relationship between knowledge and the subject. Rancière seems to me to recognise that nothing is meaningful unless it resonates in a person's experiences and there takes the shape of something meaningful. Personally, I did recognise a link to the Platonic notion of madness, which opened a new room of meaning to me in Rancière's text. However, I am sure that there is an array of interesting references or metaphors in Rancière's texts that I have not discovered at all. Moreover, the fact that that I have emphasised the meanings of some references or metaphors does not mean that I have interpreted them in the same way that Rancière did. I cannot even be sure that Rancière himself was conscious of the way his choice of words could lead his readers to think in this or that way. In either case, his writings appear meaningful to me, and that is, after all, the important point to take from this. For in the end, a reader cannot help understanding a word without engaging his or her own experiences in a process of meaning-making.

² Plato, "Phaedrus."

³ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.

It is in this way, it seems to me, that Rancière's style of writing is intertwined with his message. For the style of writing that I have described above seems to invoke the reading subject as an active interpreter and to show that to engage with a text is to engage with something sensible: something that meaning emerges from through a subject's active engagement with it, rather than being a carrier of fixed meaning. We could perhaps say, then, that Rancière's style of writing itself seems to demonstrate both the power of the subject, the equal intelligence, but also its solitude and foreignness at the same time. For with his emphasis on interpretation he seems to me to underline what he, in "The Stage of the Text," described as the writer's "solitude": that the writer will never be fully understood, that one's words may appear like gibberish or madness.⁴

6.1.1 Hermeneutics according to Rancière

This, by the way, should be taken as a warning to the readers of this thesis: my reading of Rancière is only *my* reading, and any what I say about Rancière's views is only one of many ways one could interpret or shed light on his texts, and not a blue copy of his views. Rancière has thereby provided the theoretical framework for a hermeneutics wherein no distinction is made between the attempt to seek *the* meaning *of* the text, and the endeavour to construct *any* meaning *from* the text. This seems to be in line with how Alvesson & Sköldbberg describes alethic hermeneutics. Alvesson writes that alethic hermeneutics is founded on the dissolving of the polarity between subject and object that serves as an ideal for the sciences and also for objectivist hermeneutics. However, there seems to be a difference between Rancière's method and the alethic hermeneutics. Alvesson & Sköldbberg describes the basic concern of alethic hermeneutics as the revelation of something hidden. *Aletheia* is Greek and means 'uncoverdness'.⁵ Admittedly, Alvesson & Sköldbberg also says that alethic-hermeneutic search for something hidden is a subjective endeavour, thus abandoning the idea that there is *one* objective truth that needs to be revealed. Nevertheless, the basic figure that Alvesson & Sköldbberg here ascribes to hermeneutics is one of revelation. It may not make for much of a practical difference between Rancière and ordinary alethic hermeneutics, but Rancière seems to present interpretation in a different way. A 'Rancièrian hermeneutics,' if I may use this

⁴ Rancière, "The Stage of the Text," 137–38.

⁵ Alvesson and Sköldbberg, *Reflexive Methodology*, 57–58.

expression, seems to be an exercise in trusting what one sees, reads or hears, rather than searching for something hidden. According to such a ‘Rancièrian hermeneutics,’ a reading can only be faithful in the sense that it is faithful to the text itself, to the words and the sentences, by paying attention to them. It does not search for something hidden. Or as Rancière puts it in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*: “There is nothing behind the written page, no false bottom [...]”⁶ This faithfulness seems to me to be related to the ‘trust’ that we have seen Rancière ascribe to Irene in “A Child Kills Himself,” when she pays attention to the particular situation, a person or an event instead of trying to explain it.⁷ A reading cannot, in other words, be faithful to the author. My own reading is in a sense balancing between this ‘Rancièrian hermeneutics’ and the attempt to draw a picture of Rancière’s philosophy that is hidden somewhere in his texts.

Perhaps is the difference between Rancièrian method and the method of alethic hermeneutics only one of presentation. For faithfulness is itself a devotion to understand, an attempt to let the text speak. Thus, the constant ‘interlocution’ between a wish to understand and the appreciation that understanding is always a produced meaning, seems to be an internal also to Rancière’s enterprise. Alethic hermeneutics too seems to emphasize the interpreters meaning-making engagement with the material, and the affinity between close attention and meaning-making. Rancière describes his method as a path that he constructs in a landscape in order to figure out where he is, that he must construct to get an overview of the topography of ideas that he is studying.⁸ He describes himself as a foreigner, as someone who needs to figure out the landscape he is walking through. His question, thus, is not ‘what is the meaning of this?’ but ‘where am I?’

On the other hand, we may look at this in another way. For in constructing his path, Rancière also pays attention to how the ‘obstacles’ in the landscape and to how it obliges him to move in a certain way.⁹ It may seem like Rancière pays attention to how underlying structures shape a field of thought or certain practices. For instance, I have shown how Rancière reveals the presumptions about knowledge and the subject that underpin Althusser’s understanding of reading. Seen from this angle, Rancière’s method seems to bear resemblance to a hermeneutics of suspicion, rather than a hermeneutics of trust. I touch upon an example of

⁶ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 9–10.

⁷ Rancière, “A Child Kills Himself,” 122.

⁸ Rancière, “A Few Remarks,” 114. (See also section 2.4 about methodology in this thesis.)

⁹ Ibid.

this towards the end of this chapter. There I will show how Rancière links his ‘where am I now?’ question to a question about how the ‘here and now’ could be reconceptualised. Ultimately, this is also the methodological path I will follow through the next and final chapter of my thesis. There I will use the Rancièrian outlook that I have encircled in the previous chapters to reveal and juxtapose a profound narrative in educational theory. If this method is tantamount to a hermeneutics of suspicion it is not, however, one that starts with suspicion and arrives at truth, when all lies and misunderstandings are revealed. Instead, as I will show towards the end of this chapter, it starts with attention and openness, which in turn leads to an understanding that obliges one to rethink theories and practices. I will write more about this in the last section of this chapter.

6.2 Rancière’s ontology of equality

In the way I have described Rancière's style of writing, or method of philosophy, I focused on how Rancière, invites the reader to interpret, instead of attempting to make his own message reach the reader as precisely as possible. Moreover, it seems to me that this invitation to interpretation is made into a point itself. When seen in relation to what he writes about, Rancière appears to display the reader’s subjective and interpretive engagement with the text, in a similar way to how he displays Irene’s subjective and interpretive engagement with her experiences in “A Child Kills Himself.” Rancière, the writer, becomes something like a Don Quixote, the antithesis to Rancière’s description of Althusser as a writer, someone who embraces the solitary fate of the writer. However, that Rancière is intertwining content and method of presentation might have a more important reason than simply to create an interesting link between the work and the content of the work. The shift from emphasising the reader’s knowledge and correct understanding, to drawing attention to the reader’s sensible engagement with the text and process of interpretation, comes across as a more important point than a mere choice of focus.

Rather, I will argue that we will have to see Rancière’s focus on the subject’s equal capacity to think and interpret, as something that amounts to, or is the consequence of, something more deep-rooted. I will argue that Rancière represents a different ontology than the one of Althusser or Plato, and that the conflicts and polemics that take place in Rancière’s texts can be seen as consequences of different philosophies or practices rooted in different ontologies.

I will clarify why I think so. In the previous chapter, I showed what appears to me to be a common strain of thought expressed by several of Rancière's metaphors: the subject as a *foreigner*, the idea of the *solitude* of the subject, and the *madness* of the subject. I also showed how I see these ideas as related to the notion of intelligence that Rancière refers to in his earlier book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. As I have shown earlier, Rancière does not understand intelligence quantitatively in terms of cleverness or IQ, but qualitatively, as in *the way* human minds work. The intelligence, thus, is for Rancière equal in all subjects. In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, the declaration of the equality of intelligence seems to take the form of a recognition of the power of the subject that was formerly unrecognised. Instead of an education with an internal logic building on the assumption of inequality, Rancière/Jacotot envisaged what teaching situations built on the assumption of equality of intelligence would look like. The book praises the equal power of humans to create meaning and sense, and our equal responsiveness to language and other meaning structures. Foreignness and solitude, then, are the more sober characteristics of the subject. However, it appeared to me that they are two sides of the same coin for Rancière. He seems to describe foreignness, and also the madness that he links to both foreignness and solitude, as a kind of power that all subjects have, just like intelligence: "[...] the power present in each of us to become a foreigner on the map of places and paths generally known as reality."¹⁰ By linking intelligence to foreignness and solitude, Rancière seems to say that although the intelligence is equal, the fact that we all have our *own* intelligences and make sense of the world through individual processes of meaning-making, means we are also fundamentally foreign. For even the shared, empirical reality, is understood in terms of something sensible: it is only that which encounters the senses, and the senses belong to a subject. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this notion of the sensible draws upon the double meaning of the word sensible, as both what we can sense and what makes, or can make, sense to us. The mere empirical reality, neutral and devoid of any interpretations of feelings, is not a possibility. The sensible reality is necessarily touched by human intelligence.

Perhaps we could say that the intelligence is equal *because* we are all foreign to each other; that with the disappearance of an extra-subjective or objective reference point for meaning, it also becomes impossible to say that one intelligence or 'world of meaning' is better or more correct than another. If all meaning in my world is rooted in my own intelligent engagement

¹⁰ Rancière, *Short Voyages*, 3.

with the sensible, all meaning in *your* world is rooted in *your* intelligent engagement with the sensible. Following this view, I cannot say that something you say lacks sense *per se*; I can only say that it does not make sense to me. If it does happen to make sense however, it is because it makes sense *to me*.

This, I would argue, amounts to an altogether different ontology. Different from what other kinds of ontologies? I will not try to classify different ontological positions here. Nor is this something Rancière does in his work. He seems to stick to the contextual and the specific in his polemics. I will only suggest that when Rancière criticises Althusser's idea of writing in "The Stage of the Text," Andrea's Marxist consciousness in "A Child Kills Himself" or the traditional methods of teaching in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, it we can trace the conflicts to a difference in ontological position. In all of these cases, the common critique from Rancière seems to be that they hold knowledge to be something objective, something that exists regardless of whether the subject has it or not. This idea requires an ontology that conceives of some kind of objective reference point for meaning. Based on the impression I have from Rancière's texts, Althusser seems to have an ontology of the community of knowledge. It seems to me to resemble a structuralist sociological conception of 'the social' as an entity, i.e. as something that is upheld by shared conceptions and in turn fosters shared conceptions, thus constituting a real force that acts upon individuals through history. Such an ontology of the community of knowledge allows us to talk about knowledge as something that one can have or not have, because there exists an objective, although not necessarily universally true, standard to measure knowledge against. Another example of an ontology that allows us to talk about knowledge in this way would be the ontology of Plato. In my reading of the *Phaedrus*, I associate Plato with the idea of a true being, an absolute and eternal 'Truth', with capital T. Although this seems to be a very different ontology than the one of Althusser, this ontology too makes it possible to conceive of knowledge as something objective. Meaning already exists, independently of the subject's awareness of it.

Rancière appears to think very differently. In my reading of him, the process that leads "knowledge," to someone "knowing" something, is simultaneously the process that creates the "truths" that are "known". I have put the words *truth* and *knowledge* in quotation marks, here, because they seem like somewhat inappropriate words for this context. There is no eternal truth according to Rancière's philosophy, but also *knowledge* as a concept lies at odds with a Rancièrian ontology, it appears to me. The word *knowledge* tends to invoke the idea

that what there is to know exists independently of the knower; that it is rooted in something objective; that we may have or not have knowledge. Seen from a Rancièrian perspective, it makes little sense to say that we have or do not have knowledge. For the idea of “knowledge” that is appropriate to the ontology I ascribe to Rancière’s philosophy, is “knowledge” understood as the subject’s insights, or the way the world is meaningful to the subject. This “knowledge,” thus, is not something one may or may not possess, but something we live by. As I mentioned in the section above, the reader of a text cannot help but ascribe meaning to words and sentences at some level or another, regardless of whether the meaning he or she finds is the meaning the author intended to write into the text. That is the meaning-making intelligence of subjects at work. The inherent power of the subject, the way I read Rancière, is that subjects are, by default, meaning-makers when they interact with the sensible reality. The reality outside the mind is accessible to us only as something sensible, that is, as it is exposed to our senses and our intelligence. As subjects we live, in other words, in and by our own universe of meaning and meaning-making. To talk about knowledge, with the strong connotations that word has to very different ontologies, thus seems rather misguided.

Instead of an ontology that creates a divide between *knowing* and *what one knows*, between the thinking subject and the objective world or the objective truth, Rancière thus seems to me to establish an ontology that erases this divide. Instead of an ontology of Truth or an ontology of ‘the social,’ there seems to be one uttermost ground in the ontology of Rancière: the subject’s intelligent interaction with the sensible. Or, to be more precise, an ontology of *equal* subject-sensible relations. The subject’s intelligent interaction with the sensible appears to me as the uttermost ground, the ontological base, in Rancière’s philosophy. According to this ontology, all meaning is subjective. This means that subjects are both equal and foreign to each other. We possess an equal intelligence, and equal power of meaning-making, but we are singularities. What we have is an ontology of equal intelligence or equal foreignness.

6.3 When attention leads to a rearrangement of the way we “see”

As mentioned earlier, Rancière does not proclaim an ontological position or theory, but keeps to the contextual and specific in his texts. It is only by reading Rancière closely that I have come to see the contours of an ontological position take shape. In “A few remarks,” the article mentioned quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Rancière states that his articles are

interventions in specific contexts, but also says that these interventions open up for much wider and deeper questions being asked. Rancière writes (still referring to himself in third-person perspective):

His interventions have always been provoked by situations in which the question ‘where am I now?’ appeared to him able to overlap with a wider question ‘where are we now?’ ‘Where are we?’ means two things at once: ‘how can we characterize the situation in which we live, think and act to-day [sic.]?’, but also, by the same token: ‘how does the perception of this situation oblige us to reconsider the framework we use to “see” things and map situations, to move within this framework or get away from it?’; or, in other words, ‘how does it urge us to change our very way of determining the coordinates of the “here and now”?’¹¹

The observations I have presented in this and the previous chapter fit well with what Rancière says here. They start in Rancière’s attention to a specific context, but open up questions that ultimately herald the implicit formulation of a whole ontology. The ‘where am I now?’ that Rancière asks as he attempts to make sense of the material he is studying, also becomes a question about society, theory and culture in general, in the question ‘where are we now?’ Ultimately, Rancière’s attention towards the contextual and particular allows for quite different answers to the question ‘where are we now?’ than would be possible if he jumped straight to that question. The movement mirrors that of Irene’s in “A Child Kills Himself”; it is her *attention* to particular situations and individuals that opens up the wider political perspectives to her, but it is also the attention to the particular that allows her to comprehend society in an altogether different way than others. Her intellectual journey would not bring about anything inherently new if she skipped the ‘where am I now?’ questions, the questions Rancière describes with reference to her observing eyes and her contemplating face, but jumped directly into the ‘where are we now?’ question that Andrea both asks and replies for her. This movement from the attention to the particular to the questions about the general is one that I have attempted to follow in my own reading of Rancière. From the initial focus on the texts themselves, to the later descriptions of a Rancièrian ontology, I have tried to make the text speak for itself. The bigger picture, the one that I now see Rancière’s writing through, has grown from this first attention to his text.

In this chapter, I have attempted to show how Rancière’s texts, which start in the contextual, amounts to a reconsideration of “the framework we use to “see” things and map situations,” to

¹¹ Rancière, “A Few Remarks,” 114–115.

use the words from the quote above. By reformulating the ontological standpoint to an ontology of equal intelligence/foreignness, one will “see” things differently. The ontology of equality provides a very different map of the situations we are in (the ‘where are we now?’) than an ontology that allows for the idea of objective knowledge. Now it is possible to present the irrational case of Irene as an example of a reflective and thinking human, to make the madman Don-Quixotic the hero of one’s story, to equate foreignness with a power, and think of the unlearning of the community’s shared conceptions as a ‘voyage to the land of the people’ (cf. the title of Rancière’s book).

Reading Rancière from the perspective of educational theory opens up for some more specific ‘where are we now?’ questions. The question of education appears to me as being closely linked to how we think about knowledge. How we think about knowledge is relevant to how we think about education. I have argued that if we follow Rancière’s line of thought, we are dealing with a conception of “knowledge,” in quotation marks, that is completely reformulated from how we traditionally tend to think about it. The word ‘knowledge’ may even seem inadequate in the context of Rancière’s philosophy and the ontology that he seems to think in terms of. In chapter 4 I showed how Rancière draws attention to the way Althusser ‘stages’ his texts: the way he assigns roles and makes sure that the context of an uttering or a concept is always correct and renders the concept meaningful. More profoundly, the communal cloth of knowledge, provides a theatre of relationships that gives meaning to practices and utterings: it is a stage on which certain utterances and practices can take place.¹² It was on this basis, I added, that Althusser could criticise the workers and students of May 1968 for entering the stage at the wrong time, not acting in accordance with the ‘play.’ It seems to me that when Rancière established a different ontology, this can be understood as a *restaging*. An ontology is a ‘stage’ on which certain utterings and practices are possible. As we have seen, it does for instance determine the way we may think about ‘knowledge.’ What, then, does this ontological shift—this restaging—entail for how we may think about education? I could also ask this question by paraphrasing the question Rancière posits above, in the quote from “A few remarks”: How am I obliged to reconsider the framework we use to “see” education and map the educational situation? And how are we to move within the current framework, or escape from it entirely, should we choose to adopt a Rancièrian concept of knowledge? That is what I will concentrate on in the next and final chapter.

¹² Rancière, “The Stage of the Text,” 142–43.

7 Restaging education

As suggested at the end of the previous chapter, a change in the way we think about knowledge entails a change in the way we think about education. This seems especially relevant in this case, since Rancière not only modifies the common conception of knowledge, but seems to me to arrive at a point where talking about knowledge may not make sense at all.

However, in this chapter I will not proceed by way of an analytical reconceptualisation of education in light of the conclusion in the previous chapter. Let me start with one of the texts: “A Child Kills Himself.”¹ I don’t have to interpret all of Rancière’s metaphors and analyse his texts to find an entrance to the question of education in light of Rancière’s philosophy. For already the rough narrative of “A Child Kills Himself” and the story of Irene seems to me to resemble a narrative of education. Irene goes through a series of experiences that change her and the way she thinks and acts. As we have seen earlier, Rancière explicitly refers to the story about Irene in *Europe ‘51* as a story about the “apprenticeship of the unique power that goes forth to meet the event.”² And, by that, suddenly we are back to my conclusion from the previous chapter: if “A Child Kills Himself” is a story about education, it seems to be the education of that specific interaction between the subject and the sensible that I described in the previous chapter. The “unique power” seems, I argued in the previous chapter, to be the power of the subject to make sense of the world and events: the intelligence of the subject. This echoes what I earlier quoted about the apprenticeship described in “A Child Kills Himself”: that Irene’s “gain in power is above all reflected in her face. The film is a story about a face that reflects, a look that observes and distinguishes, accompanied by a camera that follows the work of reflection.”³ The camera, the way Rancière sees it, zooms in at the training of the reflection of a subject. How can we conceptualise this as way of thinking about education? For what kind of education is implied here, when the emphasis is not on the acquisition of certain knowledge, but the training of thought itself?

¹ Rancière, “A Child Kills Himself.”

² Ibid., 109.

³ Ibid.

7.1 Revoking the traditional narrative of education

I will start by looking at this non-structured type of formative educative process with reference to the German-Continental concept of *Bildung*. One reason why I think this is an interesting term to bring into the discussion is that *Bildung*, like the idea of education that seems to be relevant to Rancière, is not confined to situations that involve a teacher, nor to the learning of facts, but has to do with a more overarching development of a person in a society. *Bildung* relates to how a subject or a person is formed by experiences, how it comes to develop its identity in close relation to the development of morality, understanding of society and of the world. In other words, the concept is referring to the broader and deeper growth of a person that education as a practice is meant to aspire towards, although never fully accomplish. In this respect, *Bildung* is a concept that can be compared to the Rancièrian notion of education. Another reason why I think it is interesting to discuss Rancière with reference to *Bildung*, is that *Bildung* is a concept that is at the heart of much of Continental European educational theory or what in the German speaking world is known as *Pädagogik*.⁴ As I have maintained, the way we think about knowledge seems to raise questions of how we should think about education. It seems sensible, then, to look at Rancière's philosophy in relation to how we often *do* think about education. How do the foundation for thinking *Bildung* conspire with the foundations in Rancière's thinking?

7.1.1 Rancière's upside-down *Bildung*

Drawing on ancient Greek and Christian ideas, the modern notion of *Bildung* emerged in Germany among neo-humanist scholars and philosophers in the decades around year 1800, and balanced on the intersection between two intellectual streams of its time, the Enlightenment and (national) romanticism. The importance of culture was formulated by Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), who maintained that a nation or a people was united by a common language that embodies the people's cultural history and spirit. These ideas were an important contribution to the development of sovereign nation states in the nineteenth

⁴ Pauli Siljander and Ari Sutinen, "Introduction," in *Theories of Bildung and Growth: Connections and Controversies Between Continental Educational Thinking and American Pragmatism*, ed. Pauli Siljander, Ari Kivelä, and Ari Sutinen (Rotterdam: SensePublishers, 2012), 1–18; Rebekka Horlacher, "What Is Bildung? Or: Why Pädagogik Cannot Get Away From the Concept of Bildung," in *Theories of Bildung and Growth: Connections and Controversies Between Continental Educational Thinking and American Pragmatism*, ed. Pauli Siljander, Ari Kivelä, and Ari Sutinen (Rotterdam: SensePublishers, 2012), 135–47.

century.⁵ Simultaneously, ideas of individual sovereignty, political freedom and rationality flourished. Lars Løvlie writes that the *Bildung* theorists of this time were concerned with “the educational question of how to forge the link between the person and his culture. They agreed that the rough answer to this question was a creative and reconstructive approach to cultural experiences.”⁶ Furthermore, the *Bildung* theorists agreed that “history tends towards man’s perfectibility as a social being, and that reconciliation and harmony was the *telos* or goal of contradictory experiences.”⁷ Jan Masschelein and Norbert Ricken, too, note that drawing upon Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s idea of the subject’s *perfectibilité*, “*Bildung* was given the endless task of developing, unfolding and enlightening the human mind and making real the independence of human will and action from natural and social determinations, coercion and constraints [...]. *Bildung* is the endless voyage of the individual towards him/her self as part of an ideal humanity.”⁸ This way of conceiving the subject as inexorably linked to culture, and to the destiny of culture, is particular to the concept of *Bildung*. Løvlie comments that for Wilhelm von Humboldt, one of the central scholars among the neo-humanists and an important proponent for the concept of *Bildung*, there was no way of conceiving of an individual unless part of the culture.

There was no individuation without cultivation [...]. In this idea of *Bildung* there existed no inherent split between the individual and humanity at large. The self (*Ich*) contained in embryo the universal humanity (*Menschheit*) that was the inner destiny [...] of the individual.⁹

It seems to me that we already at this point can spot some of the profound similarities and differences between the perspective of *Bildung* theory and the perspective of Rancière. Let me first mention some of the similarities. *Bildung* and the educational narrative in “A Child Kills Himself” both seem to be a development and refining of the subjectivity. If Irene goes through an apprenticeship of the power of reflection that constitute a Rancièrian understanding of subjectivity, we may perhaps say that she undergoes a process of *Bildung*. The emphasis Rancière puts on the liberation of Irene’s gaze and reflection too seems to parallel the idea of *Bildung*. As seen above, Masschelein and Ricken describe how *Bildung* is understood as the fostering of an independent human will and action, without any form of

⁵ Michael Forster, “Johann Gottfried von Herder,” ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2015, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/herder/>.

⁶ Lars Løvlie, “The Promise of Bildung,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 36, no. 3 (2002): 467.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Jan Masschelein and Norbert Ricken, “Do We (Still) Need the Concept of Bildung?,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 35, no. 2 (2003): 140.

⁹ Løvlie, L. (2002), 468.

coercion. The paradox of *Bildung* however, is that this freedom of the subject is gained through cultivation, by growing into the culture and acquiring it. In other words, the fundamental figure of education, if we follow the notion of *Bildung*, is a movement towards culture. While this paradox is itself worth looking into, I will here only note that the acquisition of a culture, or moulding of the subject in the image of a culture, is a central part of the idea of *Bildung*. This makes for a very different narrative of education than the one we may catch sight of in Rancière's texts. As we have seen, Rancière has returned again and again to the idea of the subject as a foreigner, whereas the idea of the subject according to Humboldt and his idea of *Bildung* is inseparable from the culture. The subject is not fundamentally a foreigner, in the idea of *Bildung*, but fundamentally in community with humanity. Thus, in order to develop the subject, to let the subject grow, one must grow together with the culture, in both meanings of the word. One could say that what Masschelein and Ricken describes as the individual's endless journey towards himself/herself, is also a journey that leads home. And by 'home,' one means at home in the culture. In "A Child Kills Himself" Rancière describes, as we have seen, the change that Irene undergoes as a change from being at home in society to finding that one is *no longer at home*, as the subject realises that it is, in the end, not bound to think like society.¹⁰ If we look at the educational narrative in "A Child Kills Himself," it may seem that Rancière even questions that the individual's journey is a journey towards itself. As we have seen, Irene lost herself just as much as she found herself. At the end of the apprenticeship there is madness.

There is some resemblance between the idea of a humanity or culture that is also the destiny of the individual, and the Althusserian idea of a community of knowledge as a cloth. Humanity, *Menschheit*, develops through history and towards its *telos* or destiny, in somewhat similar fashion, it may seem, to the way Rancière describes the cloth of Althusser: the many threads that make up the community of knowledge must be woven tightly together, the fissures must be mended and the cloth extended, until the community of knowledge has no gaps or loose threads. This comparison must not be misunderstood; the neo-humanist idea of humanity or culture is not at all equal to the Althusserian idea of a community of knowledge. What I find interesting is a similarity in the way these ideas seem to reject the fundamental foreignness and freedom of the subject that Rancière argues. We could perhaps say that Rancière's dissent from the Althusserian structural understanding of the community of

¹⁰ Rancière, "A Child Kills Himself," 117.

knowledge, is comparable to the dissent he probably would have taken from a concept of *Bildung*. In both cases it is the objection to an idea of an inevitable community with an inevitable course through history. There is no room for subjects to dissent from community in any of these narratives.

At the end, however, I wish to point out what seems to be a similarity between *Bildung* and Rancière—or at least some sort of a parallel between the two perspectives—when the *Bildung* theorists describe the development and nurturing of the individual and the general humanity, these are presented as two sides of the same coin. Although Rancière does not operate with a neo-humanist idea of humanity, he still operates with an idea of an equal foreignness or intelligence that make all humans human. Thus, the development towards subjectivity, which in the case of Rancière is a distancing from the culture rather than an acquisition of it, is still synonymous with the development and nurturing of “humanity”—or rather what is common to humans and also to their intellect.

The movement in Rancière’s narrative of education, seems to go away from shared conceptions and shared knowledge, rather than towards it. The apprenticeship is one of un-learning rather than learning. The subject’s *perfectibilité* is one of *stripping away* elements and habits of culture that distorts the pure gaze and the free thought, rather than an *enrichment* through the cultural heritage. Although there are some parallels between the idea of *Bildung* and education à la Rancière, they come to represent completely different narratives of education.

I will now leave the traditional idea of *Bildung*. I will, however, retain the focus on education understood as a fostering of humanity, of what makes us human, and thus as a necessity in order to become human. Above I recognised that Rancière too appears to describe an apprenticeship of humanity, in the sense of an apprenticeship of the intelligence that seems to be the fundamental mark of the subject. There is, nevertheless, a difference between saying that education is an apprenticeship of the intelligence that we are born with and which makes us human, and to say that education is the process by which we *acquire* that which makes us human. As I have argued and will argue again, Rancière seems to think of ‘the human’ in terms of an equal intelligence rather than a shared culture that has to be acquired. The opposite, however, seems to be a very persistent idea in educational thought: that the essence of education is to add to the subject something that it does not already have from nature, something that it lacks in order to be a complete human. This way of conceptualising

education seems to be the case even if we step out of the traditional neo-humanist idea of *Bildung* to *Menschheit*.

7.1.2 Questioning the idea of education for humanity

In 1967, in an essay named *Education after Auschwitz*,¹¹ Theodor Adorno argued that the concept of *Bildung* had been watered out and had for ever lost its power and credibility after the horrors of the second world war. The National Socialism was a perverted offspring of the very same cultural roots that the notion of *Bildung* sprung from. Along with other critical theorists of the Frankfurter school, Adorno saw this as the ultimate defeat of the cultural heritage from the Enlightenment. Adorno thus displayed the inherent danger of culture, even culture that intended to enlighten people and make them understand and think rationally. There seems to me to be a parallel between this stance and how Rancière displays the way culture and society can force themselves onto the minds of individuals, for instance the way in “A Child Kills Himself” he describes society’s reproduction of its own logic and rationality by forcing itself onto the gaze and reflection of individuals, what Rancière described as ‘shock and interpretation.’ My point here, however, is that Adorno’s disappointment with *Bildung* does not seem to have changed the way the core figure in an educational narrative is understood. He still seems to think of education as cultivation, as a matter of giving the subject something that it did not have from before, something that it needs in order step out of its brute animal nature and become civilised and human. Commenting on what education the German people needs after Holocaust, Adorno writes the following about the rural people on the German countryside:

Any arrogance toward the rural populace is far from my intentions. I know that one cannot help having grown up in a city or a village. I note only that probably debarbarization has been less successful in the open country than anywhere else. [...] I will go so far as to claim that one of the most important goals of education is the debarbarization of the countryside. [...] I could imagine that something like mobile educational groups and convoys of volunteers could be formed, who would drive into the countryside and in discussions, courses, and supplementary instruction attempt to fill the most menacing gaps.¹²

¹¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 191–204.

¹² *Ibid.*, 196.

It seems to me that this is a very different take on the problem than Rancière would have had. Education is needed, Adorno says, in order to provide the involuntarily barbaric people of rural Germany with the necessary tools to become civilised human beings. The supposedly uneducated state of rural populations is here portrayed as a lack. To step into the human world, away from the barbaric, is a matter of filling in gaps, giving the people what they lack.

Even if the traditional idea of *Bildung* failed in bringing about a truly just and human society, Adorno nevertheless seems to understand education as a matter of adding something that is missing and something that is needed to make us truly human. In this respect, he seems to share a fundamental idea about education with Immanuel Kant, one of the sources of the—according to Adorno—failed project of *Enlightenment*. Kant’s collected lectures on education (published 1803) opens thus: “Man is the only being who needs education” whereas “[a]nimals are by their instinct all that they ever can be.”¹³ Education is needed, Kant argues, because “[...] our destiny as human beings is to emerge from our natural state as animals.”¹⁴ The common refrain in both Kant and Adorno, thus, seems to be that in order to become fully human, that is, a rational, moral and reflective being, it is not enough to be born—one must also receive education. Without proper education, one will stay an animal, one will stay barbaric. We do not have to confine ourselves to the German tradition of educational theory to find other examples of this core idea of education as humanisation. Asking what education is, the English analytical philosopher Richard Peters argues in his book *Authority, Responsibility and Education* (1973)¹⁵ that education is essentially about the initiation of children into a tradition and culture of thought. One needs to be initiated, through education, into culture and the space of reasons, into the rational human realm. The image he uses to illustrate is thus: “They [children] start off in the position of the barbarian outside the gates. The problem is to get them inside the citadel of civilisation so that they will understand and love what they see when they get there.”¹⁶ In this example from Peters, we can see the same narrative of education at work: Education is seen as initiation to the human sphere of existence. Peters is not arguing that education is initiation to our nature-given humanity, because we are, of course, born humans. However, it seems to invoke the same idea that Kant had and that the idea of *Bildung* rest upon: that humanity is primarily a question of culture, and that the natural

¹³ Immanuel Kant, *On Education* (Boston, Massachusetts: D.C Heath & Co, 1900), 1–2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁵ R. S. Peters, *Authority, Responsibility and Education* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

human, thus, is only a potential for this kind of humanity. Education is needed to initiate the child into the space of humanity that is a space of reasons.

Rancière seems to revoke this narrative. It is not a question of acquiring the necessary cultural artefacts that the ability for thought and reasoning requires. A subject does not need to be initiated into a space of reasons. Ultimately, Rancière revokes the idea that education is needed for humanity. At least, education is not what makes a subject human. We may instead think of education in terms of a training of the use of intelligence, which is the mark of humanity and which we all possess right from the beginning. However, the framings of education as acquisition, internalisation, initiation, de-barbarisation etc. all seem to be marked by the terminology of inequality.

7.2 A new landscape

In the previous chapter I argued that Rancière does not seem to operate with an idea of knowledge in the way we are often used to think of it, as something that is objective or aims towards objectivity. Instead, one will find that Rancière emphasises the meaning-making interaction of a subject with the sensible reality. If there is a notion of ‘knowledge’ in Rancière’s texts, it is the insights and beliefs that spring out of this meaning-making. The interesting thing about this is not Rancière’s relativism, but his grounding of it. Rancière does not present an argument that starts by accepting that there is no universal truth, or any universal truth that is accessible to us, and therefore concludes that we cannot argue that one personal belief is less true than the other. Rancière’s writings are not about truth at all. And neither are they about knowledge. The interesting thing, is that rather than a question of truth or knowledge at the centre of Rancière’s texts, it is a description of a certain relationship between the subject and the sensible: the aesthetic relationship. In Rancière’s texts there is no reality but the sensible reality, and it is sensible in that it is sensed and made sense of by people. Thus the personal aesthetic relation with the world is not a mere substitute of a truth that is lost or that we do not know, but is in itself the very truth. Rancière’s emphasis of the equal ability of subjects to be in an aesthetic relation to the sensible, I have argued, becomes his ontology.

The way we understand knowledge has profound implications for how we think about education. What we have at hand is the idea that the only possible knowledge (if the term

‘knowledge’ can even be used), is the one that springs from the individual sensible–subject relation. One consequence of this seems to be that we will have to reject the idea that knowledge can be transmitted from one person to another. The truly educative relation is the one between the subject and the sensible reality, although there may be another person involved in inducing certain encounters with the sensible. Following Rancière’s thought, it seems to me that we must locate the truly educative moment not via the transmittance of knowledge, but at the point of subjective reflection and meaning-making. Even when a teacher says something to the student, it is, after all, the student’s attention to and reflection upon what was said that makes the utterance meaningful. Even then, the utterance itself is in no way a transmittance of meaning, if we follow what Rancière says about language in “The Stage of the Text”: Words are inherently unreliable as meaning-bearers, exactly for the same reason that education understood as transmittance of knowledge is impossible—there is no reference point for meaning outside the individual process of meaning-making. Words only acquire meaning when exposed to the intelligence of a reading or listening subject. In other words, education as teaching is impossible; the real educative moment is the moment of reflection.

Another, and related, consequence of thinking about education in line with Rancière’s philosophy, is that an understanding of education as a means. For if we say that education is a means for knowledge, education is also, if we follow the lines of Rancière’s philosophy, the moment when this “knowledge” is constructed. If we think of knowledge as an idea that is legitimated by an authority outside the subject (such as for instance a universal truth or the Althusserian structuralist understanding of the community of knowledge), the nature of the ‘educational’ may be understood as inherently a means—a procedure with a wanted outcome: knowledge. In my reading of “The Stage of the Text,” in chapter 4, I showed how Rancière describes a pedagogical procedure: where the student is made to repeat the knowledge of the teacher. The disciplinary nature of this procedure is illustrated very directly in Rancière’s example with the textbook: empty lines demand the student to write down the correct words, so that the sentences and their meaning structures become complete.¹⁷ Thus the student is forced to internalise the reason of the teacher. This pedagogical procedure seems to correspond to the traditional idea of education and teaching that Rancière criticised already in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. But it would be wrong, I would argue, to assume that education

¹⁷ Rancière, “The Stage of the Text,” 134.

has escaped Rancière's critique as soon as it replaces the old-fashioned textbooks and the disciplinary teaching methods of the old schoolmaster with a more 'child centred' education. Neither does it change anything if education is practiced without regard to what society may think of as 'useful.' As long as education is founded on the idea that there is a piece of knowledge or insight that the student is lacking and that education can bring this about in his or her mind, the fundamental figure of education as being procedure and a means persists. The characterisation of education as inherently a means is perhaps less a critique than an observation. This way of thinking about education is simply the result of an ontology that grounds knowledge in something outside the subject. By thinking this way, a person's knowledge becomes a question of possession or quantity. It becomes possible to say things like: *"This girl knows this, but not that; overall she has a sufficient amount of knowledge."* Now, following the thoughts of Rancière, it becomes impossible to think of education as inherently a means because he grounds his philosophy in a different ontology: the ontology of equal foreignness. There is nothing outside the individual subject-sensible relations. And it is exactly because of the lack of an external 'objective' reference point for knowledge that makes it an ontology of equality: instead of a question of more or less knowledge, of correct and wrong knowledge, there are equally self-contained worlds of meaning. As I showed in the previous paragraph, this foreignness causes a problem of translation that seems to secure the failure of education understood as a means to knowledge: the knowledge can simply not be transmitted or reproduced in the same way as in another person. More fundamentally, however, Rancière's ontology of equal foreignness seems to me to not only secure the *failure* of education as a means to knowledge, but indeed render the idea *impossible*. This is because the educative moment is also the moment when its outcome is first created. The end did not exist before the means. The educational, therefore, is perhaps better described as something that unfolds, or just happens, rather than a procedure.

Thus, if there is an educational moment within the framework of a Rancièrian ontology of equal foreignness, it seems to be a moment of creativity, where something new takes place: an insight is discovered, a new perspective is found that is unforeseen. Even if it resembles what other people have thought before, the thought is still new within the individual person's universe of meaning. It seems to me that we can understand the fundamentally educational along the same lines as Rancière's idea of madness. In chapter 5 I compared Rancière's use of the word 'madness' with the notion of madness I found in Plato's *Phaedrus*. I argued that the two uses of 'madness' have in common an indication towards a madness with knowledge that

is inscribed in the nature of the soul (Plato) or the subject (Rancière). In light of what I have argued in this and the previous chapter, it would perhaps be wrong to say, at this point, that the subject is mad with ‘knowledge.’ However, we might as well say ‘meaning,’ ‘insight’ or ‘sense’ instead. The important thing, after all, is the madness. We may understand education, then, along the line of such a madness: education is not something that we need to be exposed to, it is already there in our active engagement with the world, in the wish, urge, need, tendency and inclination to find meaning and make sense. The educative moment, thus, has the character of *event*. I here refer to the special sense of the word that I in chapter 5 showed is typical for several post-war French philosophers: *event* as the moment that brings about something inherently new.

I will try to summarise the conclusions I have arrived at. In the attempt to define education along the lines of Rancière’s philosophy—that is, on the ground of what I have come to appreciate as an ontology of equality/foreignness—it seems to me that “the educational” should be understood as residing in the subject’s creative and unique interaction with the sensible. Educative moments are the moments when meaning is recognised or constructed by a subject. As much as this offers us a way of identifying what education most fundamentally is, it also seems like the concept of education begins to disappear before our eyes. For such ‘educational moments’ do not belong to one domain of practice, like the educational domain, or to certain institutions like school, but to life in general. What I have here defined as ‘the educational’ seems to me to be inscribed in the very nature and existence of a human subject: it is descriptive of our interaction with the world, and our thought. Moreover, I have shown that thinking about education in line with Rancière’s philosophy heralds the shift from thinking of education as a procedure or a means to an end, to thinking of education as something that simply unfolds or happens: an event. Ultimately, what Rancière suggest is not only a restaging of education, but a restaging the ground for practicing and thinking about education. Ultimately, Rancière leaves us with a different landscape, a different ontological landscape, wherein a notion of education could take shape. By suggesting an ontology of equality/foreignness he suggests a restaging of the sensible field that authorises and delimits ways of thinking or “seeing” education.

Literature

Adorno, Theodor W. *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

Althusser, Louis. *Elements of Self-Criticism*. Translated by Grahame Lock. London: NLB, 1976.

Althusser, Louis, Étienne Balibar, Roger Establet, Pierre Machery, and Jacques Rancière. *Reading Capital: The Complete Edition*. Translated by Ben Brewster and David Fernbach. London: Verso, 2015.

Alvesson, Mats, and Kaj Sköldberg. *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research*. London: SAGE, 2010.

Appelbaum, Peter. "Mathematical Practice as Sculpture of Utopia: Models, Ignorance, and the Emancipated Spectator." *For the Learning of Mathematics*, 32, no. 2 (2016): 14–19.

Biesta, Gert. "Don't Be Fooled by Ignorant Schoolmasters. On the Role of the Teacher in Emancipatory Education." Unpublished. In press for *Policy Futures in Education*, 2016.

———. "From Experimentalism to Existentialism." In *Leaders in Philosophy of Education: Intellectual Self Portraits*, edited by Leonard J. Waks, 13–30. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2014.

———. "Learner, Student, Speaker: Why It Matters How We Call Those We Teach." In *Rancière, Public Education and the Taming of Democracy*, edited by Maarten Simons and Jan Masschelein, 31–42. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

———. "The Ignorant Citizen: Mouffe, Rancière, and the Subject of Democratic Education." *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 30, no. 2 (2011): 141–53.

Bingham, Charles, and Gert Biesta. *Jacques Rancière: Education, Truth, Emancipation*. London: Continuum, 2010.

Deranty, Jean-Philippe. "Introduction: A Journey in Equality." In *Jacques Rancière: Key*

- Concepts*, edited by Jean-Philippe Deranty, 1–14. Durham: Acumen, 2010.
- Forster, Michael. “Johann Gottfried von Herder.” Edited by Edward N. Zalta. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2015.
<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/herder/>.
- Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. Translated by Richard Howard. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Horlacher, Rebekka. “What Is Bildung? Or: Why Pädagogik Cannot Get Away From the Concept of Bildung.” In *Theories of Bildung and Growth: Connections and Controversies Between Continental Educational Thinking and American Pragmatism*, edited by Pauli Siljander, Ari Kivelä, and Ari Sutinen, 135–47. Rotterdam: SensePublishers, 2012.
- James, Ian. *The New French Philosophy*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012.
- Kant, Immanuel. *On Education*. Boston, Massachusetts: D.C Heath & Co, 1900.
- Larrosa, Jorge. “Endgame: Reading, Writing, Talking (and Perhaps Thinking) in a Faculty of Education.” In *Rancière, Public Education and the Taming of Democracy*, edited by Maarten Simons and Jan Masschelein, 166–86. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
- Lewis, Tyson E. *The Aesthetics of Education: Theatre, Curiosity, and Politics in the Work of Jacques Rancière and Paulo Freire*. London: Continuum, 2012.
- Løvlie, Lars. “The Promise of Bildung.” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 36, no. 3 (2002): 467–468.
- Masschelein, Jan, and Norbert Ricken. “Do We (Still) Need the Concept of Bildung?” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 35, no. 2 (2003): 139–154.
- Penagia, Davide. “‘Partage Du Sensible’: The Distribution of the Sensible.” In *Jacques Rancière. Key Concepts*, edited by Jean-Philippe Deranty, 95–103. Durham: Acumen, 2010.
- Peters, R. S. *Authority, Responsibility and Education*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1973.

- Plato. "Meno." In *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Including the Letters*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, translated by W. K. C. Guthrie, 535–84. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961.
- . "Phaedrus." In *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Including the Letters*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, translated by R. Hackforth, 475–525. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961.
- Rancière, Jacques. "A Child Kills Himself." In *Short Voyages to the Land of the People*, 105–34. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- . "A Few Remarks on the Method of Jacques Rancière." *Prallax* 15, no. 3 (2009): 114–123.
- . "Althusser, Don Quixote and the Stage of the Text." In *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing*, 129–45. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- . *Althusser's Lesson*. Translated by Emiliano Battista. London: Continuum, 2011.
- . *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Translated by Julie Rose. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- . *Proletarian Nights: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*. Translated by John Drury. London: Verso, 2012.
- . *Short Voyages to the Land of the People*. Translated by James B. Swenson. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- . *The Emancipated Spectator*. Translated by Gregory Elliot. London: Verso, 2009.
- . *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing*. Translated by Charlotte Mandell. Stanford, California: Stanford, California, 2004.
- . *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*. Translated by Kristin Ross. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991.
- . *The Names of History: On The Poetics of Knowledge*. Translated by Hassan Melehy. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

- . *The Philosopher and His Poor*. Translated by John Drury, Corinne Oster, and Andrew Parker. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004.
- . *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. Translated by Gabriel Rockhill. London: Continuum, 2004.
- Siljander, Pauli, and Ari Sutinen. "Introduction." In *Theories of Bildung and Growth: Connections and Controversies Between Continental Educational Thinking and American Pragmatism*, edited by Pauli Siljander, Ari Kivelä, and Ari Sutinen, 1–18. Rotterdam: SensePublishers, 2012.
- Simons, Maarten, and Jan Masschelein. "Introduction: Hatred of Democracy...and of the Public Role of Education?" In *Rancière, Public Education and the Taming of Democracy*, edited by Maarten Simons and Jan Masschelein, 1–14. Chicester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
- . , eds. *Rancière, Public Education and the Taming of Democracy*. Chicester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
- . "The Hatred of Public Schooling: The School as the Mark of Democracy." In *Rancière, Public Education and the Taming of Democracy*, edited by Maarten Simons and Jan Masschelein, 150–65. Chicester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
- Smith, Jason E., and Annette Weisser, eds. *Everything Is in Everything: Jaques Rancière Between Intellectual Emancipation and Aesthetic Education*. Pasadena: Art Center Graduate Press, 2011.
- Standish, Paul. "The Philosophy of Education, and the Education of Philosophy." *BAJO PALABRA. Revista de Filosofía* 2, no. 6 (2011): 45–46.
- Tanke, Joseph J. *Jacques Rancière: An Introduction. Philosophy, Politics, Aesthetics*. London: Continuum, 2011.

Attachment:

Primary texts by Rancière – additional info

By ‘primary texts’ I here mean texts that I have drawn upon in the thesis, beyond merely mentioning it in the overview of Rancière’s production in chapter 2.1. This list is only meant as additional info and full references to the texts is not listed here, but in the literature list.

This list provides an overview of the shortened titles and original French titles and publications.

“A Child Kills Himself”

No short title.

French title of the chapter: “Un enfant se tue”

“A few remarks on the method of Jacques Rancière”

Short title: “A few remarks”

English is the original language.

“Althusser, Don Quixote and the Stage of the Text”

Short title: “The Stage of the Text”

French title of the chapter: “Althusser, Don Quichotte et la scène du texte”

Althusser’s Lesson

No short title.

French original: *La leçon d’Althusser* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974).

Short Voyages to the Land of the People

Short title: *Short Voyages*

French original: *Courts voyages au pays du peuple* (Paris: Seuil, 1990).

The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing

Short title: *Flesh of Words*

French original: *La chair des mots. Politiques de l’écriture* (Paris: Galilée, 1998).

The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation

No short title.

French original: *Le maître ignorant. Cinq leçons sur l’émancipation intellectuelle* (Paris: Fayard, 1987).

The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible

Short title: *Politics of Aesthetics*

French original: *Le partage du sensible. Esthétique et politique*. (Paris: La Fabrique, 2000).

